

**Quarterly report:**

**Promoting Opportunities for Women Empowerment and Rights**

**Project Quarter 4 2019**

**Period covered by report:** October to December 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, Tain and Adaklu districts), Rwanda (Nyanza, Gisagara and Nyaruguru districts in the Southern Province, Musanze district in the Northern Province and Karongi district in Western Province), Bangladesh (Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts, Dinajpur district).

**Implementing partners:** Ghana (Songtaba, Bonatadu, Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), and Social Development and Improvement Agency (SODIA), GLOWA, Rwanda (Duhozanye, Faith Victory Association and Tubibe Amahoro), Bangladesh (SKS Foundation).

**Long term objective:** To contribute to the increased economic empowerment of women.

**Specific objective:** 19,500 women in Ghana, Rwanda and Bangladesh have increased income and ability to control their income, through practicing agroecology, accessing markets and reducing, recognising and redistributing unpaid care work.

**Introduction**

The period under review has seen continuing success and impact of the POWER project. The last quarter had important key moments for the women's rights movement which provided an opportunity for women to come together and demand their rights. The important moments included the commemoration of the International day for Rural Women and the Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. Outcome 1 and 2 continued to be strengthened while outcome three gathered momentum in all three countries where women have reported improved access to markets as well as a significant impact on their income. Outcome 4 has also gone well with engagements on the Beijing Plus 25, pre Commission on the Status of Women meetings and further opportunities for collaboration being explored for United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation in 2020 (SAARC). The main challenges faced were related to cold wave which affected some of the women's group meetings and harvesting in some areas in Bangladesh. In Rwanda limited resources were noted as a barrier to respond to climate change effects such as flooding and drought.

***Outcome 1: 19,500 (6,000 in Ghana, 6,150 in Bangladesh, 7,350 in Rwanda) rural women are organized and can demand their rights as farmers and carers and have greater influence in their households and communities.***

A total of 19,901 women have been mobilised and organised into women's groups and this is above the target of 19500. Women have been able to demand their rights as farmers and carers through their women's groups and through the smallholder women farmers movement. For example, in Ghana women were able to organise and have dialogue with chiefs on land rights, clinic facilities while in Bangladesh women engaged with local authorities to address access on issues of vulnerable groups benefits from government.

**Women's leadership**

The quarter has also seen increased participation by women in the local structures. In Bangladesh 12 new women leaders were included in community structures such as; school management committee, market committee, and Union Parishad standing committee and the Mosque. While in Ghana 200 women expressed interest in local government elections, 10 of which also filed nominations and 3 women won the Unit Committee level elections. The project also built the capacity of women farmers in leadership. In the new project district in Bangladesh, 1,151 participants from Ghoreghat were trained on women's leadership. In addition, 8 Women Federations reformed their executive committees through democratic election as part of strengthening their good governance at group level. In Ghana, the Akore women's group in Bono region engaged authorities on the local health centre so that it would start to function and be provided with resources. Women also made some requests to the Upper West Region House of Chief for the release of fertile lands to rural women. This was well received as the president of the Upper West Region House of Chiefs Naa Kuoro Richard Babini Kanton II also made a plea to the regional chief and landlords to give land to women. In Rwanda, a mini survey conducted with 100 respondents at end of Q4 found that 66% of project participants held one or more leadership positions in community and 34% are heads of leadership committees of different decision-making structures.

In Bangladesh, 978 women also attended a refresher training on various topics including organisational management, financial management, participatory monitoring and Violence Against Women reporting Mechanisms. The feedback was very positive with women farmers saying that they can now do proper financial management, they learnt a lot on violence against women including the issues of marital rape which were new to some of them. After the training one woman said *"after receiving the training on organizational management, I have learned how to lead a group and maintain its papers, documents, register books, resolution and its important. I also learned how to conduct a meeting."*

## **Violence against women and girls**

Women have actively participated on addressing violence against women in all three countries. In Bangladesh, one woman of Shapla women's group noted how they initiated actions to stop violence against women collectively at their community, so that people are aware about punishment and legal procedures. Due to the huge impact 6 women's groups in Bangladesh received the Jayeeta Anneshan Award for their contribution in the society to stop Violence Against Women. In Ghana, men also testified that wife beating is now a thing of the past in many households. For many women farmers, Violence Against Women is also linked to poverty and the project has been appreciated for doing a lot to address the prevention of violence against women.

