

Women leading change.

ARISE FUND
NEWSLETTER
May 2025



Members from Tanna celebrate the launch of Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) as a federation.
ActionAid Vanuatu

Thank you for standing with women leading crisis response around the world. As our global community continues to face compounding challenges—from the Vanuatu earthquake just before Christmas to the devastating 7.7 magnitude quake in Myanmar this March and ongoing conflict in Gaza – your support has never been more vital.

At the same time, international aid cuts, including the recent suspension of USAID funding, are leaving millions of women and girls without lifesaving support. In a world where the UN warns it could take 300 years to achieve gender equality, your ongoing commitment to the Arise Fund is helping women rise up, lead crisis response, and strengthen their communities' resilience to climate change. We're so grateful to share this latest newsletter on the impact you're making possible.

Read inside:

Impact updates from
Vanuatu, Myanmar, Gaza,
Uganda and Kenya
Arise events

SINCE 2017:

 **\$12.9m**

has been raised which has enabled over 38,200 women to be trained in preparing for and leading in times of crisis reaching over 4.12 million people.



For every dollar you donate to the Arise Fund, the Australian Government will match it with \$4 through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

**arise**

Women leading
crisis response.

act:onaid



Women leading disaster response

Women impacted by the earthquake are met with emergency support from the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) network. *ActionAid Vanuatu*

Vanuatu earthquake response

It's been over five months since a powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake devastated Port Vila, in December 2024, claiming 14 lives and affecting over 80,000 people.

This comes after three destructive cyclones that ripped through the country in 2023, pushing the people of Vanuatu into an almost perpetual state of crisis response and recovery.

Thanks to your generous support, emergency relief has reached 3,835 people, including:

- **3,835 people** reached with food relief in seven communities
- **356 women** provided with dignity kits
- **272 people with disabilities** reached with targeted support
- **50 women** provided with protection training

Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT), a women-led network supported by ActionAid, was among the first responders – delivering water, food, and dignity kits to some of the most vulnerable community members. One responder shared, “Many lit up with smiles and felt comforted by the support.” ActionAid’s earthquake response has supported women with disabilities to co-lead response efforts, empowering them to reach other people with disabilities, widows and single mothers.

There’s still a long way to go as families recover from the trauma and get their livelihoods back on track.



Thanks to your generous support, emergency relief has reached 3,835 people



Buildings destroyed in the city of Mandalay. Zaw Win Naing/ActionAid

Myanmar earthquake

On 28th March 2025, a devastating 7.7 scale earthquake in Myanmar affected over 17 million people with nearly nine million close to the epicentre facing the worst impacts.

Thousands have lost their lives, while many more are displaced and in urgent need of food, clean water, healthcare, and shelter. With the ongoing civil conflict and the monsoon season approaching, the crisis is intensifying. Thanks to the generous support of donors so far, ActionAid has been supporting local partners in Mandalay, Sagaing and Inle regions to respond to the crisis by providing food, water, dignity kits, multi-purpose cash assistance, as well as setting up shelters and community kitchens.

Your support has helped provide:

- **600 people** with dignity kits
- **3,247 people** with access to clean drinking water
- **4,447 people** with food relief
- **600 people** with shelter

Women stronger together in Gaza

Eighteen months on and the bombing and destruction of Gaza continues to have a devastating impact on women and their families who have endured constant fear and displacement.

From blockades preventing critical, life-saving aid from reaching people in desperate need of food and water and broken ceasefires to constant bombings of hospitals, schools and shelters. Amongst this turmoil, women have been working together.

Shurooq, a 31-year-old mother, has been living in an overcrowded shelter since October 2023, after fleeing her home in northern Gaza. When Shurooq thinks back to first arriving at the shelter, she can only recall the state of shock she was in:

“There was screaming, and I did not know how to act... I don’t remember now how I slept or where I slept. Or was I awake, or asleep, or crying?”

A resilient community of women also displaced in the shelter quickly became a lifeline for Shurooq, stepping in when everyday tasks like preparing meals and washing clothes seemed impossible.

“Women support each other. These were new things to me. I did not know how to light a fire, nor how to cook on fire. I did not know how to knead or bake. There was an aunt who would come and teach me: put the yeast like this, put the dough here.”

Shurooq also found mental health support and learned new skills to cope with her trauma through the Palestinian Women’s Union, a women’s group supported by ActionAid.



Shurooq, a mother displaced in Gaza. Wattan Media Network/ ActionAid



Young women in Gaza participate in first aid and security training. *ActionAid*

We are so thankful to the generosity of our supporters

Your generosity is providing hope and dignity to women and their families living through dire conditions in Gaza. It's been a huge effort, but with your support we've provided over **464,000 displaced people with life-saving relief** so far. You've helped feed and shelter families, deliver dignity kits to women and keep medical services running – including those for pregnant women, new mothers and infants. We are incredibly grateful for your unwavering support.



You have helped:

- **222,363 people** have received food distributions in Gaza and West Bank
- **47,458 people** have been able to access water, sanitation and hygiene services
- **8,559 women and children** received protection services and **650 children** were supported through wellbeing activities in Deir Al-Balah and Al Nusairat.
- **2,000 women** survivors and **2,000 children** in Gaza City and the Middle Area were supported with trauma counselling.
- About **5,500 children** had access to education through Hope festivals in Rafah led by the youth group in Gaza.
- **70,000 people** have been reached with health/medical service at Al Nuseirat hospital and in Rafah.
- **2,000 people** have been provided with shelter support in El Mawasi and Rafah.



