

## **POWER: Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights**

### **Quarterly Narrative Report**

### **October to December 2018**

**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 and Lalmonirhat districts).

**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:** 21,000 women in Ghana, Rwanda, Bangladesh and Pakistan have increased income and ability to control their income, through practicing climate resistant sustainable agriculture, accessing markets and reducing, recognising and redistributing unpaid care work.

### **Introduction**

Quarter four saw the project in engaging in a number of activities under the four outcomes and good progress in attaining the results such as women's economic empowerment, participation in decision making and capacity building. Despite ongoing challenges such as the final decision by the government of Pakistan to not grant registration to ActionAid Pakistan, flooding in some areas in Ghana, a few delays in finalization of reports by consultants, the project has been able to perform well in the last quarter. The quarter has seen increased recognition of women farmers in various roles, for example, one of the women farmers was recognized for outstanding work on violence against women and received the 'Jayeta Award' in Bangladesh, while in Ghana, the women's group were awarded for being the best performing farmers organizations in some district by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.



Picture 1: Belly Begum receiving Jayeta Award for her contribution in social development

The quarter also saw increased influence of women at household level as many have reported progressive changes where they can now control the income they earn, and report reduced violence. In all countries there has been evidence of the recognition of unpaid care work and reduction in the time spent on unpaid care work because of massive awareness raising activities for men and

women, boys and girls, students, academics, journalists among other groups.

**Outcome 1: By the end of 2020, 21,000 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 project has continued to support rural women farmers women to organize and demand their rights as farmers and carers. The quarter under review has seen ongoing 2women' group meetings in all countries: 200 women's groups in Ghana (6,274 women), 200 groups in Rwanda (6,000 women) and 200 groups in Bangladesh (4,998 women) have continued to meet and discuss the issues that affect them and demand their rights as farmers, rural women and carers. The total of 20,252 women have been able to meet and discuss. The challenges faced is that a total of 23 women left because of displacement in Bangladesh. In Pakistan activities ended in September 2018 and so women's group meetings cannot be attributed to POWER during this quarter.

The project has seen the deepening impact because of women's ability to come together and make demands to local authorities, for example, in Rwanda women came together and wrote to the district council to demand land for growing vegetables. The project has been so successful that four new groups were formed in Ghana in Sakote, Kpatia, Tenzug, and Kotintaabiga communities because of the activities of women groups supported by POWER project in these communities. In Rwanda, women organized in a network called *Koabikigi* and wrote a letter to Gisagara district authority requesting a wetland to grow vegetables.

The period under review has also seen an increase in the number of women participating in leadership and actively engaging in local structures such as Sector Committees, Union Parishad and district assemblies. In Rwanda, 334 women are participating in community structures at village level, as members of the National Women's Council at cell and sector levels and community councils. In a similar way, women in Ghana have met with traditional authorities and district health directorate staff which resulted in the establishment of a temporary structure as a community health unit. The women's group are also playing an important role in claiming and influencing women's rights to land. In Wakii community in Ghana, engagement meetings held with traditional leaders and land owners helped them to secure an additional two acres of land, adding up to a total of five acres of land for their group farming. In Bangladesh, women are actively participating in the Union Parishad meetings and some of them have been able to engage political parties where they have submitted their key

demands. Since the inception of the project a total of 17,614 women from four countries have been trained on leadership (Ghana 6,000, Rwanda 6,000, Bangladesh 5,422 and 192 in Pakistan) and 19% have been engaging in local structures against a project end target of 25%

The women's groups in all the countries are actively addressing issues of violence against women and girls. Generally, there is increased recognition of women's advocacy work in Bangladesh where three women leaders received the 'Jayeta Award'<sup>1</sup> from the Government for their contribution to stop violence against women, early marriage and for women's development in their communities under the social development category. A staggering 960 GBV/VAW cases were documented in quarter four in Rwanda, 50% were psychological violence, 23% economic violence, 15% physical violence and 12% sexual violence. ActionAid will work to support the project to ensure that it gets additional support to manage these issues from the ActionAid mainstream project and other civil society organizations. In Bangladesh, Gaibandha district, a total 96 VAW incidences were recorded in both districts and the cases included physical, mental, economic, early marriage, illegal divorce, dowry, polygamy, refusal to dowry money refund and free movement. Among these, women group mediated 65 incidences.

The relationship between local leaders and the women's groups is improving with evidence of increasing interest by local authorities in the activities of the Women's groups, for example, in Bangladesh the Union Parishad of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat district visited activities of 37 women's groups and shared about their services and mechanisms to access services from several departments with the group members. In Bangladesh, 6,456 women received different services in both districts because of regular communication of women leaders engaged in community structure.

