

Talking action

SPRING 2017

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COMBAT squad

The women's banking
group of Maile Saba

THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT

Hellen and her daughter Lorren received vital supplies as well as safety and support for their future, following the severe drought in East Africa.



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▲ Ntamanya is raising her daughters, Eunice and Irene, by herself. Here she is rationing her share of supplies during the food distribution program in Kenya, following the drought. Support for women's leadership during emergency relief work is creating opportunities for women to play a stronger role in the community and become role models to their daughters. Thank you for helping provide vital food, water and supplies to families following the drought as well as safety and support for the future of women and girls in Somaliland, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Thank you for helping women and girls fight poverty and injustice.

Formerly



ActionAid Australia was first established in 1967 as a national association called Austcare. In June 2009 Austcare changed its name to ActionAid Australia, becoming a full affiliate of the global network. Today, ActionAid reaches 27 million people in over 45 countries worldwide and is committed to fighting poverty and injustice.

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Women worldwide are missing out



Missing out on equal rights to land and property, to an education, to control over their bodies, to the right to equal pay and a life free from poverty and violence.

This is why I am extremely grateful to you, because you are helping create an incredible transformation in the lives of women and girls around the world.

The work that is underway in places like Kenya, Somaliland, Palestine and Bangladesh is supporting women to establish opportunities, where before, they had none.

This work simply wouldn't be possible without your support.

ActionAid Australia is more determined than ever to support women and girls living in poverty and facing discrimination. To do this, we are making a commitment to work in three key areas:

- **Economic justice for women.** ActionAid will work to support women to learn new farming techniques, access decent work and challenge unjust practices.
- **Climate justice.** Global warming is an issue that is impacting communities in some of the poorest nations. This is why ActionAid is making a commitment to hold governments and corporations accountable to end practices that harm our environment.
- **Women's rights in emergencies.** During emergencies, women are affected the hardest and often left out of the humanitarian response.

With your support, women in disaster prone areas will be empowered to lead their communities in preparing for emergencies, and responding when crises strike.

To make these plans a reality, funding is vital – but it is limited. This is why I am especially grateful to you because you know how important these issues are.

In May this year, Australia's foreign aid budget took yet another blow - for the fourth year in a row. The government announced a freeze on the foreign aid budget over the coming years, which effectively amounts to a \$303 million cut to aid. Globally, a new US sanction - the 'global gag rule' - has meant a drastic cut to women's access to vital healthcare. The loss of this funding will have a devastating impact on women in developing countries.

The fight for a just and fair world for women and girls has never been more important. The time to fight is now.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to ensure a fair and just world for women and girls.

Michelle Higelin
Interim Executive Director

Your support is helping girls like Muheem, Hoda and Hasba* have a better future in Somaliland. A future free from child marriage, early pregnancy, violence and poverty.



Safety & protection for girls during the drought

I want to thank you for your generous support towards our most recent appeal to provide long term support and safety for women and girls in Somaliland.

This is the third famine to affect this country in 25 years. Clean water sources are now almost depleted and the food crisis is leading to serious malnutrition.

Emergency situations like droughts disproportionately impact women and girls. Mothers are missing meals to feed their children. Girls are dropping out of school to help care for their families and trekking miles to find water. Women and young girls are at risk of rape and violence. Girls are at risk of being married at an early age to reduce the burden of care for the family, at this time of massive food and water shortage.

I wrote to ask for your help, because I know you are passionate about ending the injustices faced by girls and women.



▲ Safety and protection measures and long term support for the future is helping create a better life for girls like 14 year old Uba*.

**Names have been changed to protect their identities.*

Today, the drought still continues with no respite. **But your generosity has helped achieve so much.** ActionAid Somaliland is on the ground, working to ensure women and girls are receiving vital safety and long term support.

- **A women-led protection system** is now in place, in partnership with local organisations, to create safe spaces for women across five villages in the Woqooyi Galbeed region, located in north-western Somaliland.
- **A Gender Based Violence awareness programme** has been conducted by ActionAid protection facilitators, together with local partners and women's coalitions. Messages on ending violence against women and girls are being communicated across villages to educate communities to end harmful practices.
- **Transparency Boards** are an accountability tool for ActionAid teams to share project information, encouraging communication and community feedback. Displayed in a public place, communities have welcomed the transparency boards as an important tool to share plans and budgets regarding projects and increase community ownership.

Thank you. Your valuable gift is making a real difference for the safety and future of women and girls in drought-ravaged Somaliland.

