

Quarterly report:
Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights
Project Quarter 1 2020

Period covered by report: January to March 2020

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 was immensely challenging due to spread of COVID-19 from a few countries in January to many countries by March 2020. Although the infection rates in countries where POWER project is being implemented are low, the countries have been affected by the lockdown measures taken by governments and the anxiety associated with health risks. Globally, it has been noted that the unpaid care work burden on women, and incidence of violence against women is likely to increase due to high number of people staying at home, the stresses associated with shared spaces, frustration due to dwindling income and opportunities and uncertainty. In Bangladesh, women reported that they were not able to go to market due to the lockdown and the few who did go did not get many clients as many opted to stay at home. In Rwanda, the government has allowed agricultural activities to go ahead providing a window for

women to continue to produce their food and earn an income. In Ghana a partial lockdown is being implemented but it still very difficult to implement any activities.

In terms of project implementation, most of the activities have been paused due to government and organisational restrictions, however desk-based activities related to reporting, documentation, research and policy and other remote meetings and activities are still underway. The project has done an impact assessment of the COVID19 pandemic and will be undertaking a full project and budget review in May 2020 in order to realign activities, approaches and timelines to ensure maximum impact in the time remaining. In the meantime a few urgent change requests have been submitted and are awaiting approval.

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.

Women's group meetings

The women's groups in all the three countries have been meeting from January until early March 2020. In March respective countries have issued guidelines and measures including social distancing, limited movements and no public gathering to prevent spread of Covid-19 and so regular meetings were paused.

In Rwanda, 245 women's groups met in REFLECT circles at least twice a month and discussed their right to participate social and economic activities by addressing unpaid care work, violence against women and girls, increasing income and accessing markets. In Ghana, 200 women's groups with 6280 members have been meeting until 16th March 2020 when all public meetings were banned by the government. In Nabdam and Talinse Districts, the Women Smallholder Farmers drew their plans to hold dialogue meetings on women's issues with aspiring Parliamentary candidates for the 2020 elections. In addition, Zamsitaba-Yem women's group in Dapore community engaged their Member of Parliament (MP) on the passage of the land rights bill in Ghana. In this meeting the MP committed to provide a borehole for the community and he committed to discuss the passage of the land rights bill with the other members of the parliament to pass it. In Bangladesh 238 women's groups in Dinajpur, Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts conducted 2,689 meetings until the Bangladesh government restricted all types of gatherings. The women's groups discussed the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on their activities and prevention measures including distribution of leaflets with useful information. Also, 15 Women Federations from 3 districts organized 37 meetings and discussed on HRBA analysis and how to demand greater support from different local duty bearers. As a result of continued engagement with duty bearers, 238 women's groups in Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Ghoraghat received various services including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding Card (VGF), allowances for widows and divorced vulnerable women, cattle food, cattle vaccination, seeds, monetary support (from Cash for Work scheme), trainings on cattle fattening, goat rearing, tailoring and sewing machines from various government departments and Non-Governmental Organizations operating in the area.

Women's leadership

This quarter saw an increase in women's participation in community local structures. In Bangladesh, 34 new women joined in different community structures including Village Development Committee, Union Parishad's standing Committee on Family Conflict and Resolution and others. According to the monitoring data, women leaders who have greater skills and confidence to participate and play effective role in community structures have increased by 9% in this quarter. 476 women representatives from 238 women groups had refresher training on financial management, organizational management, participatory monitoring and collectivism in practice. The trained women shared their knowledge with their group members in the Reflect circle meetings hence strengthening the group's capacity to act and deliver. In Bangladesh women who made remarkable social contributions into their communities have received recognition. Mst. Bely Begum of *Bonophul Women's Group*, Gaibandha district received the Nasreen Smriti Padak award from AAB and Human Rights Award from Manusher Jonno Foundation (national development organization in Bangladesh) for her courageous role to support the 2019 flood emergency response in northern areas of Bangladesh and her initiative to stop violence against women in her community.

Violence against women and girls

In Bangladesh, monitoring data have shown that 69% and 82% of women have correct knowledge on how to report incidences of violence against women and available support services, respectively. Shanti Rani, member of HashiKhushi Women's Farmer Group of Ghoraghat said, *"Before, I didn't know about the government laws on violence against women. After receiving training and attending the weekly group discussions, I have learnt on these issues. Now I can support violence against women survivors and demand punishment of the perpetrators. My community knows that I know better on violence against women and they come to me when incident occurs in the community."*

