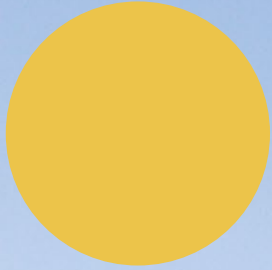


Arise Fund 2023 Impact Report



arise

Women leading
crisis response.

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**SINCE
2017**



22

countries we've worked in



3.881m

people reached



36,081

women trained to prepare for and lead disaster response



\$9.9m

funds raised

Front cover image:
Betty, Betina, Rosetta
and Rachel from Vanuatu
at the QBE-funded training

“I have seen first-hand how women and girls can transform their communities when given the opportunity. That opportunity must come now. We need to invest in the leadership of women before, during and after a crisis.”

Susan Otieno
Executive Director
ActionAid Kenya

Cheptei tending to the vegetables in her kitchen garden in Kenya.

Transforming the world through women's leadership

The window is closing to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees celsius – at which point extreme flooding, drought, wildfires, and food shortages increase dramatically. Yet we are already witnessing signs of the 1.5-degree world. The Horn of Africa is facing the longest and most severe drought on record, and in Vanuatu, ferocious twin cyclones hit within the space of two days causing the widespread destruction of homes, livestock, and crops. And because of increasing climate impacts and disasters, we are witnessing the largest setback to gender equality in our history.

In 2017, when ActionAid established the Arise Fund, it began with a simple premise – what if we could transform disaster into an opportunity to drive gender equality? If we could scale up investment in women's leadership in preparing communities for increasing climate disasters, it would not only save lives, but it could transform women's status in society. Vanuatu was the first country we began to invest in and over the past year, we have seen the impact of this investment – women-led efforts to alert communities to the twin cyclones reached 40 per cent of the population and averted widespread loss of life.

Their leadership resulted in 30,000 people receiving food, water, and other vital supplies in the immediate aftermath of the crisis and some of the most vulnerable community members receiving assistance. Both local and national governments have recognised these efforts and women leaders have been brought into the National Emergency Operations Centre – extraordinary impact for women who were completely excluded by the humanitarian system before this work began.

Women's leadership offers enormous potential as an untapped resource in responding to the growing intensity of the climate crisis. When we established the Arise Fund, our goal was to raise \$10m to scale investment in women leading crisis response in 10 countries. Thanks to the generous support of Australians, we have resourced women in 22 countries to prepare for and respond to crisis. As we near our funding goal it has become clear that the need is growing and will be much higher as the climate crisis takes hold. Our commitment is to continue to scale up this work. If we are to give communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis a fighting chance, we must invest in preparedness. And if we are to drive progress on gender equality, we must invest in women's leadership. Together, we can tip the scales and shift a trajectory that is holding back progress for women and girls!

Michelle Higelin
Executive Director
ActionAid Australia

Kristina Stefanova
Chair
Arise Leadership Circle



The women's network leading crisis response in Vanuatu

By providing long-term investment in women's leadership in crisis response, the Arise Fund has had a transformational impact on the lives of women in Vanuatu. Over the course of seven years, women have gone from being ignored when a disaster strikes to leading preparedness and response efforts, and climate resilience initiatives, across five islands.

Members of WITTT Tanna's executive team.

Transforming crisis into an opportunity for change

Vanuatu is one of the most at-risk countries in the world for climate disasters, and for Ni-Vanuatu women, the climate crisis will only deepen and intensify existing gender inequalities.

In a society where only one woman sits in the national parliament, and it is estimated that 60 per cent of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence, investing in women’s leadership in disaster response and preparedness and climate resilience is a critical priority.

“We must amplify the voices and prioritise the needs of Ni-Vanuatu women. You must invest in us, listen to us and we will tell you what works for us,” says Flora Vano, Country Manager, ActionAid Vanuatu.

In 2015, when Cyclone Pam swept through Vanuatu, leaving a trail of devastation in its path, communities were unprepared, and the needs and experiences of women – particularly women with disability – were overlooked in the national response to the disaster.

In the aftermath of the cyclone, ActionAid set up temporary women’s information centres in affected communities, providing a space for women to come together, share their experiences, and mobilise around their protection needs. For many women, this was a transformational experience and building on this momentum, ActionAid supported Ni-Vanuatu women on three islands to establish the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) Network.

The WITTT Network has become a local women-led movement that supports diverse women to prepare for

disasters, strengthen their understanding of their rights, and engages with provincial and national stakeholders to ensure that their needs are being heard and reflected in decision-making on disaster planning and response.

Since 2018, ActionAid’s Arise Fund has supported the WITTT Network to grow into a powerhouse of women-led humanitarian and climate action. With WITTT now reaching over 9,000 women across five islands – Efate, Erromango, Malekula, Malo, and Tanna, women are mobilising to shape government agendas, and ensuring that women’s rights are prioritised before, during and after an emergency, and in efforts to adapt to climate change. With these shifts, women are taking their rightful place alongside men in community decision-making spaces.