East Africa Food Crisis

UPDATE

Over 16 million people across Kenya, Ethiopia and Somaliland are facing starvation and famine in what the UN has called the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of the Second World War. Thank you for responding so quickly to help communities affected by the drought. Thanks to your support, ActionAid teams have reached over 160,000 people with vital relief and are on the ground to deliver ongoing support.

Kenya



- Food distribution of rice, beans, pulses and vegetable oil is ongoing, and has reached 97,721 people.
- Rehabilitation of water points and water trucking reached 19,740 people.
- School feeding programs were set up across 46 schools, reaching 5,667 children.

Ethiopia



- Water tanks were installed in 14 schools in drought-affected regions of Ethiopia.
- Food distribution of maize and beans to 10,600 people.
- 1,332 female-headed households were reached with livestock feed.

Somaliland



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© Ahmeed Mohamoud/ActionAid

- Rice, sugar, wheat flour, dates, cooking oil and water reached 12,792 people.
- 400 women were given dignity kits consisting of sanitary pads, clothes, soap and underwear.
- 4,011 women received blankets, sleeping mats and plastic sheets.
- Safe spaces for women were set up across 5 villages.

Dignity during a drought

Dignity kits help women and girls maintain their dignity and promote hygiene during emergencies.

The kits contain a range of items including sanitary napkins, soap, underwear and a change of clothing. They assist in preserving the dignity, self-esteem and confidence of women and girls during challenging times.

In addition to vital food supplies, your gift also provided dignity kits to women in Somaliland, Kenya and Ethiopia.



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vention Square



Francina Nkosi (middle) is one of many inspiring women campaigning against the mining industry in Limpopo, South Africa.

One victory, but still a long way to go

For the last six months, ActionAid has been campaigning to stop Efic, Australia's export credit agency, from funding a controversial new coal mine in South Africa.

The proposed Resgen Boikarabelo mine in South Africa is a 9,000h open cut mine that could have disastrous consequences for the community and the environment.

Mining in South Africa is not regulated and has little accountability to the community. As a result, the South African coal mining industry has had extensive incidents of human rights violations and abuse.

Affected communities have reported black lung disease, air pollution, contamination of ground water, as well as unlawful acquisition of land. Recent violations included an incident where mining authorities refused to permit access to the community cemetery, preventing a family from burying a loved one.

If Efic were to fund this project, it would clearly be inconsistent with Australia's obligations to act on climate change and its commitment to keep global warming below 2°C.

Earlier this year we reached out to the Australian community, asking you to sign an open letter to Efic, opposing funding of the Boikarabelo mine in South Africa.

Thank you for your incredible response! A staggering 12,000 signatures from members of the Australian public were sent to Efic, urging them to stop considering funding this coal mine.

500 complaints were sent, warning Efic of the devastating implications if funding went ahead.

On the 5th of June, Efic announced that at this stage, they are no longer considering funding the Boikarabelo mine.

During Senate estimates, Efic's Andrew Hunter said "we do not have sufficient material for us to undertake due diligence, so currently there is no work being undertaken".

This has been a massive win for people power, in South Africa and Australia.

After months of campaigning in solidarity with the women taking action in South Africa, meeting with the officials at Efic, and with your petitions and letters, together we were able to stop the funding. This win shows how the voices of ordinary people, like you and I, can create positive change around the world.

As an ActionAid supporter, your voice has been powerful to create this change. And I want to thank you for the valuable role you played in helping make this win possible.



▲ ActionAid activists in Australia campaigning against the funding of the proposed mine.

A woman with a warm smile is seated outdoors, leaning against a large tree trunk. She is wearing a vibrant, patterned dress with red, blue, and black designs, and a black headwrap. The background is filled with lush green foliage and the thick, textured bark of a large tree. The overall scene is bright and natural.

Thank you

for empowering women to create a better future for themselves, their children and their community.

Your support helps provide women like Hauwa (pictured left), in Kenya, become leaders in their community through livelihood training.



Promoting youth leadership

On the 15 of May, Palestinian refugees remembered with heartache the catastrophe (or the Nakba) that saw entire families and children displaced from their homeland 69 years ago.



Well-informed and proactive political engagement is what youth need to be more influential and have a greater say in their futures. There is great value in the power of youth to bring change to their communities and improve the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

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Palestinian refugees of the Nakba and their descendants have lived outside of Palestine since 1948, with millions of people still stateless or languishing in surrounding refugee camps.