In Rwanda, as result of the training on violence against women and girls in 2019, the incidence of violence has significantly reduced in trained families. The trained couples formed a group of model couples in their community aimed to reduce violence against women and girls and bring positive changes in their communities. The Imbaraga z'Urukundo (translated as power of love) is a group of model couples from Muganza community in Gisagara district and meets once a month to sensitize their neighbours on the negative impact of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). One husband has said, *"I used to take too much alcohol and when I come home, I used to quarrel with my wife until I beat her for no reason. When she asks me to help her with the household chores, I used to be very angry as I considered it as a disobedience to the husband. After attending, the POWER project training on matrimonial regimes and got mentored by model couple, I stopped taking alcohol and improved my relationship with my wife. We improved our livelihood as we purchased three goats, two pigs, one hen and we are planning to purchase a cow and more land in the coming years."* The story of this husband and his wife was recognized and reported in one of the national news papers <http://mobile.igihe.com/amakuru/u-rwanda/article/ubuhamyamba-nambajimana-wahozaga-umugore-we-ku-nkeke-kubera-igikwangari>

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

Awareness and sensitisation on Unpaid Care Work (UCW)

POWER Project continued to raise awareness on UCW through supporting time saving interventions such access to water, community childcare centers and access to improved energy efficient cooking stoves as well as engaging duty bearers to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work.

In Rwanda, the project has supported established childcare centres and caregivers to provide care for 1,516 children (480 in Gisagara, 800 in Musanze and Nyanza and 236 children in Karongi childcare centers). Mutegarugori, a beneficiary of Busasamana childcare centre has said, *"I am grateful for the POWER project childcare centre, it has not changed my child's life but mine as well. My child enjoys spending time at this centre – playing with other children, toys and learning new things. This allows me to engage in other activities"*

In Ghana, monitoring data revealed that unpaid care work is more highly recognized in the communities especially among men and boys. In Danyili community, a young boy named Bismack stated during a community meeting how their fathers now encourage boys to participate in the household work. He said, *"In the past when a boy tries to help his mother or sister on household activities or errands, their fathers will yell at him – that work is not for men/boys, but now boys are encouraged to help household chores."* The project has also witnessed duty bearers committing funds to provide time saving interventions. In Nanumba North, the Member of Parliament through the Government Special Initiative provided Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities to Madina and Massaka communities. In other locations such as the Bono and Ahafo regions, the Regional Gender Department collaborated with the POWER project to hold panel discussions in the media on UCW and VAWG issues with teams around International Women's Day celebration on "women's strike" and "when women stop the world stops"

In Bangladesh, women continued their advocacy efforts to raise sensitization and awareness on recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work at community, local administration and local government levels. 1,330 women's group members reported support from their husbands in doing household chores such as childcare, fetching water, business materials purchase, washing the clothes and homestead gardening. A total of 238 spouse meetings and community sensitization meetings took place in the project areas where 4,768 men and boys participated in three districts. The project interventions such as time diaries, spouse forum meetings, community leader's sensitization meetings have helped men to take some responsibility in doing household chores. The time saving interventions are also helping women to get more time for social, economic and political activities in their communities. 294 women (120 in Gaibandha, 115 in Lalmonirhat and 59 women from Ghoraghat) have reported satisfaction on the use of energy saving cooking stoves, day care centres and biogas plants. Bulbuli Begum, the cashier, Subuj Women Farmer Group,

Ghoraghat said, *“We are getting fresh air while cooking using the energy saving cooking stoves, every family should install cooking stoves because it is cost effective and healthy to use it. It is also saving our time to get involved in income generating activities”*

International Women’s Day

In Rwanda, on 8th MARCH 2020, ActionAid Rwanda and partners organized sensitization ceremonies in each district of project operation with the local government leaders and rural women and discussed women’s UCW and different interventions that reduce the burden of unpaid care work. The women representatives participated in the International Women’s Day and advocated for reducing, recognizing and redistributing the burden of UCW as the district officials and other important stakeholders attended this key event. Women used evidence from the POWER project interventions to convince the decision makers to increase funding for gender responsive interventions that reduce the time women spend on unpaid care work. The Mayors of POWER Project implementing districts have increased awareness of the impact of unpaid care work on women’s empowerment. The Mayor of Nyanza district has said, *“Even if the government and partner’s support to reduce UCW, there is need that men, women, boys, girls and leaders to recognize it in order to move forward together. I will ask all people here to put more efforts on UCW to achieve fair redistribution of the burden of UCW among family members.”*

During the event, the new Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, Dr. Bayisenge committed to join civil society efforts towards fighting VAWG, malnutrition and the reduction of the burden of the unpaid care work on women. She promised the distribution of improved cooking stoves and gas cookers for 50 women to reduce the burden of unpaid care work and save more time for economic activities. The president of the Republic of Rwanda also sent a message of wishing a good day for all women *“Whenever women gain, we all gain as a country. There can be no true progress without equality. Thank you for playing your rightful and equal role in Rwanda’s transformation. Happy International Women’s Day to our sisters, mothers and daughters in Rwanda and across the World”*

