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talking action

Issue 11, April 2013



Empowering women to lead

act!onaid



A flash mob dance at Dilli Haat (an open air food plaza and craft bazaar in Delhi, India) as part of the One Billion Rising campaign. Photo: ActionAid

Welcome to **talking action**



Archie Law
Executive Director

Welcome to the first issue of Talking Action for 2013. It has been a busy start to the year for ActionAid Australia, with international guests visiting, planning for our comedy gala event, and the One Billion Rising campaign.

One Billion Rising is a campaign organised by V-Day, a global activist movement to end violence against women.

On February 14, 2013, ActionAid joined activists, writers, thinkers, celebrities, and women and men across the world to express outrage, demand change, strike, dance, and rise in defiance of the injustices women suffer, demanding an end at last to violence against women. I encourage you to visit our new look website to see photos and stories of strong, determined women working to change their circumstances and fight for a more just world.

Also in this issue we meet Susan from Kenya, who through her involvement with the Farmer Field School is no longer reliant on food aid. You can read her story on page 10. I hope you will be as inspired by her as I was, and be encouraged by the difference you are making in the lives of women around the world.

Finally, I urge you to mark an important event in your calendar. On Thursday 9 May, ActionAid Australia is hosting a comedy gala like no other. Rights! Comedy! Action! is a night to highlight the issue of women's rights through the power of laughter. Tickets are selling fast at Ticketek.com.au – I would love to see you there! See page 14 for more information.

Thank you for your continued support of ActionAid Australia.

Cover photo: Leoni fought to regain her land, which was taken by her brothers. Read her story on page 6. Photo: ActionAid

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Redefining poverty



Mark Chenery. Photo: S. McIntosh/ActionAid.

As long as I can remember, I've been passionate about addressing world poverty. To me it always seemed wrong that millions of people could go hungry, while others spent billions of dollars on dieting because they had too much food to eat.

Yet, despite my passion to “end poverty”, I must admit I never really understood what poverty *really* was, until I started working for ActionAid Australia.

And what I now appreciate is that poverty is so much more than a lack of income or a lack of resources like food and water. More than anything else, poverty is about a lack of power.

Lack of power to access food, healthcare or an education. Lack of power to resist corruption or abuse by those with more power than you.

And that power doesn't just take the physical form of muscle strength. It's also about that feeling of power within. What I like to think of as confidence or a healthy dose of self-respect.

I've met women who, in the space of just a few years, have gone from truly believing their life was worth less than that of wealthy people or even their husbands, to understanding that every human life is precious and valuable – including their own.

And that is what developing power within is really about. Gaining the knowledge and confidence to speak up for yourself, because you believe you're worth it.



Small-holder farmers in the Masindi community (Central Uganda) welcome visitors as part of the “We Won't Accept Hunger” campaign. Photo: Thomas White/ActionAid

And amazing things happen when you develop that power within. All of a sudden a world of opportunities opens up. You no longer settle for less. You no longer think it's okay for your husband to beat you when he's drunk or for the principal of your school to not admit your daughters because it would be “a waste of an education”.

And when you don't settle, you fight. Not using physical force, but the power available to you based on your knowledge – of human rights, anti-corruption laws, domestic violence laws and so on.

That's why so much of ActionAid's work isn't about telling people living in poverty what they need and handing it to them, but instead asking them to reflect on their problems and work collectively to come up with their own solutions.

Because if poverty is caused by a lack of power, not just resources, then the solution is to help people develop that power themselves, which they can then use to access the resources they require.

You see, when you redefine the problem, you redefine what's possible. And amazing opportunities open up for more appropriate, effective and sustainable change.

Mark Chenery, Head of Community Engagement

Leoni's Story

When Leoni Sebijumba was born, the men in her village in Congo scoffed at her mother for giving birth to a sixth girl and no boys. Defiantly, Leoni's mother gave her the name 'Maniraguha', meaning 'God-given child'.

It seems defiance and female strength passed on to Leoni herself. After her parents died in 2000, she and her sisters faced humiliation and injustice as their mother's precious family fields were forcibly taken from them by their stepbrothers. The village elders and even the local community leaders did nothing to help.