The project has also enhanced women's participation in decision making roles for example, Belly Begum, President of Gazaria Federation of Gaibandha District was included as a member of the family planning committee, mother and child health committee in Gazaria Union Parishad as well as the Nababgonj Govt. Primary School Management Committee. A total of 156 women in Lalmonirhat were involved in the National Election held in December 2018 as camp in-charge, center manager, polling agent and election observer. This engagement was new to them as contributors and they gained valuable new experience. Women have also reported that engaging in decision making activities has not been an easy road for them, but they had to overcome cultural and social barriers. Roksana Begum from Bangladesh says: *'I had to overcome a strong barrier for taking the position on today. I was not allowed to step out of home. Earlier people did not count me as a human. Everyone ignored my presence. Now I became aware of my rights and basics. And I can claim my right. Situation has been changed gradually'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the guidance of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of Bangladesh, Department of Women Affairs offers 'Joyeeta Award' every year during the celebration of 16 Days of Activism through a campaign. Selected women receive the award on Begum Rokeya Day in five categories across the country- Economically successful woman/entrepreneurship; Woman who achieved success on education and employment; Successful Mother; Woman who contributed in social development and Woman who has turned away from the violence against women.

**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.**

During the quarter under review, the project has continued to work on addressing unpaid care work at community and household levels. The main change is that unpaid care work distribution at household level is being redistributed between men and women and hours and money spent on unpaid care work is also reducing. In some households more men are taking up the unpaid care work roles. Young boys' and girls' awareness on unpaid care work has increased through competitions which were organized at schools through sketches, songs and drama performances. However, unpaid care work is still not highly valued though there is evidence of increased recognition through local investments in child care centers and commitments to support energy saving technologies. The most popular unpaid care work interventions have been child care centers, time diaries and awareness raising activities, while other interventions such as energy saving cooking stoves and water harvesting continue to bear fruitful results. A total of 19,275 women against a project end target of 21,000 have completed a time diary at least once in the project, with the outstanding numbers being from Pakistan. In Bangladesh, the Azaria Union Parishad provided 3,100 BDT (33 Euro) to *Alor Dishari* day care center as financial support and Upazila Chairman of Fulchori Upazila Parishad has provided one solar panel to *Uria* day care center in Gaibandha district. The mothers of 360 children are doing small income generating activities. Ismatara, one mother of a child attending a Day Care Centre in Gaibandha district said, *"I keep my children in day care centre and now I get enough time to continue my study at higher secondary level and earning from tailoring at home. I visited the center at first and found the children over there are passing their time with joy, playing with each other, teacher is taking care of them, ..... Before leaving her at the center I could manage one day per week to go to the college. After availing this facility, I can go at least three days."*

In Rwanda, women have also reported reduced costs and time in firewood collection as well as reduced air pollution. A total of 719 women were supported with *Save80* cooking stoves. Mushimiyimana M Gorette from Rwanda said *'Before getting this stove, I spent 3,500 Francs weekly but now I only spend 1,500 Rwandan francs. This stove also helps to keep cooked food warm for longer time. I have more time to do other activities'*. The monitoring report indicates that after two months of using *Save80* cooking stoves the cost of firewood reduced from 6000 Rwf to 1500 Rwf per month. In Bangladesh, it was observed that in both districts 122 energy saving cooking stove users reported their satisfaction with the cooking stoves in terms of time saving and health aspects.

In Rwanda, the project success has also resulted in political commitments by council to support rural women with energy cooking stoves. *'We are going to work with the department in charge of cooperatives and SAFER Rwanda to see how women could have the improved energy cooking stoves like SAVE80 stove at low price and to be paid in instalments'* said Mushimiyimana Laurette, the vice chairperson of Gisagara district Council.

The project has also seen increased participation to sensitize the community on equal share of UCW between men and women, boys and girls in practice and not only words. The other sensitization activities were done through cooking competitions, and national debate in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh Radio Sarabela, a community radio, came forward with *POWER* to air different programmes on UCW. For example, they organised radio talk-show on UCW with participation of women group members, federations, and Assembly members on how men took on UCW responsibilities and women participated in social, cultural and political activities. At an international level, *POWER* organised a webinar under the theme 'Transforming unpaid care work through redistribution' which was attended

by 31 ActionAid staff and external stakeholders internationally, where examples were shared from the different countries, from time diary data findings as well as couples sharing their experiences in addressing unpaid care work in Ghana.

