

**META EVALUATION OF ACTIONAID'S  
WORK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
SHIFTING POWER IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

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## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .....	4
2. KEY FINDINGS .....	5
2.1. WHAT WE DO WELL .....	7
2.2. WHAT WE DO LESS WELL.....	10
2.2.1. IMPLICATIONS AND FACTORS DRIVING LIMITED RESULTS ON SOCIAL NORMS .....	11
2.2.2. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS.....	12
3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	17

## ACRONYMS

AA ActionAid

UCW Unpaid Care Work

DFID Department for International Development

FLOW Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women programme

HRBA Human Rights-Based Approach

LRP Local rights programme

MAM Mahila Adhikar Manch

SO1 Strategic Objective 1–livelihoods and access to natural resources

SO5 Strategic Objective 5–violence against women and economic justice

TOC Theory of Change

VAWG Violence against Women and Girls

YUW Young Urban Women programme

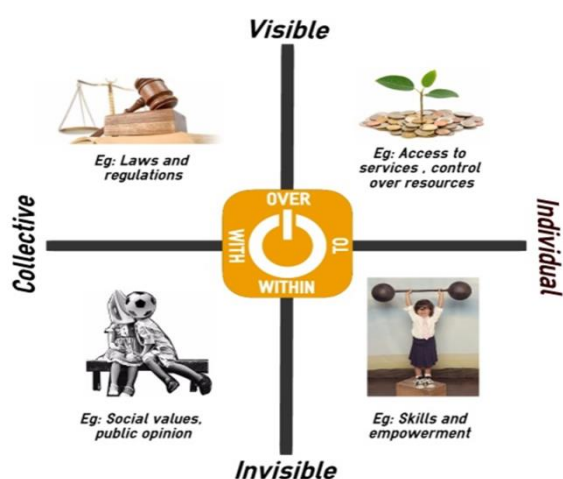
## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper summarizes the findings and recommendations of a review<sup>1</sup> of ten evaluations of our women's rights programmes in Strategic Objective 1 (SO1) –livelihoods and access to natural resources- and Strategic Objective 5 (SO5) –violence against women and economic justice<sup>2</sup>. The review was funded by the DFID Programme Partnership Agreement grant. The review is part of a larger project exploring ActionAid's contribution to power shifts in favour of women.<sup>3</sup> The meta-review aims to provide AA with evidence about what has worked and what has not and to make recommendations on approaches AA should continue or change to maximize women's empowerment, improving the quality of AA's programming.

The review aimed to answer three questions:

- *What forms of power do our programmes aim to shift?*
- *How do the results we achieve align to the different forms of power?*
- *How did these changes happen? What was AA's contribution?*

The review used a **framework to help analyse and understand power shifts** in terms of changes achieved by and for women and girls.



The framework presents four different dimensions of power. Sustainable change on women's rights is achieved if changes occur in all of these four dimensions. The framework enables changes to be looked at in a dynamic and relational way. The four different dimensions are:

- **Individual and invisible:** usually identified as 'power within'. This describes a sense of confidence as a result of women gaining awareness of their situation and realising that they can do something about it. Examples are improved self-awareness, skills, capacity and knowledge.
- **Individual and visible:** similar to 'power to'. This dimension is about being able to act. It can be triggered by self-awareness and it can grow through taking action but also through developing skills and capacities. It can translate into women accessing services or formally controlling resources.
- **Collective and visible:** this dimension relates to forms of power that are evident in public spaces or formal decision making bodies. Examples are formal laws or written regulations, changes in organizations, such as new budgets, departments, systems or structures. Depending on the context, these can empower women or organizations to claim a right that formally exists or hold governments or corporates to account.
- **Collective and invisible:** this dimension relates to the ways in which women's awareness of rights are hidden under dominant ideologies, values and forms of behaviour adopted by

<sup>1</sup> For those who are interested, a longer version is also available.

<sup>2</sup> SO1: EC Women's rights to land, FLOW, Food for Thought, Rights to Action, From Household Food Security to Women's Empowerment, EC Strengthening Women's Collectives ; SO5: Safe Cities Campaign, Irish Aid WR Programme, Reflect Circle in Hebron, Breaking the Silence of Violence (BRAVE) programme, and Young Urban Women Programme.

<sup>3</sup> Please see Delgado, M, Guijarro, D, Otero, E. (2016) Evaluation of ActionAid work on Women's Rights.

