

Talking action

act:onaid



SPRING 2020

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

women take the lead in fighting the pandemic

From our team to you **IN STRENGTH** and solidarity



Michelle Higelin
Executive Director

I want to reach out to you in these uncertain times and send warmest wishes to you and your family from the ActionAid Australia team.

In this toughest of years, we've seen more than ever the importance of working together for the good of everyone – here in Australia and around the world.

It's easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the COVID-19 emergency. But amid the many challenges, the incredible leadership that women have shown on the frontlines of this pandemic has been a huge source of inspiration to me.

As a feminist humanitarian organisation with decades of experience supporting women's leadership in times of crisis, ActionAid's unique approach is grounded in human rights. When women step up, they are ensuring the whole community benefits equitably and claiming their right to participate in decision making.

Through our local partners – who are well placed to understand the needs of their communities – supporters like you have impacted millions of people worldwide through our COVID-19 response.

I want to share some of this inspiring work with you here – because none of it would be possible without people like you.

With your support, ActionAid's **women-led response** has helped women to put food on the table for their families during lockdown. Emergency teams have

delivered millions of food and household goods packages to the people hit hardest by the pandemic.

ActionAid women's groups are producing their own **public health messages**, tailored to the needs of their local communities. From radio broadcasts to posters and SMS messages in local languages, more than five million people have received essential health and hygiene information to keep them safe from the pandemic.

ActionAid has **women's safe spaces** in communities all around the world, providing places where women can come together to support each other. Services range from legal advice and trauma counselling for women escaping violence, to skills training for financial independence.

Alongside essential services like food and healthcare, ActionAid has been **advocating for women** in this crisis. We're calling on governments to put the rights and safety of women living in poverty and exclusion at the centre of the coronavirus response.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and discover more about the inspiring, life changing work you are making possible.

As always, I can't thank you enough for your support.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MHigelin'.

Michelle Higelin
Executive Director, ActionAid Australia

YOUR SUPPORT in action

'Dignity kits' distributed by ActionAid community networks put women in charge of their own health and hygiene, even in an emergency.

Read more on page 6.

COVID-19

report from the field



This March, the world as we know it changed, possibly forever.

Communities across the planet went into lockdown. Millions of people lost their jobs and livelihoods, their connections to family and friends and in some cases, access to vital social support services like health care.

Everyone has struggled in some way or another as a result of this pandemic. But for women living in poverty and exclusion, the impact

was and remains disproportionately higher. More women are in informal or casual employment, with no access to sick leave or unemployment pay. With courts and police overstretched, and domestic tensions boiling over, many women have been trapped with violent abusers, unable to get help.

Women face greater challenges in times of crisis because of gender inequality, but entire communities benefit when women are equipped to lead. **ActionAid is working in**

40 countries around the world to **support women on the frontlines of this crisis.**

As the pandemic's scale became clear, ActionAid mobilised worldwide. The **women's community networks** our supporters have helped create, swung into action. Women are at the forefront of response to the crisis – looking after the most vulnerable, organising local networks and working to keep everyone safe.

Emergency teams have delivered millions of food and household goods packages within vulnerable communities.



ACTIONAID MOBILISES around the world

In **India**, for example, ActionAid's community networks have reached over half a million people with hygiene supplies like masks, gloves, soap, sanitiser and disinfectant.

In **Palestine**, supporters like you have helped train teams of women to provide support for families in distress, child wellbeing and support for victims of violence through a phone hotline.

In **Bangladesh**, ActionAid is offering midwifery support, remote case

management and responding to incidents of gender-based violence to make sure services are maintained during the pandemic. Supporters like you are also ensuring psychosocial counselling services are available to people who have lost family members to the coronavirus.

In **Cambodia**, ActionAid supporters have helped reach 54,000 people with coronavirus protection messages, as well as face masks, soap and sanitiser.

In **Myanmar**, ActionAid has given cash grants to 3,500 migrants who no longer have jobs due to lockdown restrictions. Supporters like you have also enabled us to make cash grants to 1000 women factory workers to help them through three months without work.

None of this would be possible without your generosity. So, thank you!

On the frontlines of COVID crisis in
40 COUNTRIES



DIGNITY AND SAFETY in Vanuatu



For everyone, sanitation and hygiene are more important than ever during this health crisis. And as always, women need a dignified and healthy way to manage their menstrual cycles. But for women in Vanuatu, even these basic needs have been a struggle.

Since Tropical Cyclone Harold hit in April, access to safe water in parts of the country has been limited, with debris damaging pipes and contaminating wells. Without enough clean water for bathing, women have been going without basic hygiene to give children, the elderly and the injured what little water supplies are

available. This puts them at risk of health problems themselves.

Thanks to generous supporters like you, ActionAid Vanuatu women's networks have been able to distribute 'dignity kits' each containing pads, toilet paper, soap, a toothbrush, toothpaste, a towel, slippers and underwear. The kits have been put together by local women, who have

responded to the needs that women from affected communities have raised.

Because you are standing up for their rights to health and dignity, women in Vanuatu can concentrate on rebuilding their communities, safe in the knowledge that their sanitary needs are being met. Thank you!



STRONG WOMEN CHALLENGE

Step up for women's rights



The Strong Women Challenge is kicking off on the 19th November to raise funds to help end violence against women.

You can join the challenge as an individual or team and complete **137 step ups each day for 7 days** to represent the 137 women who are killed every day by their partner or family member.

Will you step up to the challenge?



