

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



Grant holder: ActionAid UK (AAUK)

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), 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.

Overall progress for the quarter

The quarter under review has seen good progress towards addressing unpaid care work, women's leadership, increasing productivity and market access among other key issues for women's economic empowerment. The implementation of the activities across the countries has contributed to the achievement of the project indicator targets. Under outcome one, 86% of the women reported having improved their knowledge of their rights, how to report incidence of violence against women and available services (for example legal and health services). Similarly, 78% of the women reported having the confidence and skills to participate in existing community structures. Under outcome two, 632 sensitization/advocacy meetings, 2042 local awareness raising initiatives and 1183 dialogue meetings were held to influence the attitude of the communities on unpaid care work. Furthermore, 93% of the women reported satisfaction with time saving interventions such as childcare centres. Under outcome three, 17002 women are accessing seeds from local seed banks while market access has improved. For outcome four, 79% of women have reported greater confidence to use the advocacy skills they learnt and implementing their advocacy plans in their respective communities. The local and national duty bearers have also shown greater will and support to work with ActionAid to realize the project objectives and goal.

The Project Management team also completed advocacy stakeholder meetings with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, African Union and South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation, and participated in the donor annual conference. The project has also seen steady progress for the recruitment of project officers in the new areas.

The main challenges faced during the period under review include ongoing delays to the activities due to the delay of donor approval of the budget and disbursement of funds, and the subsequent delayed approval of the NGO bureau in Bangladesh which delayed project

implementation in the new areas. Some activities were implemented in the new district through AAB pre-finance mechanism. The finance team of AAB has been communicating with NGOAB frequently and responded to all their queries. The delayed activities have been scheduled for quarter three. The delays will be managed, and some activities will likely be moved to next year. However, AAB feels that it will be in a better position to assess which activities will be moved to next year after the end of quarter 3. Therefore, the team will update the status at the end of the next quarter. In addition, the annual audit of the project took longer than originally planned due to the closure of the Pakistan office in 2018.

Outcome 1: By the end of 2020, 19,500 rural women are organised and are able to demand their rights as farmers and carers and have greater influence in their households and communities

Mobilising and organising women's groups

A total of 19,501 women are now meeting regularly after the Pakistan office closed, Pakistan's 200 groups concluded activities, and 83 new groups were formed in Rwanda (45) and Bangladesh (38). In Rwanda, 1,350 additional women were mobilised into groups while in Bangladesh 1,149 mobilised into groups in the new areas. The women groups meet at least twice a month to discuss issues affecting their rights as carers and farmers. The discussions have focused on the collective money saving initiatives, women rights, women's leadership, preventing and responding to Violence Against Women and Girls, access to markets and finance, unpaid care work, agricultural calendar, agroecology and climate change impacts. In Rwanda 735 women group meetings were held, 600 meetings in Ghana, and 2,691 meeting in Bangladesh in this quarter. These meetings have strengthened the leadership of the group members to lead and actively participate in community discussions and advocacy issues.

Capacity building

During the quarter, a number of capacity building activities have been done, for example, 90 women representatives from the 45 new women groups in Rwanda were trained on the human rights-based approach (HRBA), i.e. planning, implementing and evaluating public services programmes and projects for both government and non-government organisations. Women have improved their understanding on how gendered power relations have given rise to discrimination, subordination and exclusion in different life opportunities particularly when overlapped by poverty. The training evaluation showed that 92% of trained women have increased their HRBA skills, which helps women to hold local authorities accountable through their participation in annual planning and evaluation of performance contracts of local leaders known as IMIHIGO.