The biggest impact of the Nakba has been for Palestinian women and youth. Economic hardships, combined with a shrinking political space and living under occupation, has left this group of people disappointed

about the fragile political situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Levels of political participation among youth in particular, are alarmingly low in the occupied Palestinian territories; studies show that some 70% of young Palestinians are politically inactive. Youth in Palestine have limited say in the decisions that affect their lives – yet in large numbers, they have great potential to be active agents for change.



ActionAid teams have been working with Palestinian communities - mainly women and young people - to understand and engage with issues of rights and democratic participation.

One project aims to help youth generate alternative ideas for a political system that can meet their aspirations.



Qamar, a 27-year-old young woman from Hebron, is one of the project's participants. She thinks it's important that young people are involved in politics.

"I believe that as people living under occupation, we should have a level of political awareness and knowledge of the occupier," says Qamar.



Tahani, 26, agrees: "We need to be politically active to try to change the miserable situation; we need political activism to deliver our messages and make our voices heard."

"The Palestinian youth are strong and resilient and they have endured a great deal - but they are still filled with hopes and power and they show that repeatedly," says ActionAid Youth Project Officer, Mai Alqaisi.

"Well-informed and proactive political engagement is what the youth need to be more influential and have a greater say in their future."

Your support for ActionAid advocacy programs such as this creates hope, and helps to rectify the balance of power for displaced communities.

Manu is a COMBAT squad member and plays a huge role in ending violence against women and girls in her village.



Meet Ghana's COMBAT Squad

The women in Ghana have long faced issues like female genital mutilation, domestic violence, child marriage and child trafficking.

Your support is helping set up Community Based Anti-Violence Teams (COMBAT) in all six regions of Brong Ahafo, South Ghana.

When setting up a squad, ActionAid approaches the Village Chief to explain the project and asks them to identify five people of mixed genders and ages who would be effective volunteers.

ActionAid then trains these squad members with the assistance of local government authorities. When training is complete, ActionAid launches the squad by bringing the community together and introducing them.

COMBAT Squads speak out through loud speakers at village information centres, create stories in Twi, the local language and record videos, which are shown via a mobile video van.

Manu, 28, lives in the village of Degedebe, Brong Ahafo with her six-year-old daughter, Naomi. Manu has been a COMBAT Squad member for the last six years.

“It’s important for COMBAT to be here. Before, the way women and children were being treated was very bad. Now things are much better; there is much less violence towards children and widows have rights to their property or land,” she said. “I talk to my community and tell them of the importance of education. I teach people how to handle violence or incidents of abuse to women and girls.

“A young girl came to me and said she wanted to attend school but her parents wouldn’t let her, they had no money. I talked to the parents and persuaded them to let her have an education.”

I know you are passionate about helping end female genital mutilation and violence against women. I wanted to share this story with you on the work in Ghana because this has been a powerful way for the entire community to be involved in changing traditional attitudes that are harmful to women and create positive change for the long term future of women and girls.



▲ COMBAT members at a community awareness discussion.

The Women's Banking Group of Maile Saba

I am in Isiolo, a small town 6 hours away from the city in Kenya.

Today, I met some incredible women in the village of Maile Saba.

I am writing this note to you, because I wish you could see first-hand, as I did today, how you are helping create long term change for women and their communities.



The women conduct their meetings in a shed. Most of them have walked long distances to attend today's meeting. Many have brought their children along.

Most of the women here have had little education, have never handled large amounts of money, or were ever in a secure enough position to make plans for their future. These are women who were told they cannot borrow money from the village money lender.

Despite these challenges, the women I see today assembled in this small room have fought against the odds. Today, they have savings for the future, have taken loans towards improving their farms and are planning for a better life.

Mary tells me that the women meet each month. At the beginning each member contributed 100 shillings which was a day's wages, approximately \$1.25 Australian dollars. At first, the group saved 2000 shillings (\$20) a week which they would give to one member at a time to spend on household goods. The women then began to invest their money on their farms and saw better harvests.



Mary Nalepe belongs to the Maile Saba Womens banking group.

Project Officer Jamlich Mutie tells me that ActionAid teams helped bring the community together, taught the women book keeping and how to set up accounts for savings, loans and membership.

Mary proudly says to me that the bank now has 300,000 shillings (approx. \$3,800). These funds are changing lives for women like Ann Camiro, who told me that without table banking, she wouldn't have been able to pay her children's school fees. Now she can confidently borrow and pay it back. Another member, Josephine, says "I used to be scared to borrow money, but I'm not scared any more. Through loans, I have my children studying and I can give them the best education. I save money and use it to improve my farm."