A woman farmer from Ghana shared that *“Child marriage was perpetuated because some families were poor, and the mothers of girls did not also have any economic power. Our daughters were exchanged and when we refused as mothers, we were beaten. These struggles have all stopped. Through the economic gains made from our improved farm practices and the saving schemes, women have the finances to send their daughters to school. We can also contribute to the family upkeep, hence now our young daughters are no longer forced into marriages. The POWER project has relieved young and old women from trouble”*. This shows the multiplier effect of addressing unpaid care work which leads to more economic participation and a reduction in the prevalence of violence against women. In Rwanda, women group's representatives were trained as trainers on how to report VAWG cases using digital tool with handsets by dialling \*554# and web-based application for case reporting. The tool helps women to report VAWG cases with full privacy to address silence regarding VAWG reporting within REFLECT meeting. This was revealed by POWER Mid-term evaluation as a major challenge. The survivors also use a link to report violence and that helps women to report VAWG cases with full privacy. This technology will also facilitate VAWG service providers to timely get VAWG incidences and provide response.

***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***

### **Reduction of hours spent on unpaid care work by women.**

The project continues to address unpaid care work through the use of day care centres, energy saving cooking stoves, improving access to water, awareness raising and biogas plants. In Bangladesh, the monitoring data shows that 63% of users of the interventions reported satisfaction on the use of day care centre, energy saving cooking stove and bio-gas plant. The reasons why it was 63% and not higher will be explored next quarter because some of the women were not there when the survey was done.

The day care centre was considered as the most time saving interventions by the Bangladesh communities. Due to effective advocacy effort by the women leaders, Day Care Centers are getting support regularly from Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad. For example, day care center of Harati Union at Lalmonirhat received 20 blankets from the Harati Union Parishad as emergency response to the cold wave. This enabled a child friendly environment for children giving the parents the confidence to leave their children at the centre.

In Rwanda access to water has reduced time spent on fetching water for project participants in POWER implementing communities. Clean tap water and water kiosks established in villages by POWER Project significantly facilitated target groups to reduce burden and time they were spending on water collection from 2 hours to less than 10 minutes. For example one woman a widow of 43 years old from Ruheru community in Rwanda noted that she was spending more than 1 hour to go and back from public water point but now she accesses water at home that has significantly reduced the time burden of Unpaid Care Work. This is not to mention the distance she travelled and the fatigue from fetching water trips *“I didn’t have enough time on my farm and other income generating activities due to the heavy load of UCW, but with this support of tap water and cooking stove, I got sufficient time to spend on my vegetable gardens and take them to nearby selling point that POWER project established for us. With money from selling my vegetables, I’ve opened a bank account for the first time in my life.”*

### **Awareness and sensitisation**

In all three countries awareness raising and sensitisation continued on issues of unpaid care work and violence against women. The use of creative methods to spread the message of recognition, reduction and redistribution has proved very effective. The methods that have been used include theatre, sketches on unpaid care work, cooking festivals and games for young people.

In Bangladesh, Honourable Deputy Speaker of National Parliament of Bangladesh, Advocate Mr. Fazle Rabbi Miah MP, joined the cooking festival at Gaibandha district and said, *“It is an important realization that if men get involved with household chores, then women can participate in income-generating activities. To achieve Sustainable Development Goals, it is important to redistribute the tasks with family and society.”* In Rwanda, the project has sensitized communities and young people to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work within families and communities. The local authorities commended the initiative of sensitizing youth on unpaid care work that helps to change cultural mindset from childhood and gives hope of better future population with positive mindset towards addressing the burden of unpaid care work said by the education officer of Muganza sector. In Ghana, a total of 2,493 (1,250 girls, 1,223 boys and 20 teachers) participated in the sensitization sessions at the various schools.