Improved participation in women's leadership

Women have also gained confidence to compete in local leadership positions. For example, Agnes UWIMANA, member of Tuzamurane women group in Musanze district of Rwanda said: *"As women, we raise awareness on women's rights and the benefit of women leadership participation. We attend different community meetings and share the participants to claim our leadership rights. Our increased confidence helped us, and we want to exceed the 30% women representation in all Rwanda's decision making organises guaranteed by the national constitution."* Moreover, the annual meetings and discussions have changed the attitudes of local leaders and religious leaders on women's leadership and they are now willing to support

women taking more leadership roles. For example, in Rwanda Reverend Pastor Ndayisaba Etienne from Anglican Church said: *“For rural women to participate in the community decision-making processes, as church leaders we need to change our mind-set and be the first to bring that change.”*

Similarly, in Ghana, such meetings have strengthened the leadership of the groups to lead in the discussions of advocacy issues within their respective communities and districts. For instance, in the Talinse district, Yagzore, Kpale and Kpatia communities benefited from a culvert and road levelling project due to their engagement and monthly group meetings. 65 participants took part in refresher leadership training, which has increased their knowledge and understanding of leadership concepts and how women in leadership positions can use their spaces to bring about the desired change in promoting gender equality and women’s rights. Gifty Ampofo, a secretary to Akuapa women’s group in the Tain district was nominated to contest for district Assembly elections. She said: *“after taking up a leadership role as a secretary in my group and a water committee member, I know it is the right time to contest for the district elections. I am encouraged and poised to contest for this election as a result of the trainings in leadership skills, lobbying, advocacy and accountability organised as part empowerment programmes in the POWER project”*.

In Bangladesh, women’s groups have very good relationships with the Union Parishad, government officials and service providers to access social protection and health care services. The relationships have improved because some women group members are very active and play important roles in the community structures through which different services are provided to the community. These women leaders are also encouraging other women to get involved in community structures and play a role as a change agent. As a result, they have increased their access to different social protection services like receiving Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) card, ration card, allowances, training, health care services and housing allocation. A total of 2,700 women’s group members in Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur districts received these services. The women who are involved in community structures are not only helping themselves to avail these services but also playing a role in making the service system more accessible to their communities including women.

Violence against women and girls

In Bangladesh, during the quarter under review, a total of 27 VAW cases were reported to women groups. Among these, 19 cases were domestic violence caused by husband and in-laws, 6 were clashes between neighbours and 2 were sexual harassment. 26 cases were resolved by women group members and one sexual harassment case was referred to court, with the women groups undertaking continuous follow up on this.

Furthermore, women group members together with the community are continuously challenging violence against women. In Lalmonirhat, the Cholar Shathi women group stopped two child marriages with the support of the community and a local Union Parishad member. Members of the women group learned that two young girls were being married off by their parents, so together they visited the girl’s homes and explained to the parents that child marriage is illegal and punishable by law. The parents agreed and stopped the marriage process.

Outcome 2: By the end of 2020 Women's unpaid care work is more highly valued within households, communities and government, more evenly distributed within households and hours spent by women on unpaid care work is reduced, resulting in more free time for women to engage in social, economic and political activities

Advocacy through budget tracking

During the period under review, women were empowered in annual district budget tracking using community scorecard and social audit tools that helped them to influence budgetary allocation, to interventions addressing unpaid care work such as water provision, community care centres, clean and affordable cooking energy sources but also to influence budget allocation to agroecology practices and access to markets infrastructure. In Rwanda, the 45 new women's group representatives have increased their skills of budget tracking. Pre-and post-training evaluation showed that 90% of trained women have increased their skills and knowledge on budget tracking and now they started to train other women in the group during their regular meetings.

Similarly, budget tracking has gained momentum in Bangladesh and as relationships between women's groups and Union Parishads continues to improve, they are likely to allocate budget for women's development, support the day care centres and establish gender responsive access to markets. In consultation with Union Parishads, the women's groups formed a committee of five members in every union, to track and monitor UP budget, physically monitor the UP projects, and share finding with the UP. These group members also facilitated several gender-sensitive budget sessions at different Union Parishads and within the community, so that they could hold the local government accountable on budget allocations.

