

Women leading change.

ARISE FUND
NEWSLETTER
May 2026



Rising together: Women leading on climate action

Members of the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta network in Vanuatu.
ActionAid Vanuatu

Around the world, millions of women are rising to meet the challenges of our time – leading climate action, rebuilding communities and forging peace where it's needed most. This is why the Arise Fund exists.

The impacts of climate change are real and unequally shared. Women bear the greatest burden because existing inequalities are deepened when disasters occur. Fires, floods, freezing temperatures are destroying livelihoods and women's economic independence, depleting natural resources that women have responsibilities in sourcing and exacerbating issues like gender-based violence – yet it is women who are leading the response.

With your support, the Arise Fund is putting resources directly into the hands of women already changing the world.

In this edition, read about:

- Up close with Arise – a Vanuatu immersion
- Women building peace in Africa
- Healing through climate action in Indonesia
- Making waves in marine conservation
- News from the Arise Leadership Circle
- Comedian Nikki Britton raises the roof and funds with Trivia
- Frocking Hilarious is back!

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Women leading
crisis response.

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Up close with Arise – a Vanuatu immersion



Michelle Higelin, Justine Cullen, Helen Bong, Sophie Ford, Sarah Morton-Ramwell, Anna Cerneaz, Flora Vano, Anne Pike, Jenny Ainsworth, Emma Wanchap, Betty and Clare Ainsworth Herschell at the Arise reflection dinner. *ActionAid Vanuatu*

Vanuatu is only three hours from Sydney, yet women there are delivering babies by the light of a phone torch, walking home from markets in the dark, and rebuilding communities after cyclones that is largely unseen by the rest of the world.

Last August, ActionAid invited a small group of women to Vanuatu for a rare opportunity to witness the Arise Fund's work firsthand. Anna Cerneaz, Managing Director of the Graeme Wood Foundation and Chair of Groundswell Giving, shared her reflections of the trip. "The first thing that struck me was that ActionAid listens to the local women's needs and invests in their leadership rather than importing predetermined solutions" said Anna. She met Annette, a 23-year-old single mother trained to install and maintain solar power for her village. "That's not aid," Anna reflects. "That's investment in leadership."

Anna also saw the power of Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) – a women's network with over 10,000 members who operate an early warning system across 5,000 mobile numbers before disaster strikes and are also the first ones on the ground in the aftermath. "It's women calling women and that's what genuine community-led work looks like. We don't need to arrive with answers," Anna says, "we need to show up consistently, behind work that's already proven it works."

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Anna Cerneaz, Managing Director of the Graeme Wood Foundation and Chair of Groundswell Giving



Women take part in the African Women’s Voices for Peace training of trainers. ActionAid

Women building peace in Africa

Across Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), women have long borne the heaviest burden of conflict but their voices have too often been excluded from peace building efforts.

ActionAid’s African Women’s Voices for Peace program, supported by the Arise Fund through investment from the Judith Neilson Foundation and the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) is changing that. In just 18 months, 4,350 women have gained skills in advocacy, peace negotiations, trauma healing and economic resilience - with their impact reaching nearly 25,000 people across their communities.

Women are now joining local peace committees, influencing policy and shaping peacebuilding efforts with the power of their lived experience.

In January, women leaders from all four countries reflected on progress and co-designed the program’s next phase, shaping a roadmap built on protection, economic empowerment, advocacy and movement building.

For Sarah Martin Jerop, a survivor of gender-based violence and displacement from Baringo, Kenya, the program opened up a path from survivor to international advocate. “Peace starts from you,” Sarah says, “then you can impact the community.”



4,350 women have participated directly, with their knowledge benefitting nearly 25,000 people in their communities.





Healing through climate action in Indonesia

For over a decade, violent conflict between Christians and Muslims tore through Poso, Indonesia – leaving more than 1,000 dead and communities deeply divided.

For the past three years, Yappika-ActionAid Indonesia, with support from the Arise Fund and DFAT, has worked with local partners to heal those fractures by bringing Christian and Muslim women together, building cohesion through climate resilient livelihoods and developing inclusive disaster preparation plans. Young people are also engaged through the project, to ensure the next generation is committed to peace and sustainable livelihoods.