"We went to see the village chief, and all he said was 'Women can't inherit',"

remembers Leoni with fury. "We faced prejudices and rejections as we were born girls, without any male child in my mother's womb." Even though Leoni's parents had left the sisters the land in their will, they struggled for more than seven years, going back and forth to the local board of chiefs to seek justice.

Leoni, the youngest, was the one who mobilised her sisters to claim their right to inherit. She sought help from a local ActionAid DRC partner that was educating local women about inheritance laws and women's rights. She convinced her sisters that they should return and start cultivating their stolen land, knowing they would be arrested and sent to jail.



Leoni has become a champion in her community and many come to her for advice. Photo: ActionAid

This enabled Leoni to put her newly-acquired knowledge to the test. She began a legal process to dispute the land claim, eventually winning victory at the provincial tribunal. To the community's astonishment, not only were the charges against them dropped but Leoni and her sisters won an equal share of their parents' land.

Leoni's husband was in awe of her strength.

"I couldn't believe she ended up such a successful lady," he says. "I supported her despite the fact it wasn't appreciated by the men in our community."

Leoni followed up by convincing her husband to legalise their marriage by paying a bride price to her parents, securing her equal rights to their land and assets.

After 11 years of fighting, Leoni is now known in her area as a champion of women's rights.

"Every time any woman has a case with her husband or a family member in this area, she comes and consults me. I have never been to high school, nor do I know much in handling legal cases, but the community refers to me as an example to follow," she says proudly.



Leoni cultivating her land which she and her sisters won back from their brothers. Photo: ActionAid

Mobilising the youth of Myanmar



Anusha Witt. Photo: S.McIntosh/ActionAid.

In December last year, Anusha Witt, ActionAid Australia's Supporter Relations Assistant, had the opportunity to attend a training course on youth participation in governance, run by ActionAid Myanmar in Yangon.

The intensive course was designed to give trainees the skills and knowledge they need to become youth activists and change makers in their own countries, able to influence decision making processes at the local, national and global level.

Who attended the course?

The course was attended by young people from India, Myanmar, and Cambodia, which meant we were able to learn from each other and hear about different experiences when discussing things such as 'what role do young people play in a democracy', 'what do you want your society to be like', and 'what are your rights and responsibilities as a citizen'.

What did you learn from the experience?

The learning environment was unlike anything I have experienced before. It was eye opening to hear from participants who live in countries where democracy



Visiting one of the communities in Meikilhar Province. Photo: ActionAid

cannot be taken for granted, and to be involved in conversations about how we can all use our voice to create positive social change. We also had the opportunity to meet with high profile political figures, both from the ruling USDP party, and Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition NLD party.

Myanmar's long and prickly path to democracy has touched the lives of many of my fellow participants in so many ways, and I was inspired by hearing their plans to shape the future of their country, be it through education, economic policy or grassroots community development.

I also had the pleasure of meeting some of the ActionAid Myanmar Fellows. The Fellowship program identifies young leaders in rural communities and equips them with skills, knowledge and confidence, to gather their community together to think about the rights they are lacking and to work with local authorities to ensure access to these rights.

Toe Toe, a Fellow from Meikilhar Province, told me "Before, we never thought we could ask the government for anything. But the main thing a Fellow needs to remember is you can never give up. The meetings I organised used to last 15 minutes, because no-one was interested. Now people want to spend two or three days talking about what we can do to improve our village."

What's next for you?

The course has given me a new appreciation for what democracy really is. Being in Myanmar, a country that is transitioning to democracy, taught me a great deal more about the value of being actively involved in democratic processes, and the importance of civil and political rights. I think it can often be challenging to find the time for activism, however as I have engaged in different activities I've realised how fun it can be!



Youth Participation in Governance training participants visiting Myanmar Egress, a civil society organisation aimed at promoting democracy. Photo: ActionAid



Susan was chosen by her community to join the Meritapan Farmer Field School. Photo: ActionAid



Rabbit farming is assisting Susan in developing her livelihood so she and her family are no longer reliant on food aid. Photo: ActionAid

conditions. The group also loans out farming equipment to members – Susan has borrowed the water pump, which she uses to irrigate a two-acre farm. Irrigation allows farmers like Susan to extend their growing season, increase their income and mitigate against the effects of climate change. Other Farmer Field Schools have started revolving loan funds and seed banks to allow farmers to increase their income by pooling their resources.