Unpaid care work interventions

Women were supported with energy saving cooking stoves which reduce firewood consumption by 80%¹ and 180 households were connected to clean piped water. The time diary analysis shows that the burden of unpaid care work has reduced approximately by 4 hours and 22 minutes a day in Rwanda. For example, the time women spend on firewood collection reduced by 1 hour and 53 minutes, 1 hour and 30 minutes for water collection and almost 1 hour for childcare. Nyirabarinda Beatha from Abishyizehamwe group in Gishubi community in Rwanda said: *"Having access to clean piped water in my house is something incredible and has immediate positive impact on our livelihoods. I no longer spend too much time in fetching water and collecting firewood. I realized that at least I saved four hours I used to spend on unpaid care work. My income is increasing as a result of more time I spend on income generating activities."*

Similarly, one of the users of an energy saving stove, Aslema Begum from Gaibandha, Bangladesh, said: *"Now it takes less time to cook food and emits no fumes resulting fewer black streaks on wall, cooking dishes and dresses. So, it takes less time to clean dishes and clothes. Now, I can attend the meeting regularly and I am going to the Union Parishad to get services for the community. Also, I can spend more time in sewing cloths which helps to increase my income."*

¹ Energy cooking stoves Tubibe Amahoro tweet <https://twitter.com/sowpeace1/status/1120714402091683842> and <http://catalog.cleancookstoves.org/stoves/243>

Increasingly over the period, unpaid care work has been recognised and has gained momentum in most community discussions in the project areas, with men and traditional leaders as peer educators. Role sharing between men and women and boys at home has become a practice and boys are more willing to support in household chores to reduce the workload of mothers and sisters at home. This displays a clear understanding of the issues among community members, increasing their support for the campaign. In Ghana, the unpaid care work sensitization campaigns have reached 3,800 community members including men, women, boys, girls, traditional leaders and wider public members. Similarly, Swapon Mia, husband of a member of Ashar Alo Women Group in Lalmonirhat, Bangladesh said: *“My involvement in household work lets my wife to get involved in businesses like selling vegetable and cow fattening to earn money. Now we are happier than before. Also, helping my wife in household chores give us more time to spend together and to know each other better.”*

In Rwanda, childcare initiatives have been highly successful, for example, Kibilizi community care centre receives 316 children (141 boys and 175 girls), so their mothers have time to participate sufficiently in farming activities. In Bangladesh, the number of day care subscribers are increasing every month because mothers can spend their time on income generating activities including small businesses, day labour, and can attend meetings and advocacy or movements to claim their rights.

Delali Asempah is a 26-year-old care giver in Goefe, a community in the Adaklu District of Ghana where AAG



established a childcare centre through the POWER project said: *“I did not just accept because I had no job, but I saw the realities of women. Most women are farmers and they cannot take the children to the farm. Those who are engaged in trading or processing palm oil get very tired and cannot do much with the children at their back.*

The children are learning quick and they are no longer at risk. If it had not been the care centre some children who are a little grown will be left at home and anything can happen to them.”

Time diaries

A total of 716 women and 405 men completed time diaries from 27 communities in Ghana. And the target for the quarter has now been met. In Bangladesh, the collection of time diaries from sample communities also went ahead as planned. In Bangladesh 429 women 71 men have completed the time diaries and the results were shared with the community in the presence of girls, boys, religious leaders, Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO) and other government officials who contributes to redistribute unpaid care work in family. Time diaries collection in Rwanda has been slightly delayed due to budget limitation. A proposal has since been sent to the donor to request approval of approved changes. In the meantime a contract has been signed with private firm on our radar on the development of a digital application to support the collection of time diaries.

Learning and exchange

Rwanda POWER project participants conducted an exchange learning visit between Rwanda and Bangladesh. Women farmers from Rwanda reported learnings on practices of seed preservation and biological control of crop pest with local knowledge and how women in Bangladesh transform cow dung into cooking stoves. Women from Rwanda committed to replicate best practices in their communities. It was noted that women in Bangladesh do not have rights to family property especially land rights due to traditional and religious beliefs and women from Rwanda shared with Bangladeshi women and local leaders that in Rwanda, women have equal property rights as men if the couple's marriage is legal.

