

POWER: Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights

Quarterly Narrative Report

January to March 2019

Grant holder: ActionAid UK (AAUK)

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

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

Overall progress for the quarter

The quarter under review has progressed relatively well with most of the planned activities having been completed. The women's groups continued to meet and discuss their issues, and training and capacity building meetings were done for new women's groups in Bangladesh and Rwanda, where funds were re-allocated due to the closure of the Pakistan office in 2018. The new groups were trained on reflection action methodologies and women's rights. The first quarter was characterized by several engagements by project staff, partners and women farmers at regional and international level. These included the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) pre-African Union Summit meeting held under the theme of addressing challenges for migrants and returnees and displaced persons¹; the inaugural UN South Asia forum for business and human rights engagement in Asia; and internationally the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting which was held under the theme '*social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*'.

The team advocated for policies to address unpaid care work as well as resilient livelihoods, and on agroecology as a way to adapt to climate change, as this relates to migration and displacement. During the CSW meeting, a woman farmer from Ghana shared her experience during the FLOW side event for all partners. In addition, the team's capacity on issues of unpaid care work was strengthened through attendance of various meetings at the CSW event focused on unpaid care work, for example those organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Oxfam. However, while there was an effort to involve more women farmers in the meetings, farmers could not get visas to travel to New

¹ Theme of the AU 2019 – "Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement"

York for the CSW event, and this impacted on the target for raising women's voices in international platforms.

Some of the activities could not be completed in 2018 and therefore were moved to 2019, as outlined below. The period also saw setting up of terms of reference for the second phase of the international time diary collection.

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.

The project has continued to organise and support women's groups. New groups' facilitators were trained on the Human Rights-Based Approach and Reflection-action methodologies. A total of 45 new groups were recruited in Rwanda and the project now supports a total of 245 rural women farmer groups who meet regularly at least once a month. In Bangladesh, a total of 38 women farmer groups have been added from Dinajpur district which are actively functioning. The new groups mainly discuss issues affecting their rights by completing women rights analyses, power analyses, daily activity charts of women, income/expenditure matrices and money saving activities. In Rwanda, meeting attendance rate of women group members in quarter one stood at 99.7% in all districts as per monthly facilitators reports. This high attendance rate is also catalysed by money saving activities that require every member to attend. However, in Bangladesh the meetings were disrupted by relocation of farmers due to the development of a barrage in one of the districts.

ActionAid Rwanda held a three-day training on the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and REFLECT Methodology for new groups' facilitators. The facilitators who participated also trained their fellow women (1,350) of their respective groups through their regular Reflect Circles. *"I can now understand the link between poverty and unpaid care work. I got new skills on rights analysis by using different tools. I am impressed with seasonal activity calendar tool; I could understand the months in which we work very hard and the months we don't have heavy activities. I am going to also train the group members so that we can discuss these tools in our meetings"*. Said Helene from Musanze district in Shingiro community. Through the roll out at group level all the new groups will have a greater understanding of unpaid care work.

Cooperative registration

Women have also increased their influence at local level, for example, the existing 200 women groups started the process of registering their groups as cooperatives under the Rwanda Cooperatives Agency (RCA). In Bangladesh, a total of 238 women groups actively performed their regular activities, such as weekly meetings, development of action plans, and regular lobby and advocacy initiatives in three districts. All group members with the help of newly elected federation members reviewed and are implementing the action plans. In Bangladesh, during the quarter under review, the women discussed some major actions keeping in mind the upcoming pre-budgetary meeting at Union Parishad where they have planned to place more demand for gender responsive public services, provision for day care centers, gender responsive market facilities and increased allocation for women in skill development trainings. In the beginning of February and March, Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat arranged federation election at union and upazila level in a democratic way by engaging local Government Election commission of Gaibandha who had extended their support by deploying female police officers and providing ballot box and seal from election commission.

Women's confidence and influence at community level is increasing, for example, in Gaibandha, 6 women leaders received "Award for contributing in women empowerment" for their contribution in stopping VAW and early marriage, women entrepreneurship, women's economic empowerment, organization development and social service, disaster awareness and management and access to

market. One of the federations of Gaibandha became a member of Upazila (Sub-district) level network, GO-NGO coordination committee².

The number of relationships among different women's groups, elected representatives, Union Parishad and other government officials and service providers has increased as a result of involving them in various group activities. These growing relationships resulted in increased access to different services such as Vulnerability Group Development cards and Vulnerability Group Facility cards, which enable women to access allowances, training, and health care services under the support of government. A total of 2,253 women in both districts received these services. Women who are involved in community structures are not only helping them to avail these services but also playing a role in making the service system more accessible and accountable. For example, one of the members of Gazaria Federation, Gaibandha, who is a member of the Union Parishad's standing committee protested the extra fees taken for birth registration and successfully stopped this case of corruption. Another representative of a School Management committee (SMC) helped to stop taking extra fees during school admission and forced the school administration to return the extra money they had already taken from guardians. Getting encouraged by the previous community leaders, this quarter about 44 women engaged in community structures.