Women Leading Change in Vanuatu

The disability arm, WITTT Sunshine network, parade through Port Vila. ActionAid Vanuatu

Celebrating a women's climate movement

In a milestone moment last November, ActionAid Vanuatu officially launched the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) Federation. This locally-led women's forum brings together over 9,000 women across five islands in Vanuatu to support women's leadership in response to climate change and disasters.

Women travelled for many hours from all over Vanuatu to share how WITTT has changed their lives and communities, creating increased resilience to climate change and disasters. They marched through Port Vila to show their solidarity with women around the country and to celebrate their achievements through Women I Tok Tok Tugeta! The streets in Port Vila filled with laughter, cheer, an array of colourful traditional clothing, song and dance as women and men made their way up to the Vanuatu National Convention Centre for the official launch of the federation.

Vanuatu's First Lady Rima Vurobaravu, Australian High Commissioner H.E. Max Willis and British High Commissioner H.E. Nicolette Brent spoke at the launch, along with ActionAid International Secretary-General Arthur Larok.

Women's leadership in disaster response through the WITTT network has resulted in a woman leader being appointed to the Chief's Council in Erromango, as well as women's early warning efforts that now reach 40% of the population being at the centre of the National Emergency Operations Centre.



Flora Vano, ActionAid Vanuatu Country Manager, shared:

"When I first met these women, no one dared to make a comment. Now, you can't stop these women in a meeting room—they are on fire."

Empowering women on the frontlines of peacebuilding

The African Women Voices for Peace project, supported by the Judith Neilson Foundation and Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT), is a regional initiative led by ActionAid that is also mobilising women in conflict-affected areas of Uganda and Kenya.

The program strengthens women's leadership and participation in peace building and conflict resolution by creating national and regional platforms that foster collective action. It equips women with knowledge of their rights and the tools to engage in advocacy, peacebuilding and community engagement.

A key focus of the program is addressing the immediate needs of women impacted by conflict—particularly survivors of gender-based violence—through access to protection services, healthcare, and livelihood training. Women also receive support to deliver community-based mental health and trauma care.

By empowering women as advocates and leaders, the project is not only amplifying their voices but also ensuring women are at the forefront of building more inclusive, just, and peaceful communities across the region.

Judith Neilson Foundation team members Titus Gwemende and Jade Thinault recently visited Kenya and Uganda to meet with community women involved in this project as well as the local ActionAid teams. In Nairobi, they sat down with a delegation from Baringo who had travelled to share their work advancing peace and accountability in their communities.

"The women we met are leading across multiple fronts, from local peace negotiations and peer support to national advocacy and international dialogue," said Titus Gwemende.

Jade added, **"Their work is closely tied to the realities they face—land conflict, insecurity, gaps in services—but also to the possibilities they're creating. The strategies they're using are clear, coordinated, and focused on lasting change."**

We extend our sincere thanks to the Judith Neilson Foundation and DFAT for their multi-year support in advancing women-led peacebuilding and justice in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Titus Gwemende and Jade Thinault meeting with community women leaders and ActionAid staff in Nairobi. *ActionAid*



Women growing a stronger future

Supported by the Australian Ethical's Visionary Grant, the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta network built the resilience of 300 smallholder women farmers in Malo, including women with disabilities. Women are growing crops using traditional and climate-resilient techniques and selling them at markets. Introducing the model of creating three gardens – one for the household, one for the community and one for resilience, food is grown for household use, market sale, and community disaster preparedness.

The project has resulted in:

- Increased income and food security
- Improved household nutrition
- Decreased gender-based violence and juvenile theft
- Enhanced inclusion of women with disabilities.

"This project is very important to me because we still have people starving. Sometimes a family might have 1 or 2 meals a day... I encourage three gardens for our members. During peace time, we sell the produce and keep the funds for disaster preparedness. The produce will also be included in the response for sisters that have no gardens. I am happy because this project will help us work together in terms of teamwork. This is a space where we can share our own experience and make it happen."

Rosita Usa,
WITT Community
Mobiliser



Turning Trivia into Impact

Hosted by Arise Leadership Circle members Kristina Stefanova and Janette O'Neill, with the fabulous comedian Nikki Britton as MC and quizmaster, our recent trivia night brought people together for an unforgettable evening of fun, laughter, and purpose. Guests enjoyed great food, drinks, and lively competition—all in support of the Arise Fund and women leading through crisis.

Thanks to the generosity of our community, \$10,000 was raised to help train more community women leaders. A heartfelt thank you to our incredible host and prize sponsors including MECCA, WerriBerri Cottages, Soul Agenda, Twig and Vine, The Chai Room, and Verve Portraits.



Run for women's rights

Join our team and run the City2Surf this year to raise vital funds for women's rights. Every step you take will help women to build better futures for themselves, their families and communities.

Contact us today on **1300 66 66 72** or email **supporter.au@actionaid.org** to find out how you can register for free and receive a t-shirt! Join us and run or walk to empower women and change the world. Registrations are now open!



A training session for women on installing home solar systems.
ActionAid Vanuatu

Making change. Not waiting for it.

The goal of the Arise movement is to empower one million women around the world to lead their communities in times of crisis.

You are a vital part of this movement and together we are creating change in women's lives. Every time you donate to Arise, you empower women to transform their communities.

DONATE HERE



Can support **250 women** affected by disasters with dignity kits, containing soap, sanitary pads and other hygiene items



Will invest in **20 women leaders** over a 12 month period to build skills in disaster preparedness and replicate training with another **400 women**



Can provide rapid response funding to support women to lead an emergency response when disaster strikes and ensure the protection of women's rights from the outset

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