

# Talking **action**

act:ionaid



AUTUMN 2021

**Together, we  
rise and reset**

act:ionaid

## A LETTER FROM

# Our Executive Director



Michelle Higelin  
Executive Director

Dear Supporter,

I don't remember a time when I've felt more challenged – and more excited – by our shared purpose to stand with women around the world as they change their societies for the better.

In the face of the world's largest ever humanitarian crisis, the ActionAid movement galvanised, and supporters stepped up like never before.

A wonderful example was our very first Giving Day, held on December 1st last year. I was blown away by the hundreds of passionate people who rallied together and helped fund over 300 women leaders around the world. Thanks to people like you, we raised over \$100,000 in just 24 hours!

Speaking to colleagues around the world, we have learnt so much in the past months. We've spoken with women on the frontlines of injustice as well as incredible supporters like you, listening and learning from many people as we refreshed our strategy for the coming three years.

An area where we will focus is getting technology into women's hands. We've seen with the Women's Weather Watch program in Vanuatu (see page 6) that technology can help shift power to women and accelerate change. It can connect

women across borders to share resources and expertise and amplify women's voices by removing the barriers caused by male-dominated societies.

We have big, audacious goals for the next few years – we want to reach 100,000 women living in poverty and exclusion worldwide and support them to advance their rights and resilience to crises.

At the same time, we hope to build a movement of 100,000 Australians, harnessing unstoppable people power to win campaigns for economic and climate justice and advance a better world for all women.


There are exciting times, and no doubt even bigger obstacles lie ahead – but we won't back down from the challenge.

As always, none of this could happen without people like you. ActionAid supporters in Australia drive our big ambitions and enable our successes.

**Thank you for rising with women everywhere towards a fairer future.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MHigelin', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Michelle Higelin, Executive Director  
ActionAid Australia**



In these difficult times,  
women's rights are under  
attack and their opinions  
are often ignored.

But because of ActionAid  
supporters like you, women  
around the world now have  
a chance to make their  
voices heard and keep  
their families safe.

*Thank you!*

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## Choose To Challenge

On March 8th, the global ActionAid Federation celebrated International Women's Day. The theme this year was #ChooseToChallenge.

We celebrated inspiring leaders like Sharmin, Shella Cayo and Talat, just some of the thousands of women leaders who challenge gendered violence, inequality and injustice every single day, even in the face of overwhelming odds.



**SHARMIN** from Bangladesh, braved the Covid-19 pandemic to return again and again to the Cox's Bazar refugee camp and support Rohingya refugee women there.

**"At the start, I was very scared and so was my family. But then I started thinking to myself, 'No, as a humanitarian worker, I cannot stay working at home'. So, I returned."**



**SHELLA** from Haiti, co-hosts a weekly feminist radio show about women's rights and gender equality.

**"I am determined to fight for the cause using the media. I want women to know their worth, their rights and the need for them to be included in everything that happens in their community."**



**TALAT** from India, retrained as an auto-rickshaw driver – traditionally a man's profession – to earn a living after leaving an abusive marriage.

**"I used to think, 'why is it just men driving autos?' So, when this opportunity came to me to learn how to drive, I chose it because I wanted to learn something different and be a woman auto-driver."**

# HOW YOUR GIFTS HELPED WOMEN Rise and Reset

## Christmas 2020



Last Christmas, generous ActionAid supporters like you helped raise

**over \$170,000**

so that women leaders could rise up and take control of their future against all odds.

The Christmas appeal we asked our supporters to help change the lives of women farmers from Kenya and around the world as they battled the pandemic, climate change, economic crises and rising levels of gender-based violence.

After the incredible challenges that women leaders faced in 2020, this amazing result couldn't have come at a better time.

Your donations will mean more Kenyan women will be able to come together in mutual support and create powerful alliances like village savings associations and women's rights education groups.

Thanks to your generosity, Kenyan women leaders will be able to access vital skills training, such as learning new farming techniques to help them grow climate resistant crops and bounce back after last year's catastrophic floods.

Most importantly, women leaders around the world will also be supported as they demand their right to be properly protected from violence.

**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

**FIJI**

# Women in the Eye of the Storm



In December last year, a powerful cyclone hit parts of Fiji. Cyclone Yasa swept through villages and towns, with winds of over 240 kph leaving homes destroyed, schools torn down, and farmlands ruined.

To make things worse, people in Fiji were still trying to recover from the impacts of Cyclone Harold, another category five cyclone, which struck earlier last year.