In Ghana, women have revealed increased confidence in public speaking, decision making processes, and increased attention to women savings schemes. Women are also actively participating in community structures such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA), School Management Committees, Water User Committees, and Magazia Positions³. On 8th March, the International Women's Day (IWD) was observed with Department of Gender in Upper East (Talinse and Nabdam), Brong Ahafo (Tain and Asutifi South), and Volta (Adaklu) and Jirapa Municipal with the theme: "Think equal, build smart, innovate for change: to reduce the burden of care on women and girls in Ghana". The president of the National Women Farmers Movement and the Project Manager were interviewed by GBC radio in their 1pm bulletin and evening news demanding for recognition of unpaid care work and budgetary support to establish child care centres in rural areas. An article was also share by GNA and my joy online.⁴

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

There has been progress towards the recognition, reduction and redistribution of UCW amongst women and men in the project, and some commitments made by duty bearers on the recognition of unpaid care work. For example, in Ghana, issues related to women's economic empowerment and unpaid care work, including access to water, have been incorporated into district assembly annual plans. The Upper East Regional Minister participated in the International Women's Day event and gladly pledged her support for the empowerment of women especially on issues related to women UCW and Violence against Women. In Rwanda, there was also the celebration of International Women's Day (IWD) and provision of support for women to reduce the burden and time they spend on UCW through 2,085 women receiving energy saving cooking stoves during the IWD event, which

² Main objective of this committee is to monitor, review and co-ordinate the activities of GOs and NGOs

³ Magazia are locally recognized women leaders in Ghanaian communities and district platform leaders

⁴ Article on POWER intervention in Ghana: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2019/March-8th/the-woman-factor-in-the-economy-especially-in-agriculture.php>

was also used as an opportunity for women to advocate for UCW recognition, redistribution and reduction.

During the celebration of International Women's Day, women presented their demands to high government officials participating in the event including senators and members of the Rwanda Parliament. The family of Musabyemariya Goreth and her husband Utazirubanda shared that their family live in harmony with fair redistribution of unpaid care work duties at home, which enabled their family's economic growth and wellbeing through the POWER Project. They requested the government to consider the issue of UCW during national planning and budgeting to allocate more budget to Gender Responsive Public Services in rural areas which reduce and redistribute UCW, especially child care centres, water provision and affordable energy sources.

Figure 1 2,085 women in Rwanda received energy saving cooking technologies in Rwanda



The guest of honor in IWD event, Honorable Senator Charles UYISENGA, expressed his gratitude on what ActionAid does in partnership with project partners to support rural women in improving their lives. He promised to take forward their presented issues to other levels of government forums especially the issue of UCW. The stoves which were distributed will contribute to reducing the time and burden of UCW for project participants because these stoves can save fuel use by 80% and they have a container each that keeps cooked food warm for more than 6 hours. ***"I can't say how this cooking stove is helpful to me, now I have enough time to feed my livestock and you could visit my banana plantation to see how healthy and productive is!"*** said Bernadette Mukarubana a member of Twiyubake women group in Kibirizi community/Gisagara District. Collection of firewood and cooking was taking women around 3 hours on average but with distributed energy saving cooking stoves, women have reduced around 2 hours on this domestic task. ***"Collection of firewood and cooking has been taking me around 4 hours a day but now using this energy saving stove, it takes me only one hour to have my food ready"*** said Mukayozefu, a member of Twisungane Iwacu group from Nyanza district.

A number of strong advocacy and networking initiatives by women group members resulted in recognizing day care centres as the most time saving interventions within the community. A sense of ownership has evolved amongst the community members, which led them to support the day care centres with finance, drawing and writing materials, food support, and CD players. In Bangladesh, the day care centres have also been contributing significantly to reduction of time spent on unpaid care work. One of the significant achievements has been made in Lalmonirhat district where a new day care centre has been established by both the Harati Union Federation and the community's own initiative. As a result of continuous advocacy of women groups with Local Government, Chairman of Kunchipara Union Parishad made a commitment to maintain the day care center after completion of the project period. The Deputy Commissioner of Gaibandha district also made a commitment to support the day care centers by allocating money for purchasing materials such as computers and solar batteries.