Important as climate resilience, savings schemes and irrigation techniques are, Farmer Field Schools aim to do far more than simply support women to learn new agricultural methods. They also provide a place where women farmers get together and learn how to make their voices heard in their own communities and with local government officials.

As well as being supported to learn new ways to farm, the women who participate in the Farmer Field Schools are also trained to track public expenditure and in

lobbying and advocacy techniques. In this way, they will be able to represent their own interests and demand their rights more effectively, giving their perspective on the local government’s agricultural activities and organising themselves into groups to make sure their district officials support them effectively.

In Susan’s case, the results of attending the Farmer Field School have been extraordinary: once unable to grow any crops at all, Susan now produces enough to sell in the local vegetable market. Farmers who attend the field schools are taught how to manage their profits from crop sales so they can build up their livelihoods in the future. Susan saved up enough from selling her excess vegetables to buy three rabbits, and has now become a rabbit farmer.

Susan told us delightedly that, for the first time in several years, she and her family are no longer reliant on food aid. As a way of reclaiming her dignity, Susan plans to de-register herself from the food aid list once the first harvest is ready.

Susan knows lifting herself out of poverty is about standing up for her rights.

“Unless all farmers come together and stand in solidarity to end poverty, then we will only get so far,” she told us.

ActionAid Australia works in partnership with the Australian Government (AusAID) to address food insecurity in Kenya and Uganda as part of AACES (The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme).



Farmers distribute drought resistant seeds among themselves. Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid works with women farmers around the world. To support our work call us on 1300 66 66 72 or visit www.actionaid.org/womenfarmers

Rights! Comedy! Action!



9TH ANNUAL
**SYDNEY
COMEDY
FESTIVAL '13**

ActionAid Australia is privileged to be partnering with a line-up of Australia's funniest women, including Judith Lucy, Wendy Harmer and Claire Hooper, to bring you a frocking hilarious night of comedy in support of women's rights around the world.

Women around the world are poor, oppressed, marginalised and excluded. Yet women are also strong, resilient and powerful. At ActionAid we believe in capturing the power within each woman and working with them to regain a sense of dignity so they can come up with their own appropriate and effective solutions to end poverty and injustice.

Rights! Comedy! Action! is an opportunity to celebrate the universality of humour and laughter as both a symbol of women's strength and empowerment. Join us for a night of laughter and solidarity with women around the world who, despite poverty, are able to laugh in the face of adversity. All proceeds from ticket sales will support ActionAid's work with women around the world.

Tickets on sale at ticketek.com.au NOW!

**ENMORE THEATRE
THURSDAY 9TH MAY 2013
9.30PM**

**www.ticketek.com.au
Phone: (02) 9020 6966**

**Price: \$39 or \$34 for groups of 8 or more
(group bookings via telephone only)**



Claire Hooper

As a woman working in the still male dominated field of comedy, I am aware of the subtle inequalities between the genders in Australian society, but even more aware that our difficulties pale in comparison to women in so many less fortunate countries. And yet, when faced with food shortages, environmental crises and other international issues, I think empowering women - the underutilised 50% - is the key to solving the world's big problems.

I am involved with ActionAid Australia because I've met the people of ActionAid and seen evidence that their work makes a difference, and it makes me feel energised, inspired and hopeful.



Judith Lucy

Well the last time I checked I was an actual woman so it seems like a good idea to be passionate about women's rights. A friend said to me recently that in the eighties she assumed feminism would have a linear narrative but that really hasn't happened - I'd explain why but I'm off to my pole dancing class.

We are comparatively so lucky in this country so I was attracted to ActionAid Australia particularly because of the way it is helping ladies in developing countries gain the kind of independence and freedom that we very much take for granted.

Sharing Day

Meet one of our inspirational supporters who has started a unique tradition that challenges the trend of excessive spending at Christmas time and focuses on sharing with others.