In Bangladesh, 472 women and 985 traditional and religious leaders and other males took part in the UCW debates and sensitization sessions. According to one woman’s detailed account of support she received from her spouse *“Men are now helping women with UCW than those in the cities in washing of cloths, child care and sweeping they do all. My husband said since he started helping me, he has seen*

*that our affection is deep. The children are also learning from their father and they have time for their books. I now have a supportive family, I am not afraid to travel or attend any meeting. I will contest the next local level elections because I feel ready to step out now.”*

**Outcome 3: By the end of 2020, 19,500 rural women have more secure and sustainable access to markets and productive resources leading to increased income**

The project has also contributed to women’s economic empowerment through improved access to markets with women in the three countries being able to generate income through the sale of processed products such as Weanimix and other vegetables. Women’s access to productive resources has also been enhanced through collective demands for land, food, networking and alliances and other services from agriculture departments in their countries.

One of the key elements of this outcome is capacity building on climate resilient sustainable agriculture which includes access to markets, agro-processing and agro-ecological farming. In Bangladesh, 376 women farmers enhanced their skill and knowledge through a training on the standard market requirements on grading processing, packaging about agriculture products jointly provided by POWER project and KKM. In Ghana, the Upper East region, Smallholder Women Farmers were sensitized on the Ghana Land Rights bill and developed an advocacy plan to demand for the passage of the land rights bill with emphasis on the Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) component. Another 417 women group representatives increased their knowledge in entrepreneurial skills through a training with National Board of Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) to prepare quality and affordable Weanimix. One group member who is also the secretary of the group. She is 37 years and shares the group’s story; *“Access to market for crops has been a challenge for many farmers especially women in this community. Through the POWER project, our group was trained on processing and packaging of crops including maize into Weanimix (Fried maize with other ingredients). The group was also selected for a second training on entrepreneurial skills which highlighted how to start a business. Now our group is processing maize to Weanimix to expand our income sources aside farming”*. Further, in Bangladesh, 238 women groups members of three districts have practiced agroecology techniques to save their produce from cold wave and heavy fog by applying mulching and shedding over the plants.

**Research and knowledge sharing**

To enhance knowledge several studies have been conducted. During the quarter under review, AAB conducted a study on mapping of existing financial institutions including their product and services and how to develop a lobby plan for women for smallholder rural women entrepreneurs to access finance and resources for their products. Women have also been participating in fairs and exhibition to showcase their skills on agroecology. In Bangladesh 70% of the women participants had improved knowledge on getting access to market, getting support from the market management committee and current market information.

## **Access to productive resources**

In this quarter, 6,823 women and men got access to seeds in Rwanda. In Ghana, 24 women groups engaged their traditional leaders and accessed secured lands ranging from 5 to 20 acres. The Kpare community women group in the Jerapa Municipality was offered a 5-acre plot of land without expiry with a detailed term of engagement in the event the landowners would need to take it back. In Rwanda, women were supported with small livestock including 119 goats 22 pigs 726 poultry, 275 rabbits for increased manure and income diversification. The project also distributed 39,445 agroforestry seedlings especially Calliandra and Leucaena for soil management and animal fodder. In Bangladesh, due to strong lobby of the women groups and their Federations, 1,644 women members of Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Ghoraghat received various direct supports from Upazilla Livestock Office and Department of Agriculture (DAE) including cattle fattening, vaccination support (deworming tablet, vaccines), Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training and seed preservation pots