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.

Capacity building

The project continues to have a strong focus on secure and sustainable access to markets and productive resources. The women participants of financial management and business skills training have reported improved knowledge and skills to access markets and develop businesses using these skills. Fatema Begum, member of Surjer Alo women group in Bangladesh said: *"I had forgotten about different ingredients to start and run businesses like skills, knowledge, honesty, machine and others. But through this training, I got refreshed with these and understand they are the most important for business."*

Women's access to markets as entrepreneurs has steadily increased. They are going to market to buy and sell their products and have started negotiating with the market to obtain fairer prices for their products. More women's groups are focusing on multiple income-generating activities after reviewing their business plans, based on current market demand and supply information analysis. They are identifying business risks and preparing business plans considering the present market trend and some have already started businesses based on the groups' revised plans. Learning and exchange has also been continuing with women's groups, especially among those who have started successful businesses and those who have faced challenges or failed.

Market access and national selling point

In this quarter, a national level selling point known as "Aaurhi" has started functioning through Kendrio Krishok Maitree (KKM) in Bangladesh. KKM is a community-based farmers group that works with POWER project to advance women's access to market. POWER project women are also members of the KKM group, which helps them to sell their produce to the market. A total of 58 women's groups are selling their products in Aaurhi. It is becoming well-known as a gender-responsive market space which is selling safe and fresh foods. Aaurhi is also helping the farmers who are practicing agroecology to get fairer prices for their produce.

Agroecology

Agroecology methods are helping farmers to grow vegetables and preserve seeds during crisis moments, for example in Bangladesh post-flood time and beginning of seasons when demand for seeds is high. Women who are engaged with agro-ecological practices reported that they were able to get nutritious food for their families and increased income by selling the surplus. Community seed banks are also getting popular in the community, particularly during the monsoon season when most of the households are getting flooded, the seeds remain dry

because of their establishment in an elevated land. Community members are taking seeds from seed banks regularly. One of the women agroecology practitioners from Bangladesh said: *“Consuming food grown through agro-ecological techniques is improving community health as it is rich with organic nutrients and earns us money by selling the surplus in the market. I am now aware of the local market information.”*



In Rwanda, Muhimupundu Claudette pictured left, noted that after being trained on agroecology using the Climate Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) toolkit, she practiced what she learned from the training and now her agriculture production has increased. In this last season she harvested more than 1,500 kg of potatoes instead of 450 kg in the past years. She is also planting fruits in order to diversify her agricultural production and increase her income. She noted that she now has a selling point constructed near to her plots where we can store fruits and vegetables. The income she earns makes her more independent and able to have a say on family issues at the household level. She can also pay for health insurance and other bills.

In the Jirapa Municipality of Ghana, twenty-three out of twenty-five of the groups have worked on their group farms planting various crops such as groundnut, maize, cowpea and soghurm, (Kapaala). Women groups in Tambaala, Ul-Kpong, Naawie, Gbare and Sentu communities have prepared compost which they will be applying on their group farms as part of the agroecology methods they have learnt from the POWER project. Women in Akore community in the Tain District demanded accountability and transparency in the management of water system in the community. They collectively pushed for the election of two women to join the water user committee and this was very successful.

Seeds control and grain banks

A total of 475 women trained as seed producers from project locations in Ghana, in collaboration with Ghana Seed Inspection Division (GSID) of the Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate (PPRSD) of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) and Heritage seed company in Northern Region and SARI in the Upper West and East Regions. Representatives from the group were trained on seed classes, seed and grain differences, principles and key steps to quality seed production, seed selection and preservation, factors that reduce seed quality, agronomy of soybeans, groundnuts and rice. Selected women were provided with foundation seed for maize, soya, rice, groundnut and sorghum. They will be supported with community seed banks as part of this activity to store and preserve their seeds.