In Ghana, International Women’s Day was commemorated in March 2020 in Accra in collaboration with ActionAid’s Young Urban Women project, about 672 men, women and Young Urban Women publicly participated in the day’s event. In the Upper West, Volta and Upper East Regions, ActionAid Ghana and its collaborators; Women Smallholder Farmers, COMBAT and Young Urban Women Movements used Ghana’s Independence Day Anniversary on 6th March, 2020 to strengthen sensitization and awareness raising on unpaid care work and violence against women and the need to re-distribute unpaid care work among household members and called on the regional ministers and other duty bearers to action. With the participation of 162 men, women and other community members, the project supported Young Urban Women to organize a cooking competition at James Town in the Greater Accra Metropolitan. The competition was used to call for the recognition, redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work burden on women and girls.

In Bangladesh, International Women’s Day was marked with a national level campaign on Unpaid Care Work through premiering short films in the film festival entitled “Behind the

Scene”. Five short films on Unpaid Care Work and change stories on redistribution of Unpaid Care Work within family and society were premiered. The short films captured the statements of policy makers such as MPs, Minister of planning, Member of General Economic Commission of the Ministry of planning, Economists, senior research fellow at Bangladesh Institute of development studies, cultural activists and prominent actor. These were shown as evidence of positive feedback of the duty bearers. On the other hand, senior policy advisor, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and Gender of the Netherland Embassy in Bangladesh participated in the film festival as guest of honour in the premiering event and appreciated the initiative on behalf of the donor community.

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

Access to markets leading to increased income

In Ghana, monitoring data reveals that women’s groups such as the Nombo and Mwofu in the Upper West Region are managing their savings schemes effectively. The groups have been meeting regularly to discuss how they can use their savings to support families that need food items and loans to procure essential needs during these partial lockdowns and movement restrictions during COVID19.



Fourteen (14) women groups in 7 communities (Damol-Tindongo, Sakote , Kotintaabiga , Damolgo, Duusi, Pelungu, Gundorg) who were supported with logistics and livelihood skill training on soap making have started group businesses and have made profits up to 300 dollars. The profit was ploughed back into the business. The skills in soap processing are promoting women’s self-sufficiency through sustainable and diversified livelihoods. Additionally, through exhibitions held in 2019 during the national Farmers Day Celebration, Madina rice processors and Aziedukope gari and palm oil women’s groups have reached an additional 18 bulk buyers located in Accra, Takoradi among others in this quarter. This has reduced the interruption of ‘middlemen’ in the value chain.

In Bangladesh, women's access to market at community and national have improved through a series of awareness raising activities including interactive theatre, meetings between farmers, consumers, wholesalers and buyers. A capacity building training for the Aaurhi Staff started on March 2020 but stopped due to COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, monitoring data shows that 58% of the women participants reported having improved knowledge on access to markets and getting support from the market management committee and current market information.

Agroecology

In Bangladesh, the POWER project has set up an agroecology school in Lalmonirhat to institutionalize the learning and practices of agroecology or climate resilient sustainable agriculture in 2019. In this quarter, 14 agro-ecology school facilitators under the guidance of an agro-ecology training coordinator provided support to community farmers on CRSA practices. Approximately, 450 community farmers from three districts have learnt that organic vegetables are more highly demanded in the market than those produced using chemical fertilizers. The farmers are also receiving technical farming support and solutions from this school. The Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazela Federation is taking an overall supervision role to maintain the school running.

Monitoring data shows that during this quarter, 1559 (250 from Gaibandha, 1150 from Lalmonirhat, and 159 from Ghoraghat) women group members and 2140 (1735 women and 405 men) community people have had access to seeds through the community seedbanks. However, Ghoraghat has no community seedbank and women farmers did not receive seeds from the local authorities. After the Covid-19 pandemic crisis the situation is likely to get worse and the community will need an urgent seed supply to cultivate farms. Now 238 women's groups are running small business on agriculture products. They sell surplus agriculture products from their homes and in the market to consumers, local hawkers, wholesalers, shopkeepers, and through the Aaurhi platform. In this pandemic crisis, the women's group businesses are facing a huge challenge as the transport is very limited, prices are very low, and markets are on lock down.

On the other hand, women's groups had good relationship with various government and local level authorities. 1208 women received agriculture input including livestock disease preventive vaccination, seeds, training on vegetable cultivation, training on cattle fattening, goat rearing from Department of Agriculture Extension and Livestock Offices. In this quarter 68% of women members reported improved service provision from the government department.

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.

In Ghana, training on unpaid care work programming was held with 35 Women's Rights Organizations to increase their awareness and skills in programming for UCW. At Adaklu, the Women Small Holder Farmer Movement (SHFM) were given a refresher training on network and alliance building. The POWER project was also able to hold a project annual skill share and review meeting with 34 project Officers, ActionAid Regional Programme Managers and Officers and the Project Partners at the Upper East Region. The skill share and review meeting enabled the project team to collectively discuss strategies to enhance a survivor-based approach on gender-based violence. Among other relevant reflections were, the team updated the project risk register, discussed the project closure and sustainability plans.