Last year [2011] I held a Sharing Day on the first Saturday of December. I wanted to step out of the consumption/ spending/gathering of unneeded stuff cycle that is the 'silly season' and my 4-year-old son, Harper, and I invited our loved ones over to our house asking for a plate of food to share and any small change they'd like to donate to our Sharing Bowl. Last year we split the donations between ActionAid Australia and another organisation. I was so proud of our \$60+ collection that I thought it could be a new tradition and we did it again this year.

My son, now 5, had been saving his pocket money in the months leading up to Sharing Day and with less than 20 people at our event, we raised more than \$260 to split again between the two charities. I would love Sharing Day to go global! We don't need stuff, we don't need to tick people off a list buying the rubbish (literally, most of it will be rubbish within a year) to "fill up a stocking". So today we donate \$132.65 to help those with the spare change from our wallets, change bowls and many piggy banks.

Thank you for letting us share!

Community fundraising

At ActionAid Australia we rely on our wonderful supporters to spread the word of ActionAid Australia among their community and networks.

Which is why we get very excited when we hear from supporters running their own fundraising events to raise awareness and money for ActionAid Australia.

There are numerous ways you can get involved. You can participate in one of the many events organised by various groups, for example the Sun Herald City2Surf or the Perth Half Marathon, or you can create your own event – birthday parties, wedding gift registry, garage sale, and so much more!

Whatever your talent is you can use it to raise awareness and money for a cause you're passionate about.

All you need to do is pick an event, choose ActionAid Australia as your charity, create a fundraising page and email the link to your family and friends asking them to support you as you make a difference to people living in poverty.

We will send you encouraging emails and fundraising tips in the lead up to the event. For more information, visit our website www.actionaid.org/australia or call us on 1300 66 66 72.

Here's a snapshot of organised events happening across Australia in 2013:

New South Wales

Bay Run Sydney – 16 June
The Sun Herald City2Surf – 11 August
Sydney Running Festival – 22 September

Australian Capital Territory

Australian Running Festival – 13/14 April

Victoria

The Age Run Melbourne – 21 July
City 2 Sea – 10 November

Queensland

Brisbane Times City2South – 16 June
Bridge to Brisbane – 1 September
Brisbane Running Festival – 4 August

South Australia

Sunday Mail City-Bay – 5 September

Western Australia

Gibb River Challenge – 19 May
Perth Half Marathon – 11 August
Chevron City to Surf – 25 August



Samantha and Harper Florence. Photo: Samantha Florence

Get active

There are so many ways you can become part of the ActionAid community, from making a one-off donation, to becoming a regular giver, to taking a stand in one of our campaigns. We would love to hear from you, so decide on how you'd like to get involved and get in touch with us!

Regular giving

Ever wanted to give up your day job and work against the injustice of poverty full time? Well, by becoming a supporter you can do just that, but without giving up your day job. By becoming a regular giver, you support the work of ActionAid around the world and see the changes you're helping to make through the eyes of our activists.

Wills and bequests

By leaving ActionAid Australia a bequest in your Will you can be sure your vision to see a more just world will continue long into the future.



Susanna McArdle, Kristy Marshall, Rebecca Fox, Camilla Done and Jessie Jo Blythe cycled 400km in Cambodia to raise money for ActionAid Australia. Photo: Maeva Freeman/ActionAid

Single gift

A single gift is a great way to start your journey with ActionAid Australia and help change lives around the world. With your help, we can do more to end poverty and see a world in which every person enjoys their right to a life with dignity.

Campaigning

Change happens when a group of passionate people come together to fight injustice and inequality. By being part of this group you will receive updates when we are campaigning against an issue or lobbying a government on their harmful practices. By being part of the ActionAid community, you have your voice heard and can affect change.

Child sponsorship

Sponsoring a child with ActionAid Australia goes beyond making a donation to an individual child. ActionAid works with the entire community, and you see and hear of the changes taking place in the community through the link with your sponsor child. This way your support enables entire communities to lift themselves out of poverty.



Maureen, 7, playing with a tyre hula hoop outside her aunt's home in Uganda. Photo: Georgie Scott/ActionAid