

# Talking **action**


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**WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES** of crisis

A young woman with a warm smile is the central figure, wearing a black headscarf with a vibrant, multi-colored floral and geometric border. Her dress is pink and white with a delicate floral pattern. She holds a small, open book with a blue cover. Behind her, a corkboard is adorned with various educational cards, including letters 'G', 'D', 'C', 'H', and 'W', each accompanied by a small illustration. A whiteboard is partially visible to the right. In the lower-left background, another person wearing a blue and white striped headscarf is partially visible, looking down. The overall setting appears to be a classroom or a community learning center.

‘Because of ActionAid’s work, today my daughter can go to school without a male relative beside her.’

**Women’s empowerment  
in Afghanistan**



# A DECADE of empowerment



Michelle Higelin  
Executive Director

**We are living amidst one of the greatest global health emergencies the world has ever faced as Covid-19 has reached every country around the globe.**

It knows no borders and has impacted all of us – Australians included. In this time of great uncertainty, I hope you and your family are safe and managing through this crisis.

At ActionAid, we are rapidly mobilising to support women on the frontlines of the Covid-19 pandemic. We know that this virus will have a devastating toll on countries where health systems are weak, and where people living in poverty are already struggling to survive. We are already hearing widespread reports that this virus is impacting women disproportionately – as frontline health workers facing increased risk of exposure, as vulnerable workers in global supply chains, and as mothers caring for the sick, the elderly and children now pulled out of schools globally. In countries where the majority of women experience violence at the hands of their partners, the prospect of being trapped in homes with violent husbands for months on end is frightening, particularly as economic tensions rise.

There has never been a more important moment for global solidarity, and I want to assure you that ActionAid is already on the ground supporting women on the frontlines of this crisis to ensure lifesaving prevention messages reach

the most vulnerable in communities. In this newsletter you will read about the inspiring efforts of women in Vanuatu to protect their communities from this devastating pandemic and over the coming months we will keep you informed of the efforts in other countries where we work.

While this is a frightening time, we know that women are incredibly resilient and resourceful as the stories in this newsletter demonstrate. With access to resources, training and opportunities, women can provide the leadership that is urgently needed right now to prevent the spread of infection and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable. We also know that women need our support more than ever in challenging contexts like Afghanistan where this pandemic is spreading amidst increasing armed conflict and insecurity or Southern Africa where communities face the triple threat of climate, health and economic crises.

I want to personally thank you for standing with us through this new global threat as we support women on the frontlines of crisis. We can do this together!

Stay well and safe,  
Michelle Higelin  
Executive Director

**EMERGENCY  
UPDATE:**

# COVID-19

**For everyone in the world, the Covid-19 pandemic is a deeply challenging time.**

Unfortunately, women living in poverty and exclusion will bear the brunt of this pandemic.

Globally, women hold two thirds of health care jobs. Often women hold the lowest paid positions and are the first to be laid off to cut costs. Now, women in healthcare are some of the first to battle the virus.

In lower-income countries, domestic and informal workers – mostly women – have no economic support if they lose their jobs or become ill.





# MEET THE WOMEN LEADERS

## – fighting Covid-19 in Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, a group of women leaders have taken prevention into their own hands.



When news of the pandemic struck Vanuatu, Women's Weather Watch sprang into action. First, they worked together to simplify the official health advice from the Vanuatu government and translate it into local languages. Next, this amazing group of women used an innovative system of bulk SMS messages to spread the information to women leaders in rural communities across the country.

**Their message reached  
over a quarter  
of Vanuatu's population**

Plus it was the first and largest public health communication on the virus.

With your help, ActionAid can mobilise more women's networks around the world and get vital health information where it's needed most.

**Can you make a gift today to help support ActionAid to scale up its work with women on the frontlines of this crisis?**







## AFGHANISTAN – her future in the balance

Afghanistan is still one of the most difficult and dangerous places in the world to be a woman. In rural areas in particular, deep poverty and conservative social attitudes leave many women on the edge of survival.

Frequently denied access to education, business or paid work, rural Afghan women must depend on male relatives for everything. Women who don't have male family members are left isolated and even destitute. Young girls are forced to marry long before they are ready, just to obtain a 'bride price' and help their families survive.