“**[WITTT] totally changed their [men’s] mentality. It drove away any doubts they have concerning what we were doing. They now come around to offer to help and support us,”** says Betina Charlie, President of WITTT Malo.

The Arise Fund scales up support for ActionAid’s women-led and human rights-based approach to humanitarian disasters, which centres on resourcing the leadership of women from affected communities before, during and after a crisis. This not only saves lives but transforms women’s status in society long after a disaster, and is a rare and critical opportunity for women in a country like Vanuatu where patriarchy and gender inequality remain deeply entrenched.



Attendees of the QBE-funded training with ActionAid Vanuatu Country Director, Flora Vano (far right).



Dalila Laus, Treasurer, WITTT Network Tanna.

Dalila’s story

Dalila’s community on the Island of Tanna in Southern Vanuatu is at the mercy of more frequent and severe climate-induced disasters that are threatening the lives, safety, and livelihoods of people across the island.

The women of Tanna face the additional burden of being left out of decision-making at the local and provincial level, their experiences and expertise disregarded and their needs in times of crisis ignored.

“In our culture, especially in Tanna, the husbands are considered head [of the household]. When with your husband, the woman does not have a right in decision-making; the man makes the decisions,” says Janet Iatiknu, Community Mobiliser of WITTT Tanna.

Dalila joined the WITTT Network on Tanna in 2018 and has seen the Network become a catalyst for change in her life and the lives of the women of Tanna. Women are now leading initiatives to adapt to the impacts of climate change, creating businesses to increase their financial independence, and have become powerful community leaders – particularly in times of crisis.

“**I’ve seen the changes taking place within women. The fathers have seen the changes, and they allow women to speak their concerns as well.**”

The WITTT Network helped Dalila build her confidence and she is now a vocal leader in her community, recently taking on the role of treasurer of WITTT Tanna.

“The trainings I have attended empower me to stand and take on the leadership to train and teach other women in the community.”

Since becoming part of the WITTT Network, Dalila has participated in many trainings run by ActionAid Vanuatu, and through ActionAid’s train-the-trainer model, she takes what she learns back to her community to teach other women.

“What I have learnt throughout those training workshops, I come home to teach and train other women in my community... I train them to produce local food products like banana chips, kumala chips, bread, cake, even we produce local soap, weaving baskets with coconut broom and hair flowers.”

Livelihood training is creating avenues for women in Tanna to increase their financial independence and strengthen their resilience to disasters, in turn decreasing their vulnerability in times of crisis.

“[ActionAid Vanuatu] has trained us to be resilient and stand up for ourselves, to do something on our own.”

Dalila’s wish for the future is simple: “I want to see a transformation in every woman in Tanna.”

The twin cyclones:

A women-led response to an unprecedented climate disaster

In March 2023, two powerful tropical cyclones devastated Vanuatu – an unprecedented disaster, fuelled by the climate crisis, which affected 80 per cent of the population.

As the cyclones approached, ActionAid Vanuatu and members of the WITTT Network – a movement of women now working across five islands – immediately mobilised. Thanks to disaster preparedness training supported through the Arise Fund, the WITTT Network ran a powerful women-led response and was able to immediately respond on the worst-affected islands.

WITTT members used the Women Wetem Weta (Women's Weather Watch) network – a women-led early warning and disaster response messaging system, to alert 40 per cent of the population to the incoming cyclones using SMS. This saved lives and enabled families to protect their homes, livestock, and crops.

In the aftermath, WITTT members from Malo, who had been spared from the worst impacts of the cyclones, rapidly mobilised and used their resilience gardens to provide fresh food for more than 10,000 people on the worst-affected islands.

"Women all over Malo came together and contributed local food crops to respond to the affected southern provinces. We did something that surprised a Tanna chief as well, because he did not believe in this network. They said we were wasting time, but when the ladies from Malo got to Tanna with the relief foods, they received the chief's support and he said from now on they will work with ActionAid," says Betina Charlie, WITTT Malo.

Over the last seven years with support from the Arise Fund, ActionAid Vanuatu has worked to build awareness of WITTT, demonstrate the effectiveness of women-led community-based responses to crises, and strengthen women's leadership. As a result of these efforts, provincial and national decision-makers invited women leaders in the network to be part of the government's Emergency Operations Centre. Additionally, on Tanna – one of the worst-affected islands – WITTT members were called on to support the government response by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

"The NDMO called the women, 'Please we need your help, ladies', says Joyce Yaris, WITTT Tanna President. "During [the cyclones], the entire [WITTT] executive team led the recovery response. They identified vulnerable members of the community."