As part of capacity building, the project has encouraged learning and exchange visits within countries but also supported intra country lesson sharing through exchange visits. An exchange visit was conducted between the Talensi and Nabdam districts, and between Asutifi and Jerapa Municipality in Ghana. Some of the groups are performing marvelously well in terms of advocacy engagements, self-confidence and assertiveness, self-initiative, interest for development, unity and peaceful co-existence among members. This observation called for an exchange visit to create an opportunity for other groups to learn and share their experiences with other community group members. Participants shared experiences on Unpaid Care Work, (UCW), Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA), and gender-based violence. Women were motivated to practice more of sustainable agriculture, confidence of participants was built to test new alternatives and participants explored the differences and similarities between Talensi and Nabdam as well Jerapa, Asutifi south and Tain districts and their farming activities.

**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.**

The project has engaged in lobbying for women's access to resources including land and agricultural inputs as well and resources for income generating and savings. Sustainable market access is gaining momentum as rural women farmers have strengthened their skills in agro-processing, packaging and market access analysis. In Ghana, representatives of women groups were supported to engage with local traditional authorities to lobby for long term access to productive land beyond 2020. In Ghana, a total of 120 participants from the women groups were trained on processing, packaging and labelling of soap, sheabutter and rice and Cassava. A further 70 women small holder farmer group representatives from all the 6 regions in Ghana were trained on trainer of trainers on market access. Participants were taken through intensive four days training with the objective of refreshing participants tools and skills of CRSA and market access practices for improved yields and income. The training has also increased women's income, for example, in Ghana, before the women were taken through the training, they would sell a sack of "gari" (processed Cassava -50kg) at GHC 120.00 (\$30.00 USD) and because of the training on standard market requirements, these women are currently being paid between GHC 192.00 (\$38.00) to GHC 250.00 (\$63.00) within the first three months of production. Further, the Ministry of



Picture 2: Gari Processing by women in Ghana



Food and Agriculture has awarded the Aziedukope women's group as the Farmer Business Organization of the year 2018 in the Adaklu district and Women smallholder farmers in Asutifi South and Tain districts recognized through practicing agro-ecology. The women's group have been practicing agro-ecological practices like mulching, compost, intercropping, cover crops, among others in their group farm.



Picture 3: Mukaburezi have led to a significant change in her life due to the money she is earning from selling of the production from her banana plantations. Mukaburezi is currently earning more than 150, 000Rwf which almost 200USD per month from her banana plantations which totally different from 50,000Rwf per months which is around 80USD that she was getting before practicing agroecology.

In Rwanda, women have also benefitted from agroecology and are increasing their income. In order to enhance livelihood diversification and agroecology, the project supports animal rearing. In Ghana, 120 women from Nanumba North and South Districts were provided with small ruminant animals (goats and sheep) in 10 communities. This will help them collect their droppings for compost to improve soil fertility as well as income from the sale of the animals. A total of 240 small ruminants comprising 48 sheep and

192 goats were distributed. Project participants also received training on best animal husbandry practices to enhance management and upkeep of the animals.

As part of its agroecology work, the project continues to support rural women farmers on issues of seeds and seed preservation. Our monitoring processes show that 19,720 women in Bangladesh now have access to a seed bank or seeds or other kinds of direct inputs for their farming. In Bangladesh, the construction work of five seed banks was completed on the land purchased by the women groups. A total of 22% of women members reported improved service provision from the department of agricultural extension while 1,110 women received different services from Upazila Agricultural Extension office including seeds and training on vegetable cultivation. In addition, 636 women received technical support for the cultivation of different crops. In total 2,500 women received vegetable seeds for winter vegetables and 15 women's groups received small grants as cash transfer support like beef, goat, rice for trading, material support for handloom factory from project. It is noteworthy that in Bangladesh an average 1,065 of women group members sell their products produced using agroecology to market regularly. The products have high demand as they taste good and are of good size.

In order to increase income, a total of 10,803 women have been trained on business skills, markets, process and now have knowledge of how to access markets and how to get current market. They have good knowledge and understanding about the accounts handling and pricing as well as the value chains of different agricultural products. A total of 30 group members visited a farmer's association named Habibpur Farmer Association which works with value chain and market promotion in Bangladesh. Women's groups savings continue to be a great initiative which has also been providing

basic needs for their families and helping them to avoid the discriminatory practices of accessing loans from formal lending institutions. In Ghana, all groups were trained on financial management and were provided with voluntary savings and loans boxes. The outcome so far on this initiative is that, all the 200 groups were able to save not less than GHC 1000 (USD 202). Dooh Pahzina a smallholder woman farmer from Duusi community had to say; *'This is the easier way of supporting ourselves instead of going to Bank for loans with long procedures and follow ups and at the end nothing comes out of it.'* In Rwanda in 2018, the total savings for 200 women groups work with POWER project amounted to 138, 164,770 Rwf (\$153,879). ActionAid recognizes that this is an alternative to support women's access to loans while at the same time advancing advocacy for women's inclusion in macro- economic services.