Improved access and control over productive resources

In Ghana, 50 communities involving 3500 women engaged their traditional leaders to lobby for secured access and control over productive lands across the eight project districts in the country. 18 communities in Nanumba North and South districts got their land agreements signed by land owners for five years, subject to renewal.

Women's influence in decision making processes continues to increase and has improved their access to resources. In Rwanda, the women groups wrote a request letter to district authorities asking for land to be appropriated for cultivation, and their requests were accepted.

The authorities of Gishubi community sector released 1.5 hectares of marshland for three women groups to produce beans and vegetables. Similarly, the authority of Kibirizi community Sector in Gisagara district released part of Duwane marshland for 22 women groups to increase production of vegetables to be sold at Kibilizi community selling point established by the ActionAid POWER project. Uwimpaye Serge, the agronomist of Kibilizi sector said: *“Because women groups are well organized, it is hard to deny their request to land. That’s why Kibirizi sector authorities decided to release part of Duwane marshland for women farmer groups to increase their vegetable produce and to make the established selling point more operational so that women farmers increase their income.”*

Livelihood diversification through livestock rearing

In Ghana, 184 women farmers received livestock in Nanumba North and South, Jirapa Municipal and Adaklu districts and were trained on animal husbandry practices. An additional five hundred women were identified and provided with group level trainings and sensitisation on animal husbandry. They will receive two animals each from members who have already been provided with animals as part of the “pass on” strategy, to ensure all women benefit from the project.

Market access

In Rwanda, the project participants were empowered in the seven steps of gender-sensitive access to markets including identification of their local production potential; collective reflection on the market; building relationships with markets; gender sensitivity in value chains to support collective goals; gaps, bottlenecks and risks in the value chain; building sustainable wealth; and collective plans of action; as well as management of five established community selling points, at least one selling point per district.

Women in Gitesi community in Karongi district and Ruheru community in Nyaruguru district of Rwanda started selling their products at the community selling points established by POWER Project, which has reduced the burden and long distances involved in taking their produce to markets. Muhimpundu Claudette who sells her products at Ruheru community selling point in Nyaruguru District *“It is a great pleasure to have this selling point in our community. I am safe here because it is nearest home and it helps me to spend more time selling my products”.*

The pre and post training evaluation has shown that 98% ‘gender-sensitive access to markets’ training participants have increased their skills and knowledge on market access. Due to the good relationship with the district authorities, the POWER project did not purchase land plots to set up the community selling points, but the district allocated it and provided technical support in designing and monitoring the set-up of the selling points. Ancilla NIRERE from KOTWIBU women cooperative in Musanze District in Rwanda said: *“I got more skills on access to market. it is going to help us to add value on our products and build relationship with potential consumers not focusing only our community but sell our products out of our communities”.*

Access to finance through voluntary savings

Through collective money savings schemes, women groups have built strong relationship with local financial institutions such as Savings and Credits Cooperatives (SACCO) which operate at every community level (Sector) throughout the country. From 2017 to 2018 savings in Rwanda amounted to 323, 205,274 RWF equivalent to 352,844 USD. This saving is owned by women in the groups and each women group member has a share. The saved funds help

the group members to pay for family needs, including medical insurance and school fees for their children as well as purchase of collective cropland. Using the interest from the small loans, the women groups purchase livestock and distribute to those women who did not benefit from the project livestock distribution.

Outcome 4: Greater visibility of intersections of agroecology, women's unpaid care work 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 engage important national, regional and international stakeholders. At the local level in Bangladesh, women groups are becoming more skilled on election processes, stakeholder analysis, preparation of effective messages, proper technique selection and risk analysis for advocacy and campaigning. For example, in Gaibandha, one advocacy meeting at district level was held with lawyers, public prosecutors, police, doctors, women organizations and civil society representatives on reducing VAW.