This relentless cycle of extreme weather events is one of the consequences of climate change in the Pacific. As women struggled to rebuild their homes while also

caring for vulnerable neighbours and replanting their crops, they also faced a troubling increase in gendered violence in their communities. With the help of supporters like you, women leaders (from the Shifting the Power Coalition) of women's rights and disability organisations stepped up to lead a coordinated emergency response.

**“Women are the first responders. We need to be supported and work together to reach out to people in remote areas. Women leaders can go out and share preparedness with the community and the things they can do to prepare themselves during and after disaster.”**

– Unaisi Bakewa, Fijian Disabled Peoples Federation



Thanks to ActionAid supporters like you, local women leaders were able to distribute lifesaving emergency relief kits containing food, water, hygiene and sanitary items to 225 households, including 50 women living with disabilities.

Women in Fiji and across the Pacific are taking big strides to protect and rebuild their communities. But they cannot do it alone. With cyclones like Yasa becoming more frequent and severe, the Shifting the Power Coalition is needed now more than ever.

Shifting the Power Coalition desperately needs to train more women leaders so that they can get their communities prepared before the next cyclone hits. Could you make a donation to help support women leaders battling climate disaster? Please send your gift today by using the donation coupon included with this letter, by going online to **www.actionaid.org.au/yasa** or by calling us on **1300 66 66 72**.

**Thank you so much for your support.**

## STRONG WOMEN CHALLENGERS

# Step Up for a Record Year

**STRONG  
WOMEN  
CHALLENGE**

Last November, we called on our community to step up in solidarity with strong women all over the world to end gender-based violence.

An incredible **630 people** answered the call, completing 137 step-ups each day to represent the horrifying fact that 137 women are killed daily by a partner or family member.

The funds our challengers raised went to support ActionAid women's safe spaces in countries like Uganda and Bangladesh, where violence against women has been surging since the outbreak of Covid-19.

### **THANK YOU SO MUCH TO EVERYONE WHO TOOK PART**

- and stay tuned for details of the launch of the Strong Woman Challenge 2021!



**“Being part of the Strong Women Challenge was one of those accomplishments you can look back on forever and say, ‘I am so proud I did that’. The moment I saw a post on Instagram about the challenge I knew this was a way that I could give back and share my voice!”**

**Brooke, Strong Women Challenge top fundraiser**



# ACTIONAID ACTIVIST PROFILE

## Meet Grace

We caught up with Grace to ask her about her experience as an ActionAid activist:

### Why did you become an ActionAid activist?

At the time that I joined, I was relatively new to feminism - I'm definitely still learning - but I was curious and wanted to learn more. It was this feminist lens, combined with ActionAid's work on climate and economic justice, that drew me in.

### What's your favourite memory of being an ActionAid activist so far?

It would have to be pulling together a film screening with the Inner West group in 2019, where we screened *The True Cost*, which documents the exploitation of garment workers in low-income countries.

It was just such an empowering thing to see our little group of strong, passionate women organise something like this from scratch - we booked the venue, we organised an event speaker, we set up ticketing, we did it all!

In the end we had around 40 people turn up and it was just a really inspiring and electrifying night.

**Interested in getting involved?** Join our ActionAid Activist network to make a difference alongside inspiring people like Grace. Go to [actionaid.org.au/activist-network](https://actionaid.org.au/activist-network) to find out more.



## COVID-19 REPORT BACK

# ActionAid around the world

All around the world, women and communities are struggling to meet the challenges of Covid-19.

Alongside the obvious dangers to health, the pandemic brought job losses and an increase in violence against women.



# Here's how you made a difference:

## Vanuatu

Women in Vanuatu seized the opportunity to put their leadership and advocacy skills into practice after Vanuatu recorded its first case of coronavirus in early November. Since the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic, ActionAid supporters like you have helped train women to lead Covid-19 prevention strategies and dispel misinformation about the virus in their communities.

## India and Bangladesh

In India and Bangladesh, the effects of the virus have been devastating. In both densely populated cities and rural areas, many families have been left without livelihoods.

Here too, ActionAid women's groups have stepped up, with newly trained women auto-rickshaw drivers delivering 7000 emergency ration kits to the most marginalised people in their communities.

## Palestine

As gender-based violence spiked across the globe, women's groups in Palestine mobilised in their local communities.

Through your generous support, women leaders received tailored training to support those affected by violence, providing women with vital services such as psychological and financial support.



**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR SUPPORT DURING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

**Together your gifts have helped the ActionAid emergency response to reach 10 million people over the past year.**





*Our message to you*

Women around the world are not waiting for change to happen. They're taking matters into their own hands. From rural villages to busy factories, women are coming together to demand a safer, fairer world.

They already have strength, courage and intelligence aplenty. With your help, women can get access to the skills, technology and global connections they need to transform their societies for good.

**Thank you.**

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