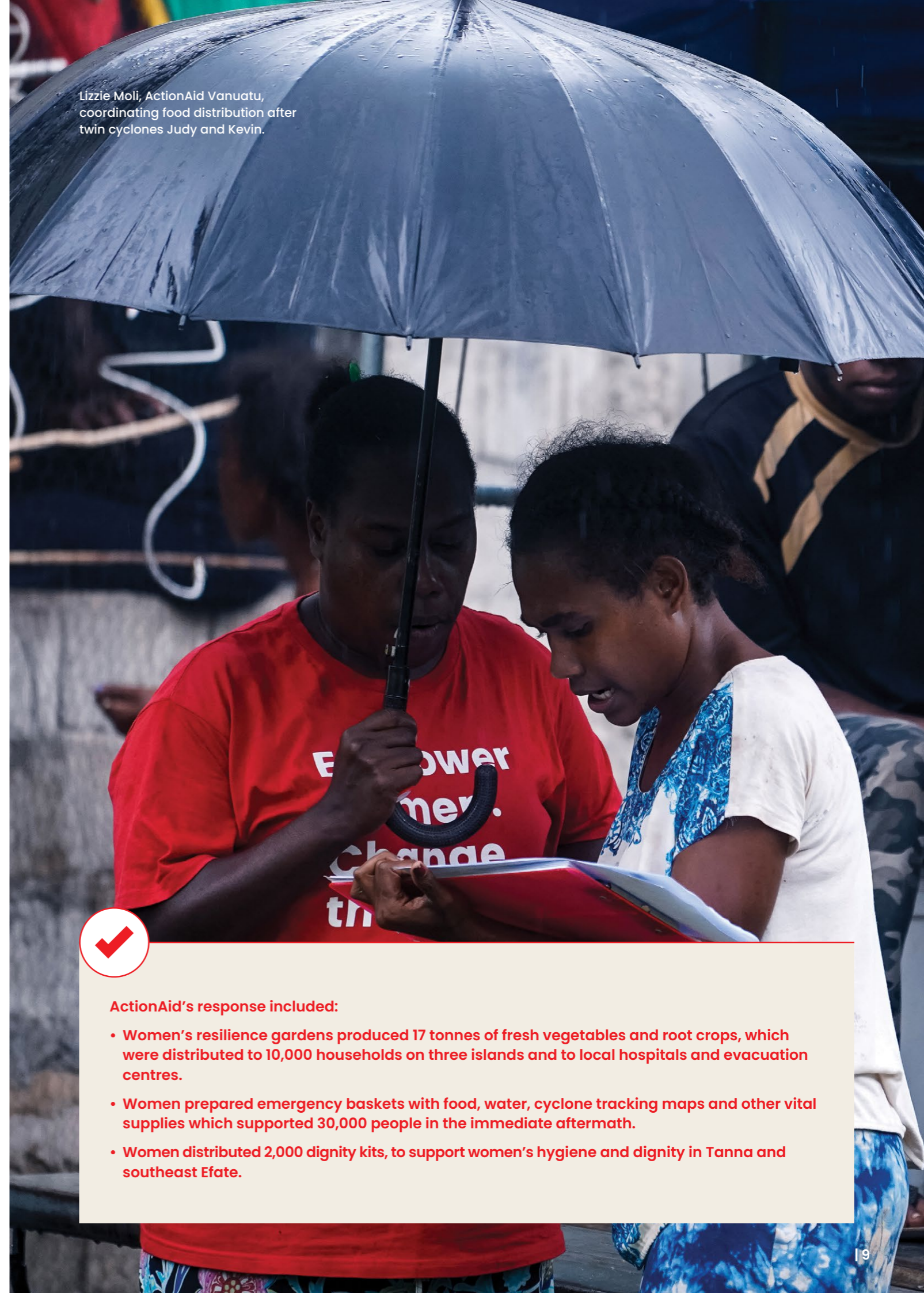
After the twin cyclones, the WITTT network grew from 5,000 to 9,000 members. Women from the affected islands who were provided humanitarian relief by WITTT members leading the emergency response efforts asked to join the network. Witnessing other women leading the response had a powerful and transformational impact that will continue long after the disaster and has helped the WITTT network become an even stronger and more wide-reaching movement.

// During the distribution after the cyclone, I can see a lot of women are coming to join the network. The network in north Tanna is expanding from inland to the coast," says Dalila Laus, WITTT Tanna Treasurer.

By investing in women's leadership at scale through the WITTT Network, the Arise Fund has made a profound difference in the lives of women living in communities on the frontlines of humanitarian disasters and climate change.

"Ni-Vanuatu women are taking ownership of their emergency responses and tailoring it to what they know women need," says Flora Vano, ActionAid Vanuatu Country Manager. "In 2015, ActionAid showed solidarity and provided support. In 2020, after Cyclone Harold, the women themselves supported each other to rebuild their lives. In 2023, women were prepared, led the disaster assessment, and knew how best to respond."

Lizzie Moli, ActionAid Vanuatu, coordinating food distribution after twin cyclones Judy and Kevin.



ActionAid's response included:

- Women's resilience gardens produced 17 tonnes of fresh vegetables and root crops, which were distributed to 10,000 households on three islands and to local hospitals and evacuation centres.
- Women prepared emergency baskets with food, water, cyclone tracking maps and other vital supplies which supported 30,000 people in the immediate aftermath.
- Women distributed 2,000 dignity kits, to support women's hygiene and dignity in Tanna and southeast Efate.