*"In my village, women were hardly allowed to go and visit the doctor for treatment. They had no choice in anything. Whatever was chosen for them, they had to accept. We saw girls married at the age of 12, 14 and 15 and even younger than this,"* says Mariam, a participant in one of ActionAid Afghanistan's women's empowerment groups.

**Thanks to donors like you, Mariam and the other members of her women's group were able to access training in skills like financial literacy, business management and marketing.**

The support of generous ActionAid donors like you meant Mariam could realise her lifelong dream and start her own business. Mariam is now a successful shop owner, sharing her new skills with other women.

Your gifts are helping change not just lives, but whole communities. Successful women like Mariam can now take their place as village leaders alongside men. With business ownership comes newfound respect.

Women like Mariam, once ignored, now have a voice in decision making both in their families and communities. Mariam and the other women you have supported use their newfound confidence to boost women's rights in everything from education to healthcare and safety.

**Thank you so much for supporting women like Mariam to become strong, influential leaders and improve life for women in their communities.**



# SOUTHERN AFRICA EMERGENCY

## – your impact

Almost 45 million people in Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe are facing severe food shortages after the worst drought seen in 35 years. It's now the peak of the 'hunger season'.

The three countries are still recovering from Cyclone Idai last year, with many people still without proper shelter. To make things worse, the time between harvests is predicted to be even worse this year due to different weather patterns caused by climate change. Floods have washed away crops in some areas, while in others the rains have not arrived, drying up fields and killing farm animals.

As we work to respond, communities are reporting stomach problems, headaches, skin irritation and nausea caused by lack of food.

As always, women are the worst affected, facing extra hardship and danger. Girls are at risk of sex trafficking, while the women fear violence as they attempt to access food relief. Young children are getting by on one small meal a day, while their parents are forced to eat even less.

### ActionAid's response

Because of the generosity of donors like you, ActionAid has been able to assist families in districts where no other help is available. But more is needed to be done as this crisis deepens and as communities begin to face the prospect of a health crisis.

ActionAid is carrying out vital work such as mending water infrastructure and getting food into schools so children can continue their education. Staple foods like oil, maize and beans give women the ability to keep their children nourished, even when they are unable to grow their own crops.

We are working with women leaders who use their local knowledge to make sure the emergency supplies get to the most vulnerable families as fast and as safely as possible.

**With your support, ActionAid will continue to train women farmers in the latest climate resilient agricultural techniques over the longer term. This will enable women within their communities to replenish their depleted stocks of food.**





# WE LEARNED TO FARM FROM OUR MOTHERS

## – women facing climate change

Across the world, women are using their generations of traditional knowledge to survive in the face of climate change. Precious local knowledge is passed down from mother to daughter, helping families and communities survive when times are hard.



*"We learnt how to farm from our mothers... what to plant depending on availability of water, how to tie rice stalks and harvesting. But this is changing."*

### **Woman farmer in Cambodia**

Too often, this valuable traditional knowledge is ignored – both by Governments and male community leaders. Patriarchal attitudes mean women are shut out of preparing for climate disasters like droughts or floods or responding once they happen.

At the same time, women are denied opportunities to learn modern scientific techniques which can complement their traditional knowledge. Men are chosen over women for training programs in climate resilient agriculture, either for cultural reasons or because women's domestic duties prevent them taking part.

ActionAid is working with women to overcome these challenges through access to training and resources. In partnership with Monash University, we also

documented the experiences of women in Cambodia, Kenya and Vanuatu in order to drive improved responses to gender and climate change.

The report, made possible by ActionAid donors along with the Australian government and the Arise fund, echoes what we see every day in our work with women around the world. When women gain the opportunity to take part in disaster preparedness and response, they have unique skills and experiences to bring to the table.

*"The men came to me and said, 'Wow, you women can do many things!' 'Yes', I said to them, 'And we need your support!'"*

### **Focus group participant in Vanuatu**

**Your donations play a valuable role in our global efforts to support women on the frontlines of the climate change, enabling them to stand up for their rights and be at the forefront of ensuring communities are prepared. Thank you for making this possible!**



# CAMPAIGN UPDATE:

## – a win on Woodside

**We've recently seen a terrific win, with ActionAid supporters ensuring that our taxpayer dollars won't fund a first-of-its-kind billion dollar offshore oil project in Senegal.**

**Thank you so much for stopping this destructive mining project from getting public funding!**

Thousands of ActionAid supporters signed our petition and spread the word on social media so the proposed loan to energy giant Woodside wouldn't fly under the radar.