Similarly, in Bangladesh, women also reported saving time on cooking using three Bio-Gas plants that were installed. A total of 81.5% project participants reported their satisfaction on the use of these time saving interventions and energy saving cooking stoves. One of the community leaders, Belly Begum opined that the time saving initiatives of this project helps them to save both time and money. She gained more time to invest in group activities and take part in advocacy initiatives for claiming women's rights and making government more accountable. Another woman, Manika Rani of Gajaria Union said that she repaired her house with the money she saved by using the energy saving cooking stove. A total of 385 mothers are benefitting from the child care centres and other time saving interventions. Many report that they have more free time to engage in income generating activities and thus contribute to their family and community. They became self-dependent and do not rely on loans from others.

Moreover, in order to address UCW issues in local government budgets, women group members received orientations before open budget sessions held by the UP. Ojifa Begum who recently received an orientation said that, "previously I did not know about the UP budget but now I am confident to participate in the budget session and get to know about the total process." This quarter, in one of the wards of Gaibandha an open budget session was held where women members actively participated and presented their demand for a women friendly budget allocation, for example with increased allowances for lactating mothers and pregnant women, hygiene materials for girls' schools and colleges, and an increase women's participation in UP activities.

In Bangladesh, awareness raising on UCW using theatrical interactive drama continued in this quarter. Approximately 21,000 people were reached through these interactive shows where representatives of Union Parishad also participated and appreciated the initiative. On this occasion Md. Liton Miah, Chairman of Kanchipara Union said, "to reduce poverty, everybody needs to involve with income generating activities and support women." Panel Chairman Mr. Kholilur Rahman of Kanchipara Union Parishad mentioned that "It would be better achievement if GO & NGOs are working jointly on the issues of UCW". Furthermore, as a result of several sensitization initiatives a sense of responsibility has grown amongst the male members of families. One of the male participants expressed his view in the meeting that now men are cooperating with their wives so that their wives have some time for income generating activities. One of the traditional religious leaders said that his wife has been suffering from paralysis from a long time and after attending one POWER group meeting now he is supporting his wife in household chores like cleaning cloth and cooking. He added that all the male members of the family should contribute to UCW.

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 continued to contribute to support women with information and technology to support women's access to markets. For example, ActionAid Ghana reviewed its contract with ESOKO to provide weather alerts services to 3,400 farmers throughout the year. Over the years, AAG has developed several manuals in the project thematic areas and is currently reviewing them for publication and printing and use by the women farmers. The manuals include Farmer Business School Manual, Reflection Action Manual, Manual on Good Agricultural Practices, Unpaid Care Work and market-oriented Manuals. A refresher training on women savings schemes was held in Jirapa Municipality with 70 participants representing 25 women groups. Key topics discussed during the training included the meaning of savings and savings groups, the formation and management of functional Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), and how to share surplus. Other activities that are still in progress are savings scheme support in other districts and providing seed support to women. In Rwanda, work continued on establishing a community selling point. The project also engaged with government to secure five land parcels that will be used for women's community selling

and aggregation points, to support women farmers with access to markets and proper storage of their agricultural produce. The government in Nyanza District also gave women's groups twelve hectares of land to establish a farmer field school (FFS) for growing Cassava. *"The advantage of working together as women farmers has given us the power to influence decisions in the community and to demand more land for our collective farming activities. It is in that regards that Nyanza District authority has given us 12 hectares which are erosion-controlled to plant cassava"* said MUKAMANA Liberata from Duteraninkunga woman group, Cyerezo village in Nyanza district.

Regarding access to finance, women groups in Rwanda saved around **80,900,000 Rwf (USD 88,853.4)** through the group savings scheme. This initiative has helped women groups to cooperate with local financial institutions, access quality health care services with insurance, and pay school fees for their children. ActionAid Ghana has also seen increased attention to women's savings schemes. For instance, in Tain District, the groups saved a total of 90,000 Ghana cedis. Women's groups also reported increased yields as a result of practicing agroecology.



Figure 2 Konika Rani at her tea stall

In Bangladesh, 1687 women entrepreneurs reported that they have started income generating activities by reviewing their business plans based on recently acquired knowledge from training on product value chains, financial systems and market analysis, and from the experience of other group members. From this experience they gathered information and analysed current market situations and demands, identified existing gaps in their business plans considering the current market trends, and revised their business plans accordingly. Women have been very successful in income generation. For example, Konika Rani who set up a tea stall and received an award during the International Women's day

commemorations. *"The honour I receive from the Women Affairs Office, is the most rewarding recognition of my struggle. It was a breakthrough for a woman like me to settle down a business in a market place. Now, as an entrepreneur, I am taking care of my family and earning for them with my small capacity."* Although the Selection committee received many nominations on different categories, Konika Rani was nominated for 'access to market for women' category. Following her courageous and successful work income generation where she now earns 500 to 600 BDT taka and makes profit up to 250 BDT per day. As a result of her success, 11 women started different types of business in Kalirbazar, Fulchari, Gaibandha areas.