From exclusion to inclusion: The women with disability leading disaster response

Five years before twin cyclones Judy and Kevin hit Vanuatu, ActionAid brought women with disability together for the first time to discuss their needs and experiences during emergencies.

The women reported falling through the cracks of response efforts: those unable to flee by themselves said they had been left in their homes, or if they could get to a shelter, that their needs were overlooked and evacuation sites often inaccessible.

From this discussion emerged Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) Sunshine – a network created for and by women with disability to support their collective efforts to ensure inclusive disaster responses.

With support from the Arise Fund, which was matched by Australian Government funding, ActionAid Vanuatu facilitated disability leadership dialogues and disaster preparedness and response training that equipped WITTT Sunshine members with the skills and resources to ensure the needs of women with disability are prioritised during emergencies.

When the cyclones hit, WITTT Sunshine initiated an inclusive women-led emergency response to ensure women with disability were not left behind. The team liaised with evacuation centres to ensure the most vulnerable had a space, and distributed food to people with disability after the disaster.

WITTT Sunshine executive member Ellen Tamata found her voice in the network, and now has the confidence to communicate her needs and advocate for the rights of other women with disability.

“At first, I was shy to speak in a crowd, but now I can boldly speak,” says Ellen. “Through ActionAid, I can now communicate clearly with the members in the community. When food was not given to us [after the cyclone], I spoke up with confidence, saying, ‘Why is it that you received the supplies, but those with disability do not have any? We are all equally the same.’”

Ellen, pictured below, who uses a wheelchair, said when the WITTT Sunshine disability emergency response team arrived, many cried: “They told us that it was the first time they were receiving any support in a cyclone and that they were shocked to see women like them leading the response.”

WITTT Sunshine has grown in size and influence from three to 500 members over the past five years. This year, the network was recognised in the Government of Vanuatu’s Standard Operating Procedures in Emergencies as an important group for informing their response.

WITTT Sunshine aims to continue expanding its reach, including resourcing Community Mobilisers on all five islands where WITTT operates. The Network will continue to provide targeted support to women with disability, building their resilience and creating spaces to drive their collective agenda.



Ellen Tamata,
WITTT Sunshine
Executive Member.

Mokra Lava, WITTT
Sunshine President in Tanna
and Leitangi Solomon,
WITTT Sunshine member.



Championing women's leadership before disaster strikes

Through training in disaster preparedness, conflict resolution and community-based protection, the Arise Fund is preparing women to lead in times of crisis.

Chepkales Kambi at her home in Kenya.

Kenya

Communities in Kenya are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, with more erratic rainfall and persistent drought posing a significant threat to the rights, livelihoods and safety of women and girls.

The Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change (GRACC) Project, funded by the Arise Fund with matched funding from the Australian Government, is supporting women to respond to the climate crisis by strengthening their participation in climate change decision-making and providing women's groups with resources to build climate-resilient livelihoods.

The Arise Fund's six-year investment in this project has contributed to long-term change that has enabled women to claim space, take on leadership positions, and influence policy on climate change at the local and national levels – transforming their position in society.

Women, trained in leadership and disaster response protocols through the Arise Fund, are using their collective power to mobilise and influence the government's humanitarian response to the ongoing climate-induced drought. When the local government failed to distribute food relief to affected communities, 300 women involved in the project marched to the county commissioners' office to demand accountability. Within days, the relief was distributed to affected communities.

“Women are taking leadership roles on disaster committees in the communities in which ActionAid works. Women are holding leaders and the government to account,” said Susan Otieno, Executive Director at ActionAid Kenya at a Arise Fund World Humanitarian Day event in August 2023.

“They are saying we saw the budget; it had this amount for disaster and [the disaster] has happened but you are yet to respond. We have worked with women to bring out the power within themselves.”

This year, five women who received climate resilient livelihood training from ActionAid were elected to lead the ward-level climate change planning committees, in recognition of their knowledge and skills.

The Arise Fund has supported the continuation and expansion of the Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) – a women-led savings group that provides women with control over their finances and access to training on climate-resilient livelihoods. Additionally, training in agroecology has enabled women to sustain their livelihood projects and keep the VSLA groups running, despite the climate-induced drought.



In Kenya, the Arise Fund has championed women's leadership in climate and humanitarian action by:

- Supporting 2,500 women to participate in climate change planning committees.
- Training 1,240 women on how to access resources, including finances, to support the establishment of climate-resilient livelihood activities.
- Empowering 60 women with disability to engage in climate dialogues to drive more inclusive climate action.



Abigail at her home in Tangelbei, Baringo

Abigail's story

Women in Tangelbei, Kenya are no strangers to persistent drought – a dire reality made worse by the escalating climate crisis.

“When the dry season starts, all the trees shed their leaves and you do not wish to live here as the scorching sun batters the landscape.”

Abigail found it impossible to believe anything could grow in the semi-arid land around her home. But now, when she stands on her homestead surrounded by a thriving kitchen garden and vibrantly green pawpaw trees, she is immensely proud of what she has built for herself and her family despite the challenges of a prolonged climate-induced drought.