The project has also trained paralegals to respond to cases of violence against women and children, which spike in times of crisis. When crops fail, families fall into debt. And it is often daughters who pay the price – pulled from school and pushed into early marriage to repay the loan sharks. Paralegals are intervening in these cases, connecting the girls, who are often exposed to a life of violence, to counselling and traditional courts services.

This project is a powerful example of what investing in women's leadership delivers: less violence, stronger communities, greater climate resilience and lasting peace.



Making waves in marine conservation

In Vanuatu, one of the world's most disaster-prone nations, coastal communities depend on healthy marine ecosystems to survive. Now, with support from Groundswell and the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust, women from the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta (WITTT) network are stepping up as powerful guardians of the ocean.

Trained in coral and mangrove ecosystems, sustainable fishing and climate impacts, women on the small islands of Uri and Uripiv (to the north of Malekula) are updating community marine management plans, replanting coral and mangroves, and installing devices to support sustainable fishing – blending traditional knowledge with modern conservation practices.

The impact of this project extends beyond the water. In a significant milestone, the program has secured endorsement from male community leaders resulting in a formalised memorandum of understanding between WITTT and local chiefs – increasing the likelihood that marine protections will hold over the long-term.

Women with disabilities are also among those leading this work – a testament to the program's commitment to inclusion.

When women lead, ecosystems recover, resilience grows and entire communities thrive.

News from the Arise Leadership Circle



Farren Williams



Sarah Morton-Ramwell

The Arise Leadership Circle brings together bold, visionary women who use their influence and networks to supercharge investment in women-led disaster response and climate resilience.

We are delighted to welcome Farren Williams, Senior Advisor & Partner at Koda Capital in Melbourne, to the Arise Leadership Circle. Farren has over 23 years of experience in investment, wealth management, governance and integrating philanthropy into wealth planning.

“What drew me most to the Arise Leadership Circle was the community-based approach that supports women to take leadership roles, prepare for climate disasters, design solutions and have an equal say in decisions that affect their communities,” says Farren.

Whilst we welcome Farren, we say farewell and thank you to Sarah Morton-Ramwell, Partner and Global Head of Pro Bono and Social Impact at Ashurst. Sarah has been a fierce advocate for ActionAid and the Arise Fund over the last seven years.

“It has been a great pleasure to be on the Arise Leadership Circle since visiting Vanuatu with ActionAid in 2019”, Sarah said. “The stories of women and their successes in the face of ongoing natural disasters inspired me greatly. **The experience has shown me how empowering women through a climate change lens, accelerates success in both gender equality and disaster preparation, response and recovery.**”

Nikki Britton raises the roof and funds with trivia

Comedian Nikki Britton hosted another huge Arise Fund trivia night, that raised an incredible \$12,500 for the Arise Fund to scale up the investment in women’s leadership. Thank you to everyone who attended and the winning bidders of our live auction.

We sincerely thank our event organiser Kristina Stefanova and sponsors Pure Foundation and Canva Space, and our auction prize donors – Verve Photography, Werriberri Cottages, Lyrebird Festival of Nature, Sydney Writers’ Festival, Blue Mountains Writer’s Festival, Harris Farm, Moore Park Golf Course, Dryridge Estate, Nikki Britton and Groundswell for this incredible result.

Do you want to host an Arise Fundraiser Trivia event? [Get in touch](#) for our Arise Trivia Fundraiser Kit today.



Frocking Hilarious is back with our all-women comedy gala



ActionAid's Frocking Hilarious comedy showcase is back again as part of Sydney and Brisbane Comedy Festivals.

Come along to see a huge all-women comedy lineup, hosted by the fabulous Clare Hooper, all in support of ActionAid's work with women around the world.

Come along for a Frocking good time!

Sydney

6:30pm
Sunday 10 May
Enmore Theatre,
Newtown

Book your tickets [here](#)

Brisbane

3:00pm
Saturday 16 May
Powerhouse Theatre,
New Farm

Book your tickets [here](#)



Women I Tok Tok Tugeta march together on Human Rights Day in Port Vila. Harriet Pratten

Together we are making change. Not waiting for it.

Every time you donate to the Arise Fund, you empower women around the world to lead and transform their communities.

DONATE HERE

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