Sign up:

Register for the challenge at **www.strongwomenchallenge.org.au**



Step up:

Do 137 step-ups for 7 days and raise crucial funds to prevent violence



Rise up:

Help women find safety and justice and support an **end to violence!**



*MILLCENT, A SURVIVOR
OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.*

If you have any questions or want to know more, please contact
Mon on **1300 666 672** or **supporter.au@actionaid.org**

SUPPORTER PROFILE meet Robyn

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



Robyn with husband Don, meeting Flora Vano Country Manager, ActionAid Vanuatu

Robyn is a retired medical scientist. In the course of her career, she has run pathology labs in Papua New Guinea and in refugee camps in Laos, supporting local staff to build skills in these areas.

Robyn has a long history of involvement in social justice and equity issues, including sitting on the board of Australian Volunteers International, which oversaw the Australian Volunteers Abroad program. It was there Robyn first heard of a little agency named Austcare, which became ActionAid in 2009.

Why do you support ActionAid?

I support ActionAid as it aligns to my belief in working alongside and supporting others to get the most satisfying, healthy and fulfilling lives they can, in the way that they want. I strongly believe everyone has a right to make decisions about their own life as well as a responsibility to care for others.

Tell us about visiting ActionAid Vanuatu to learn more about their work.

The highlight was meeting Flora Vano, Country Program Manager of ActionAid Vanuatu and hearing about the work that she and her team are doing to empower women to take an equal place in society in Vanuatu. We realised some old cultural values don't give women equal opportunities with the men in Vanuatu and that the women want this to change. There are many very capable women and the country would benefit from using their talents just as the women themselves would have more fulfilling lives.

What's your dream for the future?

I hope women who make up 50% of the population of the world have 50% of the decision-making and management roles and every girl has an equal opportunity along with the boys to have an education, to decide for herself what and how she lives her life and to lead a healthy, satisfying and fulfilling life.

If you were to tell a friend or family member about ActionAid's work, how would you describe it?

This is a small dedicated agency empowering the rights and freedom of women to live a fulfilling, safe life.

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL it's over for everyone

END COVID
FOR ALL

As our experiences here in Australia have shown us, no one is safe until we are all safe.

It's never been more important for us to stand together to ensure the health and wellbeing of communities both at home and overseas.

Too many of our neighbours around the world are under-resourced and struggling to respond to the devastating health and economic fallout from this crisis. Without immediate aid from wealthy countries like Australia, coronavirus could lead to over 70 million additional people experiencing extreme poverty, with women already among the worst impacted.



We must raise our voices to get more support for low-income countries before the crisis gets even worse.

ActionAid Australia has joined organisations from across the aid and development sector in a campaign to #EndCOVIDForAll – and we need your help.

Will you take the pledge and call on the Australian government to provide vital support to low-income nations so they too can protect people from COVID-19?

www.actionaid.org.au/endcovidforall

THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS

3 years on

This August marked the three-year anniversary of the most recent surge of violence towards the Rohingya people in Myanmar, which drove more than 700,000 Rohingya from their homes.

The violence in Myanmar saw villages set ablaze and entire families killed. Women and girls faced unimaginable atrocities, including widespread sexual violence. Thousands of people were forced to flee and seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

More than 860,000 people still live in a series of refugee camps near the town of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, making them the largest refugee settlements in the world. Even after three years, the Rohingya's situation remains precarious. With no guarantee of safety in Myanmar, most

people are too afraid to return.

Life is not easy for Rohingya women in the camps. Each year the monsoon season brings with it the threat of floods and strong winds. The crowded, wet conditions are especially dangerous now that the coronavirus pandemic has reached the camps.

As always, women are most at risk. Women and girls often have limited access to information on how to stay healthy and prevent disease spreading. Women are especially

vulnerable to catching the virus due to their responsibilities as caregivers.

Along with the coronavirus pandemic has come a related surge in gender-based violence. The pandemic means many women are being forced into close quarters with their abusers, unable to escape.

Supporters like you have helped ActionAid reach over 172,586 people since the start of the pandemic with life-saving public health messages about how to stop the spread of the virus.

Some of the ways supporters like you are helping include:

- Training 79 women in tailoring to create 45,000 face masks to help them earn a living as well as keep people safe from coronavirus.
- Training 32 ActionAid staff members in gender-based violence case management and risk mitigation, working with women and girls to reduce their risk of violence.
- Providing psychosocial support and counselling to 370 women and 99 girls.
- Running nine women's safe spaces where women can come to seek help. These have been able to remain open despite the challenges faced since the outbreak of coronavirus.

As the pandemic spreads, Rohingya women need support now more than ever. Safe spaces and psychological support help women keep themselves and their families safe in the face of the twin challenges of the pandemic and gender-based violence.

**Can you make a donation to help refugee women get the urgent help they need to stay safe?
Thank you so much for your support.**



Rohingya refugee women have already been through so much, and their future remains uncertain. But their strength and courage in facing multiple crises and persecution is always remarkable.

Our message to you

Right now, women around the world are stepping up to face the huge challenges posed by the coronavirus. They're handing out face masks and hand sanitiser, packaging up rice and cooking oil, printing out information leaflets and finding emergency beds for those fleeing violent homes.

None of this absolutely critical work would be possible without the generosity and commitment of the worldwide ActionAid supporter community.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for being part of our women-led movement against poverty and injustice.



**ActionAid Australia
Level 3
25 Cooper Street
Surry Hills, NSW, 2010**

**1300 66 66 72
www.actionaid.org.au
supporter.au@actionaid.org**

ABN 87 001 251 930