In 2021, like many young women her age, Abigail was struggling to find a job. Desperate to apply her skills and education, she joined an ActionAid-run Village Saving and Loans Association (VLSA) group. She became part of a collective of women who were learning to build climate-resilient livelihoods that would help them prepare for and thrive during the lengthy dry seasons.

“We also learned [at ActionAid training] how to form groups, write a proposal and search for funds and grants to push for our preferred agenda, which would elevate us women away from desperation to independence.”

By investing in the skills and leadership of women, the Arise Fund is supporting women like Abigail to effectively prepare for disasters and build their financial independence.



Scan QR code to hear more on Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change in Tangelbei Baringo County

Indonesia

Since 2019, Yappika-ActionAid Indonesia – with funding from the Arise Fund – has worked in disaster-affected villages in Banten and Central Sulawesi provinces to strengthen community resilience to disasters using ActionAid’s Women-Led Community Based Protection (WLCBP) approach. In 2018, these communities were struck by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake and tsunami, which had devastating impacts.

The WLCBP model is a unique feminist approach to protection, pioneered by ActionAid Australia, which supports the agency and leadership of women affected by disasters and conflict. This approach builds on women’s existing knowledge, networks, and capacities, supporting them to identify and respond to their own protection concerns and establish community-based support structures that protect women’s rights in times of crisis.

The model has been successful in mobilising the collective power of women and women’s groups in Banten and Central Sulawesi provinces and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in decision-making on disaster risk reduction and violence against women at the local level. In four villages in Banten province, the village government has integrated community-based protection mechanisms into official processes. Additionally, Yappika-ActionAid Indonesia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, plans to scale up the WLCBP model to the national level, which is testament to the model’s effectiveness.

Women, including young women, have been empowered to act as focal points in their village for disaster preparedness, gender-based violence case management and livelihood activities.



Alus, at her small shop in Indonesia.



Scan the QR code to hear from the women leading disaster preparedness efforts in Banten and Central Sulawesi provinces, Indonesia.



This has included:

- The formation of 13 women’s economic collectives with 101 members. The groups have been trained in business management and are running successful businesses. The economic collectives support women’s control over their finances and build their resilience to crisis.
- Supporting 292 people with disability, including 196 women, to participate in an inclusive disaster simulation training so they are prepared and supported when a disaster hits.
- Training women’s groups in domestic violence case referral to assist survivors in accessing services like medical care, psychosocial support, court support and police reporting.

Resourcing women's collective action

Since its inception, the Arise Fund has been empowering women-led movements across the Asia-Pacific to champion a transformative women-led humanitarian and climate action agenda.

Members of Jamorawan Women's Association in a community meeting, The Philippines.

The Philippines

The Philippines is one of the countries in the Asia-Pacific most vulnerable to the worsening impacts of the climate crisis and is among those at highest risks of disasters in the world, according to the 2022 World Risk Index. For women, particularly those living in rural areas, climate change and humanitarian disasters aggravate prevailing gender inequalities – leaving them without access to the resources they need to recover quickly from crisis.

As the climate crisis worsens the risk of disasters, it becomes even more critical to support women to build their leadership skills and resilience to the climate crisis and humanitarian disasters.

In 2016, ActionAid, in partnership with the National Rural Women's Coalition (PKKK), established the Women in Emergencies Network (WENet): an alliance of women's rights organisations that supports and nurtures women's leadership in humanitarian and climate emergencies. This powerful network of women leaders, supported by the Arise Fund, has had a transformational impact on women's leadership in humanitarian responses and climate action in the Philippines.

WENet's approach to upholding and advancing women's rights in emergencies was recognised recently with an award for Best Practice on Gender Mainstreaming in the Environment Sector by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) and NAPC Women Sectoral Council.

This year, WENet's leadership continued with the second Womentarian Summit – a gathering of over 84 women leaders, government officials and civil society organisations from across the Philippines. With support from the Arise Fund, women leaders came together to discuss how women's rights can be supported in times of disaster and how more women can be empowered to take on leadership roles.



In 2023, WENet:

- **Trained 458 people, including women farmers and fishers, Indigenous women, and young people, on gender equality, disaster reduction risk management and climate change adaptation.**
- **Held disaster preparedness and advocacy training for 66 young people from 12 provinces. This training equipped young women and men with the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with decision-makers on disaster reduction risk management, climate change adaptation, and gender equality.**
- **Supported 22 rural women leaders from across the country to develop a national-level emergency call tree to be used as an early warning communication system.**



Roselyn at the 2023 Womanitarian Summit.

Roselyn's story

Roselyn Riopay is a young rural women leader and chairperson of PKKK Negros Occidental – a coalition of 29 local women's organisations.

She reflected on the importance of women's active participation and leadership in times of crisis at the WENet Womanitarian Summit.

“ [Women's] roles do not end within the household. They are also first responders. That is why their participation in disaster risk reduction planning is very important because they know and understand the needs of women in times of disaster. They need to have the opportunity to explore and develop their skills.”