In Ghana, as part of the measures to ensure women farmers are visible, have access to productive resources as well as enhanced their income levels, National and Regional Farmers Forums were held in Ghana for experience sharing, exhibitions and to raise advocacy demands. The National and Regional Smallholder Women Farmers Movement held their annual conference on the theme ***“Building Resilient Livelihoods for Women and Smallholder Farmers through Agroecology”***. In attendance at the National Conference was the Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture in charge of crops, Hon. Sagre Bambangi. A communique, which raised key issues such as the biased selection of beneficiaries for Rearing for Food and Jobs (RFJ) Programme, was presented to the Deputy Minister. The communique also demanded for a national programme on standard measurement for farm produce to reduce exploitation and a national policy that promotes agroecology. The deputy minister expressed his excitement that women are championing a course for indigenous and resilient approach to agriculture. He committed to follow-up with the ministry departments to ensure smallholder women farmers are fairly and equitably treated in Government flagship programs”. He said “Government have not lost complete sight of agroecology practices, the issues raised in the communique are relevant and I will discuss the with the Agriculture Minister. Government is assuring the public to even get closer to farmers. We know some want to be served by the environment now while others are particular about the future. We will continue to work together for the nation’s economic growth through an attractive, competitive agriculture sector.”

## **Promotion of agroecology and access to markets**

Progressively, agroecology is gaining eminence through the demonstration farms of the various women’s group. Nyame Beye and Ahodwo kuo women groups were judged the best Community Based Organizations committed to agroecology in the Tain and Asuitfi South Districts in 2019 during the National Farmers Day celebrations. Smallholder Women Farmers Movement (SHWFM) also participated in two national level market fairs to network and exhibit their products with others on business opportunities. As a result, “God is King” women group in Tain District engaged EKA food processing company limited to supply EKA with pepper for

processing. Thus, reducing middlemen in the value chain. Women's access to information on markets was also improved with 3,400 farmers also received weather alerts from ESOKO through the quarter.

In Rwanda, access to market was also promoted using ICT POWER Project that digitized the selling points established for women that allows client to order women products through visiting women markets website. The website will be fully functional by early quarter one 2020.

### **Climate change**

In order to support the adaptation of climate change impacts and implement agroecology, some 22 women groups were supported with underground water tanks and a solar-powered irrigation system. Approximately 660 women who are members of the groups will have access to the water for irrigation. The local authorities of the District of Gisagara contributed 75% of total cost of the irrigation scheme and provided part of Duwane marshland for women organized in Koabiki cooperative.

*Figure 1 Koabikigi member **Mukeshimana Christine** harvesting tomatoes*



In quarter four, in Rwanda POWER project supported national policy dialogue jointly with other agroecology promoters that discussed findings on linkage between agroecology and women economic empowerment. The meeting recommended collective advocacy in country to call for increased public financing for agroecology to ensure sustainable development process that meets the needs of

the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In all countries, the local government authorities showed their positive response to the demands of women leaders. In Bangladesh, for example, the Chairman of Mogolhat Union Parishad of Lalmonirhat, Mr. Habibur Rahman said, "we supported 20 women to receive training on tailoring. We are also trying to allocate budget on making breast feeding corner and separate seating place in the local market." This reflects a significant mindset change as traditionally women have not had a place in the market and their specific needs were not considered.

**Outcome 4: Greater visibility of intersections of agroecology, 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.**

Regional and international advocacy initiatives were held with the aim of raising the visibility of the intersections on unpaid care work and agroecology and violence against women. Women in all three countries were linked to alliances and coalitions.

A total of 1,420 women were linked to various networks and in Ghana, women were linked to networks such as TradeAid and Market Women Association. The participation in these networks has also improved women's access to market access. The Pwalugu women group have also increased their visibility and secured a motorcycle from Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) an International Non-Governmental Organisation to improve market access. The women groups have mobilized additional 10 groups from outside the POWER operational areas (Banda and Asutifi North) to be part of the SHWFM. The Bono and Ahafo Small Holder Women Farmers Movement is now made up of 60 groups comprising 2,410 members. The leadership plans to engage in vigorous membership drive in 2020 to reach 10,000 target members.

In Ghana, Representatives of women from 30 groups engaged key departments of the Talensi District Assembly such as the Planning, Budget and Co-ordinating units on budget utilisation and gender-sensitive budgeting. The budget tracking revealed the District Assembly Common Fund for 2019 was used to construct 15 boreholes, build a training centre for women at Pwalugu among other projects. A similar meeting was carried out in the Nabdam district and follow up meetings will be held in 2020.