Time diary activities

ActionAid UK contracted On Our Radar – an external technology organization - to develop a digital time diary application, roll it out and train the project staff. On Our Radar has developed an interactive mobile application that will be used for time diary data collection. On Our Radar conducted face-to-face training for Rwanda and Ghana teams and remote training for Bangladesh teams because of travel restrictions related to coronavirus pandemic. The trained staff in each country will roll out further training for partner staff and community facilitators to lead field data collections soon. The application has not yet been used for massive data collection, as the Covid-19 pandemic crisis took its toll.

The POWER project has contracted Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to undertake advanced quantitative and qualitative analysis of the time diary data sets, supporting documents such as reports and case studies and discussions with project and partner staff and the project participants, for all three countries in order to: understand the nature, process and drivers of time-use and/or associated social norm change and resultant impacts on project participants; measure overall project progress in this area; and produce evidence to inform ActionAid's policy and advocacy work. IDS has been working on analysing the quantitative data collected in 2018 and 2019. The findings of the quantitative analysis formed the basis to develop fieldwork qualitative protocols. The fieldwork did not take place in this quarter due to Covid-19 pandemic crisis. ActionAid is engaging with IDS to explore alternative approaches to implement the field work.

Advocacy, linkages and networking

In Bangladesh, 56% of women in the project have improved knowledge in advocacy skills on different issues including women's access to market, reducing UCW, and addressing VAW. Women Federation of Khuniagach, Lalmonirhat has initiated business relation with 'Teesta'- a social business organization of Bangladesh to promote their products in the market.

A group of rural women leaders and AAB POWER project organized a lobby meeting with the Deputy Speaker and four MPs of the women and child caucus of Bangladesh parliament

to advocate for reduction, redistribution and recognition of Unpaid Care Work. The duty bearers agreed to bring the Unpaid Care Work issue in the upcoming parliamentary session as a “notice of resolution”. The Deputy Speaker has also emphasized to include the issue of Unpaid Care Work in the upcoming 8th Five Year Plan of the government.

The POWER project has also engaged this year the Voluntary National Report. The VNR is submitted to UNESCAP by the government as update on the progress of the SDGs 2020. In Bangladesh, the Citizen’s Platform for SDGs has organized a national conference titled ‘Voluntary National Report 2020 of Bangladesh: Positioning Non-State Actors’ on 11 March 2020 in Dhaka. The event was organized in association with eleven of its partner organizations including ActionAid Bangladesh. The POWER project contributed on SDGs target 5.4 progress and highlighted the need to recognize UCW in national policies. The POWER project also shared learnings on Agroecology – as means to adapt and mitigate climate change risks and shocks on agriculture to ensure food security and environmental sustainability.

The POWER project engaged in the Gender Is My Agenda campaign meeting in February. The meeting was attended by staff and women smallholder farmers who continued to advocate for the rights of women smallholder farmers, unpaid care work and agroecology. Some of the staff members also attended a training organised by OXFAM on unpaid care work to strengthen their capacity on unpaid care work. The training provided an opportunity for collaborating, sharing lessons from the POWER project as well as learning from OXFAM.

Impact of the Covid-19 and proposed arrangements

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has severely impacted the implementation of the project activities and the livelihoods of the communities the project that works with. The majority of project activities have been paused due to government restrictions to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. The project staff are working from home supporting minor project activities remotely and coordinating revised plans for the 2020 project implementation.

Lessons learnt

- In Bangladesh pictorial IEC/BBC materials were helpful rural women to understand well during training sessions.
- The provided financial literacy training for women groups, helped women to access services during the covid-19 lockdown by using Mobile Money financial services to transfer and receive money through their handsets as per the Government directives
- Integration of WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) for public health is core to the wellbeing and economic empowerment of women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but is not currently a part of this project

Challenges and Risks

- The Covid 19 pandemic has severely impacted the implementation of the project activities and the way people live in all the three countries. All major community based

project activities have been paused. This is delaying planned activities for this quarter and is likely to continue delaying for the next quarter. However the project will undertake a review of the situation and full project revision during May 2020 to try to maximise the impact we can have before the end of the project.

- The working from home arrangement for the project staff in some countries is also challenged by poor internet connectivity and power cuts.
- In Bangladesh, court trial cases take a long time, and this delays justice and puts the safety of the survivor at risk. To ensure safety of the survivor women leaders of federation and groups keep abreast with the local police.
- The advocacy engagement on the Commission of the Status of Women was cancelled due to COVID 19 and this impacted on the sharing and consultation on the minimum standards on unpaid care work which will now be done online.