When Tropical Storm Paeng made landfall in November 2022, Roselyn and women members of PKKK Negros Occidental were quick to mobilise, addressing the protection risks facing women, people with disability and the elderly.

“There are many factors adding to the vulnerability of women during crises; for example, in evacuation centres, there were no safe spaces for women, children, or persons with disability. They also do not consider the needs of elderly or persons with disability while transporting them to the centres.”

The women-led team used the knowledge they had learned at ActionAid-run training to coordinate a gender-responsive needs assessment of their community and collected sex-age-disability disaggregated data to inform their emergency response plans.

“The training and seminars on gender [equality] and [disaster risk reduction management] helped me a lot to expand my knowledge, especially working in an emergency situation, and I am happy that I am able to share that with other women in my community.”

Shifting the Power Coalition

The Shifting the Power Coalition (StPC), a unique regional feminist network, brings together women leaders from across six Pacific countries.

The Coalition is a pioneering force behind women-led innovations in humanitarian and climate action and early response to disaster, which was formed with support from the Arise Fund in 2017.

Co-founded by ActionAid, the Coalition now brings together 13 women-led civil society organisations across six Pacific countries to strengthen women's leadership in humanitarian action at the local, national, and regional level, by building the collective power, influence, and leadership of diverse Pacific women.

Over the past eight years, the Coalition has supported 242 women, including 110 young women, to build skills through regional and national training programs on women's leadership in disaster risk reduction and climate action. This has enabled Pacific women to actively lead gender responsive humanitarian efforts during times of crises, engage in local and national disaster coordination, and bring the often-underrepresented perspectives and experiences of women to the decision-making table.

It has facilitated learning exchanges between partners, which have been critical for the development of national women-led early warning mechanism in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Bougainville, Vanuatu, and Tonga. In Vanuatu, the Coalition partner – ActionAid Vanuatu – launched the Women Wetem Weta Platform in 2019, building from a similar model in Fiji, and since then, the platform has become a key part of the Government of Vanuatu's national emergency response plan.

In PNG, the Meri Gat Infomesen, Meri Gat Pawa project (MGI), a joint initiative of ActionAid and StPC, reached over 1.2 million people with COVID-19 prevention, response, and vaccination messages through a national women-led early warning platform.

In Tonga, following the Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in 2022, Coalition partner the Talitha Project launched the Tonga Women's Information Network for Disasters (Tonga WIND), which aims to drive gender equality goals within disaster management and support early preparedness for extreme weather events.

By creating spaces and opportunities for diverse Pacific women to come together and share their knowledge and experiences, the Coalition has helped partners to drive more inclusive community-led approaches to disasters and climate change across the Pacific. This has led to increased leadership from diverse Pacific women in humanitarian responses, and greater visibility and influence in disaster management, which is shifting the power towards women, including young women and women with disability within local, national, and regional humanitarian systems.

Over the next three years, the Coalition will be continuing to lift the voices of diverse Pacific women in national and regional climate advocacy spaces, to deepen the skills of women leaders, particularly young women and women with disability, across the Pacific in disaster response and support partners to quickly respond to humanitarian emergencies.

StPC partners at the official launch of the new Pacific women-led early warning system in Tonga, Tonga Women Information Network 4 Disasters (TongaWIND).



Turning crisis response on its head

Women and girls suffer disproportionately during humanitarian emergencies, which intensify existing gender inequalities and too often undermine women's efforts in recovery. Yet when disasters strike, women are the first to act, often putting their lives on the line to protect others. ActionAid's Arise Fund provides women leading crisis response with the resources they need. In 2023, the Arise Fund supported women-led crisis responses in the Horn of Africa, Türkiye, Syria, Ukraine, and Vanuatu.

Veronika volunteers with ActionAid partner, Insight NGO in Ukraine.



Ukraine

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, millions of people – the majority women and children – have been forced to flee their homes, leaving behind everything they knew.

In a region known for organised trafficking networks, displaced women and girls searching for safety have faced threats to their lives, security, and rights, including an increased risk of gender-based violence, abduction, and sexual exploitation. However, women's protection initiatives remain critically underfunded and under-prioritised by traditional humanitarian actors across the Ukraine response in comparison to the level of need.

As the war in Ukraine shows no signs of ending, the Arise Fund continues to prioritise protecting the rights of women and girls. ActionAid is working alongside 40 women- and youth-led organisations in Poland, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine to develop inclusive and transformative ways of reaching those most in need, including women, girls, sex workers, people with disability and LGBTQI+ communities, while supporting women first responders in the humanitarian response. So far, ActionAid has reached 1.4 million people, including 1.1 million women with humanitarian assistance.

With support from the Arise Fund, ActionAid and eLiberare, a women-led organisation in Romania, have been responding to the protection risks facing Ukrainian women and girls in Romania using the KOMPASS model. The model adopts an individualised approach to protection, focusing on implementing long-term measures that decrease the risks women and girls face on their journey to safety. This survivor-centred approach reduces the risk of trafficking through the creation of individualised safety plans that provide women with access to resources to support them to reach safety, find work and report gender-based violence.