In Rwanda, POWER Project has empowered 245 groups in network and alliance building, advocacy, planning and campaigning skills and have established Rwanda Rural Women Farmer Network (RWFN) that is under official registration as legal network to formally advocate for increased public financing for agroecology and access to markets. Nyanza District authority pledged with official letter to host a coordination office of the RWFN that will facilitate rural women network to register their network under Rwanda Governance Board (RGB). *"I really appreciate the skills we got about networking and alliance building, after understanding the benefits of working as a network we elected our farmers' Network committee to operationalize the farmer network jointly with our allies in the country. It will help us to increase voice for advocacy towards addressing agroecology and access to markets related issues"* said a women farmer from Ruheru community.

ActionAid Rwanda through POWER Project organized a National Press Conference on effect of women's UCW and women empowerment. The event was attended by 85 participants from various media houses, government and civil society institutions. By reflecting on project time diary findings senior government officials on panel argued that unpaid care and domestic workloads that are often unevenly distributed continue to keep Rwandan women in perpetual poverty, undermines the economic autonomy of women and makes women more vulnerable to gender-based violence. The concluding remarks, in response to media questions, recommended the increase of public awareness on UCW through media; increased investment in

gender sensitive public infrastructures that reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care work; continuous advocacy for increased recognition and representation to address effect of unpaid care work on women economic participation.

### **Research and knowledge**

The project continued to produce some research and knowledge products to support advocacy work. In Ghana, an inception report was delivered on the development of guidelines to support Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), on recognition of UCW. AAG in collaboration with Abantu for Development also had a national level sensitization and dissemination workshop on the research report on the national Climate change policy as well as National Determined Contributions and action plan to ensure gender response national determined contributions. The quarter under review saw the team drafting a minimum standard on unpaid care work which will be used for Commission on the Status of Women engagement as a guidance for government to address unpaid care work. The institute of development studies was contracted to do an analysis of the time diaries. A digital tool on the collection of time diaries is currently being developed which will support timely data collection. A tool on mapping of status of women's groups has also been developed and will be used to map out the status of women groups and provide necessary support in the final year of the project. The project communication team is also now working on a documentary to share the best practices on market access and unpaid care work and agroecology. The videos will be used for advocacy and popularising the impact of the FLOW grant and POWER project on women's livelihoods and rights. A Webinar was also held during the quarter to discuss more about market access and women's rights with much interest being gathered around the Esoko platform and how women farmers access and share information on markets for their products.

### **Advocacy, linkages and networking**

In Bangladesh, 55 women representatives from respective women groups, Union Women Federation and Upazila Women Federations of Gaibandha organized an advocacy meeting and other interventions with local police administration, local journalists, cultural institutions and Union Parishad on VAW incidences in their locality. This resulted in the police providing police surveillance support to a child survivor on an incident of rape case.

Women continued to be linked to local and international networks a total of 239 women attended in 13 national and international advocacy and campaign initiatives, for example, debate campaign, sustainable food consumption and photography campaign. This also included the: regional expert consultation on Foresting Investment for Sustainable Agriculture Development for SAARC (South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation) Member countries: Public-Private Farmer Cooperation (PPFC) was jointly organized by SAARC Agriculture centre. As well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Economic Affairs, Irrigation and Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development of Sri Lanka from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Women farmers shared best practices, learning and experiences on Women Economic Empowerment, UCW and agroecology and demanded the national and

regional bodies to recognize and redistribute UCW and agroecology national and regional policies. This meeting brought major outcome is That SAARC Agriculture Centre developed a voluntary guideline on foresting responsible investment in sustainable Agriculture in South Asia through this regional conference for SAARC Member Countries.