Together with our partners at Jubilee and Caritas Australia, we also gathered powerful evidence to show why our export credit agency (a government bank that hands out loans), Export Finance Australia, should reject this project.



**BREAKING: Export Finance  
Australia ditches Woodside's  
massive Senegal fossil fuel project!**



**But the struggle isn't over yet.**

Woodside is still seeking to go ahead with their oil project, as well as many others around the world. If this project goes ahead, it could have devastating consequences for Senegal's coastal communities - especially women, who rely on the fishing industry to put food on the table.

Women, who make up about half of the small-scale fisheries workforce in Senegal, already face pressures due to overfishing and climate change. These challenges will only get worse if this project goes ahead.

This win shows clearly how amazing ActionAid supporters like you can work together to make real change. By raising your voice, you put the government's export credit agency on notice that funding fossil fuel projects like these is no longer acceptable.

To avert the worst impacts of climate change on women living in poverty, we must rapidly transition away from



**fossil fuels to 100%  
clean renewable energy**



With your backing, we'll continue to campaign for the Australian government to end its support for *all* oil, gas and coal projects here and overseas.

**Thank you so much for helping to make this change happen!**



# SUPPORTER PROFILE meet Anne

We love having a chat with ActionAid supporters to find out what is important to you.



**Anne Miller**  
ActionAid supporter

**Meet Anne Miller, one of our longest serving and most passionate supporters.**

## **Why are women's rights and ending poverty important to you?**

Several years ago, I reorganised my donations after I became aware of how disadvantaged women and girls are by global standards, especially compared to those of us in Australia. The main areas I was concerned with were their education and the lack of opportunities available. They were missing out on services in the areas of health, ability to earn money, how to manage it, and taking part in leadership and decision-making not only in their families and local communities, but also in wider governmental bodies.

## **What ActionAid work do you feel most proud of?**

I am impressed with all the activities and events that ActionAid supports to encourage women in the areas of which I have mentioned. I'm pleased to see an increase in work to improve the safety of women and girls, with the aim of ending violence.

They empower women to claim their rights and campaign against injustice. I was very impressed with the start of Women Wetem Weta (Women's Weather Watch) in Vanuatu – an SMS system that assists women with the information they need to prepare for extreme weather events.

## **Why did you start supporting ActionAid?**

I started supporting ActionAid, formerly Austcare, 38 years ago and have continued as I see them frequently reviewing their programs.

## **As a long-term supporter what difference do gifts in Wills make to ActionAid's work with women and girls?**

I understand that this enables ActionAid to ensure more forward planning in appropriate areas.

## **What are your hopes for ActionAid over the next 10 years?**

I hope that more progress will be made in the area of violence against women worldwide, particularly in the area of domestic violence.



# GETTING STRONG for women's rights



Register for the 2020 Strong Women Challenge here:  
[www.strongwomenchallenge.org.au/registernow](http://www.strongwomenchallenge.org.au/registernow)



**Late last year, nearly a thousand strong women (and men) committed to get physically and mentally fitter as they took part in The Strong Women Challenge.**

Families, friends, girlfriends and colleagues got together to strengthen awareness of ActionAid's work. The event saw women smashing their personal goals and raising funds to support women around the world fighting for their rights and equality in their communities.

This year will be the fourth year running for The Strong Women Challenge. There will be an exciting new challenge that will show just how strong we are together as we stand for equality and women's rights for all women around the world! Be the first to find out about this year's brand-new challenge and when you can sign up. Simply follow the link above and complete the form.

**To all the participants and to those who made donations – a huge thank you!**

**Together, you  
raised an amazing  
\$33,621**



*"I wanted to be part of the Strong Women Challenge because I've seen the power inner strength can create. I want to help women ignite their inner strength, live with passion and strive for what matters most."*

**Amelia Phillips,**  
Fitness and Nutrition Expert







# Thank you

**Wherever and whenever  
women's rights are under  
threat, ActionAid supporters  
step up in solidarity.**

**We hope you enjoy this update  
and thank you so much for  
being part of our movement!**

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