The needs of women and girls displaced by the Ukraine war will persist and upholding women's leadership, dignity and rights is essential.

In 2022, ActionAid Australia's Deputy Head of Programs, Carol Angir visited Romania and Moldova to work alongside partners delivering vital crisis response and protection services for Ukrainian women and girls. "We have consulted with local women's organisations in Romania, in Ukraine itself and Moldova. They provided firsthand information that safety, security and dignity was an issue for women and ActionAid said we will use our capability to support them to come out of this crisis and build their long-term resilience."

"As an organisation, our main focus is supporting women and girls in crisis because often their issues are not supported. Most humanitarian funding is not directed to women and girls but to the generalised response. As a result, we are committed to supporting the safety, dignity, rights of women in crisis."



Through the Arise Fund, ActionAid's women-led emergency response to the Ukraine crisis has:

- Supported 2,503 women and their families with individualised safety plans that helped them to reach safety in Romania and other parts of Europe.
- Responded to the protection and psychosocial needs of 236,034 people.
- Raised awareness of gender-based violence and protection risks among 414,127 people.
- Trained 553 professionals in gender-based violence support, safeguarding, and anti-trafficking.

Türkiye Syria earthquake

On 6 February 2023, south-eastern Türkiye and north-west Syria were struck by two devastating earthquakes, killing more than 50,000 people.

For women and girls living in north-west Syria, the earthquakes further compounded an already dire humanitarian situation, adding untold hardship after 12 years of protracted conflict. Despite facing trauma on top of trauma, women's leadership has been critical in the long road to recovery – with women working in challenging conditions to ensure no one is left behind.

The Arise Fund supported a women-led response led by ActionAid's Arab Region office that provided rapid and flexible support to local partners in north-west Syria, which enabled them to direct funding to where it was needed most. As a result, 6,330 people trapped under collapsed buildings were saved. These efforts built on prior investment in preparedness among young women and men, who were subsequently ready to mobilise when the crisis hit.

ActionAid's response prioritised providing funding to Syrian women-led organisations and supporting the protection of some of the most vulnerable women and girls in a context where early marriages are rife, and discussing gender-based violence is taboo. This included setting up safe spaces for women and providing psychosocial support as well as supporting Syrian women to define and drive their own protection agenda.

Our community- and women-led response to this crisis enabled us to effectively reach 104,788 people affected by the devastating earthquakes. Over 5,275 women have also been able to access lifesaving medical care through ActionAid's support of a local hospital serving 58 temporary camps for Internally Displaced People.

As the recovery from the earthquakes continues, ActionAid will work to support women's leadership in the recovery efforts and build the long-term resilience of communities impacted by more than a decade of conflict.



Zaynab, who lives in an camp for internally displaced people near the hospital funded by ActionAid, is visited by a medical team from partner organisation Violet.



The women-led emergency response included:

- 935 people received multipurpose cash assistance, including 55 female-headed households.
- 2,527 people supported with protection services delivered at four women and girls' safe spaces.
- 6,855 people (77% female) received health services, including maternal and obstetric care, paediatric care, and sexual and reproductive health services.
- 12,129 dignity and hygiene kits distributed to affected communities.
- 38,659 people received food relief through a women-led community kitchen.



Hala, a Violet staff member, works in a safe space for women and children.

Hala's story

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Hala, a 23-year-old law student who works with Violet – an ActionAid partner in north-west Syria – was involved in setting up safe spaces for women and girls affected by the disaster.

The Violet-run safe spaces have supported women experiencing trauma and anxiety by providing mental health support and a safe space for women to gather with their children. The spaces also run awareness raising sessions with women on the prevention of sexual exploitation and women's rights.

In an interview with ActionAid staff, Hala reflected on the untold impact of the earthquake and 12 years of conflict on the mental wellbeing of Syrian women, a large majority of whom are the sole providers for their families, and her role as a first responder in supporting women to recover and find a way forward.

"The centre was opened [by Violet] after the earthquake catastrophe, within a short period, and we started work directly with affected communities, whether kid's activities or [supporting] women and young girls."

"After 12 years of war, women are facing a lot of challenges and difficulties. There are women who lost their breadwinners, became widowers, maybe [got] divorced or all [their] relatives have died. So [these women] became the breadwinners for [their] kids. All of this will impact their mental health."

"There are many people who don't reveal [the problems they are facing] since it is [around] mental [health]. They need trustworthy people to talk to and [to] feel there is a safe space, to [share] what's happening with them, for us to be able to help them to recover and carry on [with] their lives after this catastrophe."

// It's my duty to offer help to people. Because after 12 years of war, it's our duty to help each other, in all difficult circumstances."

ActionAid's Arise Fund trains women leaders like Hala to effectively respond to the protection needs of women and girls in the aftermath of disasters.

90-year-old Amina Yusuf from Xidhint, Somaliland has lived through 12 different droughts.