To raise awareness and sensitize the policy makers and stakeholders on UCW, the project in Bangladesh successfully organized a national level Photography Exhibition titled 'Different Images of Men' and national debate campaign. The campaigns brought up the discussion on Unpaid Care Work issue among the policy makers, researchers, economists, media personals, students, young celebrities and activists from sport and showbiz. The MP, Minister, Ministry of Planning, Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh committed to work on the Unpaid Care Work Issue on 8th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh while gracing the occasion as the chief guest of the photo exhibition inauguration event. They also recommended a model to turn this Non-SNA to SNA (System of National Accounting) and committed to provide all support to include some actions on 8<sup>th</sup> Fifth Year Plan of Bangladesh. He also shared that the Prime Minister of Bangladesh also wants to recognise the issue of unpaid care work. The photography exhibition reached about 5,500 people and the debate competition reached 2,300 people. The POWER Project also established a Platform SDG 5.4 to increase campaigning efforts on recognition, reduction and redistribution of UCW.

At the African Union level, the women farmers engaged in the Beijing plus 25 processes as part of the Commission on the Status of Women preparation meetings highlighting the need to put in place stronger policies on unpaid care work and enhance women's economic empowerment. A farmer's platform on unpaid care work was set up which will help steer the work on unpaid care work in 2020. The communique will be used in future lobbying and advocacy and recommended among other issues the development of a protocol on unpaid care work in the African context. The information from the farmers platform on unpaid care work was also used to inform the minimum standards on unpaid care work. The recommendations will be taken forward during the engagements with the African Union and CSW meeting.

In South Asia, several engagements were held with South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Food and Agriculture Organisation. This will enhance ActionAid and women farmers future engagements with the regional bodies. As a result of this initial engagement, Action Aid will participate in the Food and Agriculture Organisation-Regional Asia and the Pacific-Civil Society Organisation consultation for Asia and Pacific region and will facilitate the participation of rural women farmers to raise their voices. Women farmers recommendations were included in the Statement of South Asia People's Forum on Sustainable Development. In the statement UCW and women contribution in agriculture has been incorporated. The project also engaged with the South Asia Forum on Sustainable Development organized by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, South and South West Asia (SSWA) Office in Delhi. AAI is now on board the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Organisations Engagement Mechanism South Asia Chapter which is a strategic position to influence regional policy.

## **Lessons learnt**

- In Rwanda, community selling points contributed to enhanced access to markets in Rwanda and enhanced their income and women's economic empowerment. Similarly, in Bangladesh, linkage with national markets through the national level outlet 'aurihi' inspired the smallholder women farmers especially after 2-day long training on standard market requirements for processing and packaging their product. Women have now been able to get better prices for their products.
- Engaging different stakeholders e.g. media, corporate organisations, student organisations, photography club, film makers, young people, men, women and leaders gives a wider scope to reach people on the unpaid care work issues especially when participatory methods such as theatre, sketches, debates are used.
- The project has supported men engagements and the spouse of women contesting the assembly elections supported their wives after a meeting on women in leadership. Men still considered the underlining causes of violence against women.
- The project has had a very good engagement on response to violence against women with many women organising on their own to address Violence in their own communities. The issues of unpaid care work and violence against women are linked as evidenced by the Mid term review and the reflections of the participants at the review meeting. There is need to share more widely how the work on women's economic empowerment and unpaid care work can contribute to reduction of violence against women.

## **Challenges faced**

### **Delays in implementation due to the delays in the approval of the NGO board**

The delays faced in the earlier part of the year had long effects on the disbursements of funds to the Ghoreghat community in Bangladesh. Through regular meetings and support the activities planned in the region are now catching up with the rest of the country. Further attention will be given to this new region. The 2020 approval from the NGO board in Bangladesh has now been received

### **Weather**

Some communities in Bangladesh were affected by the cold wave and could not participate in the women group meeting. The project also set an alternative time schedule for meetings. In Rwanda, it was noted that there were limited resources to adapt to climate related hazards especially prolonged and heavy rainfalls causing drought and floods. Women's groups group also not be adequately advance post-harvest technologies such as cooling rooms for their vegetables.