The use of agroecology practices is ongoing, including sack cultivation, the use of high pits, hanging plants, vermi-compost, organic pesticide, mulching, seed preservation and the establishment of seedbanks. Women who are engaging with agroecology practices reported increasing intake of nutritious food for their family and increases in income from selling the surplus. Jayful Begum from Kulaghat Union said that, "as my husband is sharing the burden of UCW at home I can spend more time in agroecology practice which is increasing my income. Now I am suggesting others to apply agroecology method."

A total of 35 demonstration plots have been continuing in communities, where project participants and their family members have also provided support. These model plots demonstrate application of cultivating different seasonal vegetables using agroecology techniques in homesteads. The use of seedbanks enabled 200 groups members to preserve 21 types of seeds, which has reduced the dependency on the market or corporates for seeds and organic fertilisers. Some farmers not

supported by the groups have also started to preserve seed on their own and have received good results.

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.

Under outcome four, project staff and partners have been engaging with regional and international platforms to raise the visibility of intersections of unpaid care work and agroecology. During the quarter under review, the POWER project team participated in the 33rd GIMAC Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the African Union. The participation started with the capacity building of women and staff on AU engagement as well as familiarization with other key documents being used in the African governance sector. ActionAid through POWER Project moderated a session on how climate change impacts affect women’s rights to sustainable livelihoods, wherein women panelists in this session requested African Union Member States to increase public financing to address climate-induced forced displacements that mostly affect rural women smallholder farmers in refugees camps or relocation sites.

POWER team also participated in the UN CSW 63rd Conference whose priority theme was “*Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*”. ActionAid through POWER project participated in the side events, especially the side event organized by the Permanent Mission of The Netherlands for the United Nations that brought together all FLOW programme implementers to share learning and challenges emerging from the POWER project related to the economic empowerment of women.



Figure 3 Mary a woman farmer from Ghana shares her experiences during the FLOW side event at CSW

CSW 63 was also an opportunity for ActionAid Rwanda to have face to face discussions on the issue of unpaid care work with Rwanda government CSW63 delegates including the Head of Rwanda delegates and Chief Gender Monitor (CGM) of Gender Monitoring Office. They requested ActionAid to share a concept paper on UCW to be discussed by government policy makers.

Addressing Violence Against Women reporting as a cross cutting issue

In Bangladesh a total of 40 cases of violence against women have been reported in this quarter, mostly by using hotline numbers of relevant departments provided in a leaflet. For example: this quarter 2 rape cases in Gaibandha have been reported with the help of women federation members who contacted a police station using the number provided in the leaflets. In both cases perpetrators were arrested and cases are subject to police investigation. The women federation prepared a detail

advocacy plan to follow up the cases to ensure justice. All countries are continuing to track the incidences of violence against women.

Challenges faced

In Bangladesh, Gaibandha faced some challenges in implementing some of the activities because many people were evicted due to the renovation of a barrage. In Uria and Kanchipara Union a total 125 members of 5 women groups were evicted and migrated to other areas. As a result, 17-18 weekly meetings were postponed and some of the migrated members could not attend entrepreneurship and skill development trainings, nor continue their income generation activities. But federation members continue to communicate with the migrated households to keep track of activities, and in their new areas they have again set up their grocery shops.

Delays to the approval of the budget reallocated from Pakistan to Rwanda and Bangladesh affected the implementation of new activities in the first quarter, which have now been moved to second quarter. In Bangladesh, the team also required express written approval from the NGO board to implement the activities and this can take more than six weeks. However, all project teams went ahead and implemented the recurrent activities. The workplan has been revisited and adjusted accordingly.

The project will continue to monitor risks from climate change such as flooding, drought and the women farmers will be supported with agroecology techniques to adapt to the specific incidence of climate change. This was mentioned as a risk for both Rwanda and Bangladesh.

Key next steps for the coming period

Capacity building for new groups

The second quarter will also focus on strengthening the capacity of new groups in Bangladesh and Rwanda while providing ongoing monitoring and support for already existing groups.

Review of the Mid-term review report and management response

The team will be working to review the logical framework and approach based on the MTR findings and reflection. This will include the reflection on the targets for ActionAid Pakistan, the review of new target as well as the mapping out on how to adequately respond to the recommendation in the management report. The MTR will also be unpacked and shared widely with the key stakeholders at community, national and international level.

Development of a digital mobile application

The project will kick start the development of a digital application to support the collection of time diaries in all three countries. The app will be used to collect information on the time men and women spend on paid and unpaid care work and present the data back to project participants in an interactive way to reflect on the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work.