Horn of Africa

After consecutive failed rainy seasons, millions of people across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are facing acute hunger and growing food insecurity.

The rising cost of living, including increasing food and fuel prices because of the war in Ukraine, has further exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis. Sixty million people are in urgent need, and 13 million have been displaced due to climate change and conflict.

The Horn of Africa food crisis has disproportionately impacted women and girls, with increased violence against women, maternal mortality and unpaid work increasing, as well as a growing number of women reporting they are forced to resort to sex work to survive. As a result, the Arise Fund has prioritised women's participation, leadership and decision-making in the drought and conflict response and recovery.

In Kenya, the Arise Fund enabled ActionAid to organise women-led disaster management committees and resilience-building training, which supported women to discuss and plan a drought response that responds to their specific needs and priorities. Women-led community-based protection forums also supported women to identify and define threats to their safety and rights.

“I have seen first-hand how women and girls can transform their communities when given the opportunity. That opportunity must come now. We need to invest in the leadership of women before, during and after a crisis”, says Susan Otieno, Executive Director, ActionAid Kenya.



In Kenya, our women-led response included:

- 104,947 people, including 65,331 women, reached with humanitarian assistance.
- 12,988 households provided with assistance through unconditional cash transfers.
- 25 forums conducted on women-led community-based protection, where women identified protection threats and developed response plans, and 36 forums for girls to discuss protection issues.

Afghanistan

Thank you to those who supported our Afghanistan appeal. This is one of the most challenging contexts globally for women and girls, who are also facing a dire humanitarian crisis with one third of the population currently facing hunger. ActionAid continues to prioritise protection and humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable. If you would like to know more about our response and ways you can support, please get in touch.



The importance of partnership in crisis

ActionAid established the Arise Fund to scale up efforts to support women around the world to prepare for and respond to emergencies. The fund expands the opportunities for women's leadership in disasters and conflict from immediate response to long-term recovery and supports women-led efforts to ensure rights are protected.

ActionAid is extremely fortunate to have the support of incredible partners who have helped ensure that women on the frontline of crises around the world are empowered to lead. We would like to extend a special thank you to the individuals, foundations and organisations who mobilised quickly when multiple disasters hit and invested in women's leadership throughout the year to prepare for these crises.

QBE-funded training

The Arise Fund is supported by several organisations, including the QBE Foundation, whose vital funding is creating tangible change in the lives of women affected by crises.

In May 2023, ActionAid Vanuatu, with funding from the Arise Fund and the QBE Foundation's Local Grants Program, held a Women Led Preparedness training with 17 women leaders, including women with disability, from Malo and Malekula islands.

Through participating in the training on the island of Santo, one of the WITTT members, Rachel learnt skills that will support her community to be better prepared for climate disaster.

"After these two days of training, we will get back to our communities, and then we'll carry awareness about what we did here. Then we will develop our community disaster response plan. For example, we will advocate for disability inclusion in evacuation centres and in communities... so that when we have any disaster, we don't leave anyone behind," says Rachel.

WITTT Network members have already taken new skills back to their communities, to ensure women are better prepared for climate disasters. ActionAid's train-the-trainer model, where women are provided with the tools to share new skills and knowledge with others in the community, means that this initial training of 17 women leaders will have a ripple effect supporting over 500 diverse women to be trained over the next six months.

Australian Aid program

Together the Australian Aid Program and the Arise Fund are supporting multi-year programs in the Philippines, Vanuatu, the Pacific, Indonesia, and Kenya to advance women's leadership in responding to climate disasters and protect women's rights and safety.

Every dollar contributed by donors through the Arise Fund is matched by the Australian Government with four dollars through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.

On behalf of all of us at ActionAid and the women we work with, thank you so much for your generosity this year! Thanks to you, ActionAid was able to support thousands more women to rise up and lead during times of crisis.

From Vanuatu to Kenya, Syria to the Philippines, and Ukraine to Indonesia, ActionAid's Arise Fund has continued to advance women's rights in emergencies and resource women on the frontlines of crisis to prepare, respond and build resilience.

We are so grateful for your incredible support, without which none of this would be possible.



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QBE Foundation
The Roberts Pike Foundation
The Sky Foundation

Organisations

GreenCollar
MECCA M-POWER
The Generations Foundation

Arise Leadership Circle

The Arise Leadership Circle is a group of incredible women leaders who are committed to transformational change for women across the world.

Angela Priestley, Founding Editor, Women's Agenda
Arielle Gamble, CEO and Co-founder, Groundswell Giving
Janette O'Neill, Partner and Chief Sustainability Officer, PwC
Jo Norman, Philanthropy Manager, Norman Family Foundation
Kristina Stefanova (Chair), Co-founder, Bundaleer Sustainable Investments
Lauren Hicks, Head of Social Impact, QBE Insurance
Lisa Keenan, Executive Director, MECCA M-POWER
Sarah Morton-Ramwell, Partner and Global Head of Pro Bono and Social Impact, Ashurst

Atiyah in her village
in Indonesia.



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