The women's banking group has played a huge role for women in this community. It has given them the confidence to make choices and financial decisions, encouraged them to work together for the good of the community. Even more importantly, women are playing a more important role in the family unit. The opinions of the men in the community have changed. Any money borrowed is seen as a family loan, promoting discussion between partners and equality within the marriage. Traditional roles are being redefined as children see their mothers handling money and making major decisions about how it is spent.

What an incredible visit this has been!

I leave this group of women today feeling incredibly proud of what they have achieved, when they have had so little. I leave with memories of confident women eager to create a better future for themselves and their children.

Sincerely,
Dr. Sally Henderson



The box contains the group's savings and account books. It has 3 different keys to unlock it. This is their safety system.

Every year, the people of the Char go through agony, repeatedly watching their homes be submerged in water, losing everything.



All photos © Mahtuza Akter Malal/ActionAid

Please will you help women in Bangladesh?

Surjo lives in fear every day.

Because her home is at risk of being submerged under water again. Surjo has had to move house eight times in the past 20 years because of the floods.

Surjo is a single mother of three children and lives on a small island called a 'char', a river island formed by sediment, in Southern Bangladesh.

Southern Bangladesh is one of the most disaster prone areas in the world. Bangladesh suffers from widespread floods, cyclones, storm surge, riverbank erosion, earthquakes, drought, salinity intrusion, fire and tsunamis.

"If river erosion did not happen, then my sufferings would have reduced. I have faced a lot of hardship and struggles. My income would have increased; I would have done better then. But I couldn't, only because of that river," Surjo said.

Please will you help more women like Surjo who are affected by natural disasters?

Your gift could provide women with leadership training and support to rebuild their lives as well as training to help them prepare against future emergencies.

When these disasters happen, women like Surjo are often left out of the emergency response and have severely restricted decision-making power. Your gift today can change that.

In Bangladesh, women are expected to be the primary caretakers of their families, and often must provide food and drinking water. Collecting water becomes a difficult task during and after extreme weather events, when availability is low and the water quality rapidly deteriorates, creating further health problems such as infections and diarrhoea.

Women who rely on agriculture as their source of income find their crops are destroyed and struggle to find other ways to earn money. Flooding and land erosion often results in men leaving their wives and children behind, to look for work in bigger cities. The rise of the female-led household places women and their children at risk of violence and trafficking.

It is a desperate time for women like Surjo.

Global commitment to climate change is not on solid ground either, with world leaders like Donald Trump pulling out of climate change agreements and failing to provide solutions to those who will be most affected by global warming. Women in disaster-prone areas need support to help fight the impacts of climate change and learn new skills to be better prepared for future disasters.

Women like Surjo, who have limited education, skills and no government support to rebuild their lives, are struggling. This is why I am asking for your gift today to help more women like Surjo.

ActionAid Bangladesh has been working with women in local communities to establish support systems like the Women Led Emergency Response village group in Southern Bangladesh. In a safe and supportive environment, women share their experiences and work together to lead their own disaster response.

This program is absolutely critical to the future of the women in Southern Bangladesh. Through the Women Led Emergency Response village group, women in crisis are

building the confidence to demand action, as well as embracing their right to be involved in decision-making regarding emergency response in their villages.

Teams will continue to work with the communities of Southern Bangladesh and help women like Surjo have access to skills and support, so they are better able to deal with future emergencies. But funding is limited.

This is why I am asking for your valuable gift today.

How your gift could help:

- **Surjo could learn how to keep herself, her family and her community safe in times of emergency.**
- **She could become a confident leader for other women in her community.**
- **She could campaign for better services and support from local government and lead long term change in her village.**

Your support is urgently needed at this time.

Please will you help Surjo and more women like her in Bangladesh?



▲ Surjo draws the map of her migration from house to house each time her home was devastated by floods.

To make a gift:

☎ **Call** 1300 66 66 72

📄 **Online** actionaid.org/australia/surjo

✉ **Post** Donation Form using the reply envelope



Thank you

**for empowering women
and girls to fight poverty
and injustice.**

ActionAid
Suite 2, Level 2
10 Mallet Street
Camperdown
NSW 2050

1300 66 66 72
www.actionaid.org/australia
supporter.au@actionaid.org

ABN 87 001 251 930

Eunice's future is a brighter one,
thanks to your support.