#### **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.**

The project has continued to raise the visibility of the intersections of CRSA, UCW and violence against women at national and regional levels. This was done this quarter through national dialogues, production of policy briefs, sharing of information, participation in events such as the World Committee on Food Security.

In Ghana, a national dialogue was held with 80 stakeholders to discuss and create awareness on agro-ecology and CRSA methods. The dialogue was done in collaboration with the General Agricultural Workers Union with participation and support from Ghana Peasant Farmers Association, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, CSOs, department of Food and Agriculture, farmers and the council for scientific and industrial research. The main outcome was to conduct a mapping of the agricultural policies in Ghana that highlight agro-ecology. This will lead to the drafting of a proposed agro-ecology policy in Ghana.

Training on networking and alliance building was conducted for selected women groups in the Upper East Region of Ghana with support was provided to the National Department of Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit to mark the 16 days of activism in Upper West and Volta Regions. A national "what do you know" programme was held for only men on UCW and violence against women, with focus on the Domestic Violence Act of Ghana. Radio discussions were held to raise awareness on the issues of gender-based violence as well as the mechanisms for reporting in the Northern Region as part of the 16 days of activism with a root march to the Nanumba North Municipal Chief Executive to submit a petition to the government through the District Assembly.

A massive awareness drive took place in this quarter nationally on UCW in five out of eight divisions of Bangladesh through an inter-university national debate campaign organized jointly with the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUJDS). More than 40,000 students participated in the campaign and reached 206,741 people reached through social media. The debate campaign was packaged with debate competition, public speech competition, workshop and seminar. The campaign message was "We want recognition, redistribution and reduction of Unpaid Care Work". In the workshop and seminar on UCW, different stakeholders like government officials, policy makers, academics, leaders of different political parties. Some of them appraised POWER for such initiative for recognition, redistribution and reduction of UCW. For example, Dr. Md. Akhtaruzzaman, Vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, said, *"Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be possible more efficiently if*

*the unrecognized UCW of women in our family is given recognition as economic contribution.” Mr. Abdul Momen, former Ambassador of Bangladesh to UN mentioned in his speech, “Our GDP will be increased up to 26% if government recognizes and counts it in GDP. To sustain the progress of the country required men’s participation in UCW, building awareness on it and recognise UCW as economic.”*

ActionAid Bangladesh prepared a policy brief on recognition, redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work which was a joint initiative of ActionAid Bangladesh and Steering Committee on Recognition of Unpaid Care Work and Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture. While a research report based on findings was produced in the last quarter.

In terms of regional advocacy, the International Project Manager attended the World Committee on Food Security meeting during the commemoration of the World Food Day and International Rural Women’s Day. The meeting also resulted in strengthening of relations between the POWER project and the Via Campesina and AFSA, and another farmer network. The issues of agroecology and unpaid care work were raised and considered as important in addressing women smallholder farmers needs.



Picture 4: Christina and Janneke Bruil of ActionAid meeting with the Dutch representative to FAO

The project is also now part of the Civil Society Mechanism working group on Agro-ecology and women’s rights enabling them to input into the main CFS policy dialogue. This will be particularly important as FAO works on voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition. During the meeting staff from ActionAid Netherland and the POWER International Project Manager (IPM) were able to meet with the Dutch Representative of FAO. The representative expressed interest in

the project and would be willing for some of his team to visit the project. A meeting was also held with the Africa region FAO Representatives who were forthcoming on working with civil society, they feel they need more information on issues of agroecology and the right to food. The countries that attended included Burkina Faso, South Africa, Nigeria, Cape Verde and Angola. We need to communicate more regularly with the Permanent Representatives in CFS rather than only during the CFS meeting. The IPM also attended a side event organised by FAO and which also led to more discussion on how POWER can collaborate on agroecology and unpaid care work and further actions have been taken to strengthen the partnership with FAO.

One staff member from Bangladesh also attended a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) sponsored capacity building meeting in "Rural Poverty Reduction", held in Italy 20 - 23 November 2018. The meeting was a platform for networking as well as capacity building and learning will be shared back to partners and others working on the project.