Furthermore, a lobby meeting was held with the Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh to introduce discussions around recognition, redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work in the National Parliament of Bangladesh. Representatives from different Union and Upazila Federations of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat participated in the lobby meeting with the Deputy Speaker who agreed with demands of the women leaders and sought support from AAB with relevant documents. The ActionAid Media Fellowship on unpaid care work has raised public awareness and sensitized policy makers and stakeholders on unpaid care work and women's labour rights 12 in-depth articles and news reports. Through the reports, policy makers, practitioners, researchers, academics, economists, media personnel and activists have attempted to address the issue of unpaid care work and shared their opinions for the government to take necessary action. For example, Dr. Shamsul Alam, Senior Secretary, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning stated in an interview with one of the fellows that, "a statistical system must be formulated to analyse the labour of women doing unpaid care work and make this visible, so that it can be addressed in the national budget in the next period".

SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) in partnership with ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) and Asian Farmer Association (AFA) organised a regional expert Consultation on "Youth and Women in Agriculture: For Economic Development and Key to Food Security in Future," held in Kathmandu, Nepal. This year the conference made some major recommendations including that South Asia governments need to declare policies formally to support farmers, and that multi-country committees should be formed to promote women and young agricultural entrepreneurs, introducing delay sale loan² for farmers.

For increased visibility of the intersections of women economic empowerment, agroecology practice, unpaid care work and violence against women and girls, women farmers from Rwanda, Bangladesh, Ghana and ActionAid staff participated in the technical consultation between ActionAid, the FAO and Care International, to engage with key stakeholders and

² loan from the government to meet farmer's immediate needs during harvesting period when the market price is low. This loan encourages farmers to sell their produces later when prices increase.

discuss ways of improving programming and policies for rural women's empowerment. The full discussion can be accessed from the FAO website³⁴

POWER Project participated in the 34th Session of the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) meeting in Niamey, Niger under the African Union Summit theme, "Towards Gender-Responsive Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement". The ActionAid team held a session on women's economic empowerment, during which they spoke to the need for policy that recognises unpaid care work. The heavy load of unpaid care work and effects of climate change threaten livelihood bases in rural communities and force young women to migrate to towns. Women who spoke in the meeting strongly recommended time-saving interventions to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, and specific climate change adaptation measures.

Finally, in June one PMT member and a representative from Songtaba (a partner of ActionAid) participated in the donor conference in Lebanon. The team was able to share a lot with other FLOW grantees on their experiences on unpaid care work. Among the lessons learned was the need for a stronger focus on intersectionality.

Monitoring and evaluation

During the period under review, project field visits were undertaken to Ghana by the PMT to discuss issues of finance, in particular supporting implementers in addressing audit queries, as well as assessing programme progress, visiting women's groups and discussing the mid-term review management responses. The project is now planning for an annual review meeting in September 2019 issues to be discussed includes revision of logframe work, theory of change, data collection and training the changes with the project M&E officers.

Communications and visibility

The project held a webinar to highlight the interlinkages of unpaid care work, climate change and agroecology. A brief of the Mid-Term Review report, banners and other publicity materials were also shared during the different advocacy engagements. The POWER project has also continued to inform ActionAid's other work, for example, information from the POWER project is currently being used to build case studies and inform the ActionAid Global campaign focused on gender responsive public services.

Key upcoming activities

- Annual review meeting
- Development of a time diary digital application
- Comprehensive analysis of time diaries
- Review of the project logframe, theory of change and the current monitoring data collection tools.

³ [Gender, climate resilience and agroecology: http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5004/icode/Women's_unpaid_care_work/time_burden_and_Social_protection:](http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5004/icode/Women's_unpaid_care_work/time_burden_and_Social_protection)
<http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5003/icode/>
[Gender-sensitive value chains and Access to markets: http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5003/icode/](http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5003/icode/Gender-sensitive_value_chains_and_Access_to_markets)