The quarter also saw enhanced capacity of women farmers, partners and staff through the South Asia advocacy capacity building meeting which was attended by participants from civil society organizations who lead in feminist advocacy and agroecology including the one billion rising, Asia Farmers Association among others. The participants came from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Thailand

and included activists, women farmers and staff members. The key advocacy objectives were agreed, and the feminist perspective was deepened among stakeholders. At national level, in Bangladesh, 54% women have improved knowledge in advocacy skills on different issues that is women entrepreneurship development and market access, increase support for reducing UCW, how to address VAW. Hence it was found that a strong advocacy, networking and alliance building of women groups at Union and Upazila level with local government, local administration and NGOs assisted to increase access to different services.

Women have also advocated for the inclusion of unpaid care work in party manifestos of different political parties before the National Election in December 2018. As a result, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) deliberately mentioned about the recognition of women's household labour in their election manifesto. A number of political parties (Awami League, BNP, Mohajot and Jatio Oikkyo Front) have incorporated some issues of UCW in their election manifesto like day care establishment, implementation of activities related to women rights, special loan with low interest for women entrepreneurs and skill development for rural women among others

The period under review also saw the deepening of the relationship between POWER and the Institute of Development Studies around time diary research and strengthening of the time diary tool. The next round of data on women's time use has now been collected and is awaiting analysis. However, monitoring unpaid care work, the changing of the time diary tool and data entry software resulted in the delay of time diary data collection and sharing data analysis findings with women's groups and community. The process is now underway, and it will support evidence-based advocacy activities with government and other stakeholders at country level.

### **Mid Term evaluation Report**

In order to review the progress of the project, a team of consultants were hired and have collected data from three countries and have had some discussions with the outgoing staff from ActionAid Pakistan. This provides for rich data on the progress made and we await the development of a draft report in February 2019. Action Aid also used a peer to peer review method to enhance the process where other M&E staff and women's rights advisors also participated in the MTR for a different implementing country.

### **Challenges**

Natural disasters - In Ghana, women in Nanumba south who were supported with improved seeds to do group farming were affected by floods resulting in lower yields.

Adoption of agroecology- there have also been challenges in the adoption of agroecology particularly relating to seed control, for example, In Rwanda, women groups are restricted by agricultural policy to develop, maintain, use and exchange their own seeds that prevents POWER project to support women with establishment of community seed banks. But the recently UN declaration on seed sovereignty<sup>2</sup> that provides rights for rural farmers to develop, use and sell their own seeds promises

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<sup>2</sup> <http://undocs.org/en/A/C.3/73/L.30>

the change of governments' seed policies in near future then women groups be allowed to develop local seeds for their own.

Delays in finalizing reports by consultants - Delays in data translation in Bangladesh have affected the timely delivery of the MTR report. As one of the consultants is unwell the report will now be delivered at the end of February. The policy brief on unpaid care work and CRSA was also delayed due to the consultant being unwell.

### Lessons Learnt

- Ghana, the team has learnt that branding is important when improving women's access to markets, for example, Gari product has increased more markets and increase income for most women groups and branding of products produced in Bangladesh will also enhance their access to markets.
- The combining of women's group meetings and saving schemes has enhanced regular group meetings which has giving the women the opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues that affects them in their communities.
- The use of modern ICT such as the ESOKO platform in Ghana increased access to market information that aids appropriate pricing.
- Benefits of registered groups- Registered groups with a business certificate are better able to apply for loans to venture in to other business. More support is needed to support women with registration certificates and help them win government contracts which will provide them with ready market for their farm produce.
- Balancing priorities of farmers - In Ghana, there was a lower participation rate of the women's groups in group activities during the season due to prioritizing their harvesting and threshing of grain. The project will continue to adapt its activities so that there is sensitivity to women's priorities
- Adequate preparation for rural women- We have learnt that for rural women farmers to participate in international events, we need time to prepare for their VISA and its important to find alternative ways of articulating women's voices such as the use of blogs or videos. The blog for Santona Rani will be key<sup>3</sup>
- Involvement of politics in some of the women's groups can have a negative impact as some women would like to push their political agenda overlooking overall women's rights agenda. This also created conflict in a small number of groups and needs to be carefully managed if the group is to continue meeting.
- Agro-processing is also required for perishables however in some countries, for example in Rwanda, women groups have no technology to preserve their produce especially tubers and this still affects their ability to increase income from agricultural produce

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<sup>3</sup> <http://news.trust.org/item/20181015135433-a7oyf/>The power of rural women to reduce global food insecurity and cut emissions