[https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/evaluation\\_of\\_actionaids\\_work\\_on\\_womens\\_rights.pdf](https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/evaluation_of_actionaids_work_on_womens_rights.pdf)

communities and societies in general. Women internalize their powerlessness without realising the role played by unwritten social expectations. Examples are social norms and collective behaviours. Work to change attitudes and behaviours is usually an entry point to improve this situation.

The review mapped changes achieved in the programmes in relation to the four quadrants of the framework, as well analysing which approaches taken by AA and partners had been effective in influencing these changes. The report includes a review of external work on changing social norms to identify effective approaches and provide AA ideas on furthering its work on social norm change.

The paper aims to share the review findings, identify implications for AA's methodological approach to women's rights and elicit reflections on how to improve our work on women's rights.

The next section presents the key findings of the review. This is followed by conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS

Overall, our programmes were successful in increasing women's invisible individual power, their **self-esteem and confidence, building their knowledge about their rights, legislation and their entitlements**. Women gained **practical skills that enabled them to generate income**. They also learned effective negotiation and communication skills. They started to change their own conception about gender roles and norms, and questioned the normalisation of VAWG.

Women also gained visible power by **participating in income generation activities**, gaining access to land and earning more income. This also increased their bargaining and decision-making power in the household and in the community. Changes in government services and policies were found mainly at the local level. *(See illustrations on p.6 for a summary of changes achieved by women in SO1 and SO5 programmes)*

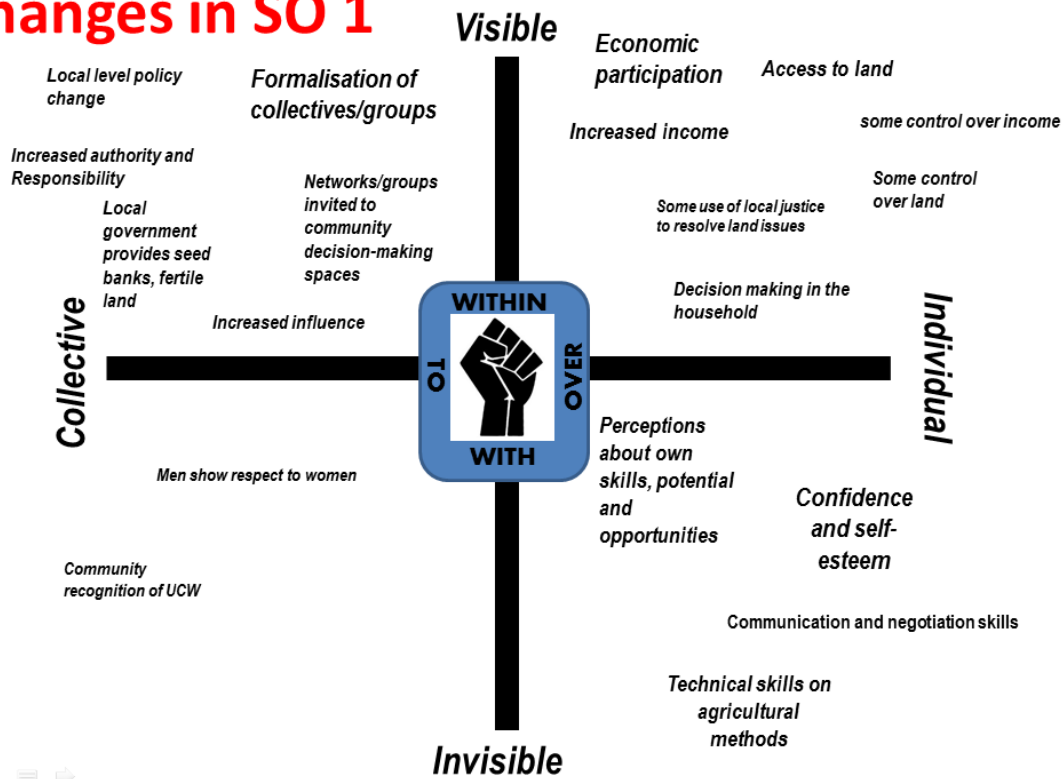
AA's approach of working with **collectives was effective in building women's skills and opportunities for economic participation. This was particularly useful when combined with awareness of human rights and women's empowerment**. The use of **time diaries** contributed to results on the recognition *(and to some extent reduction and redistribution)* of unpaid care work (UCW).

However, our work was **less good at shifting the invisible and collective power of social norms about women's role**. Progress was less consistent where husbands and others had to change their attitudes and behaviours, for instance on women's ownership and control over assets. This shows that changes in norms about gender roles were limited.

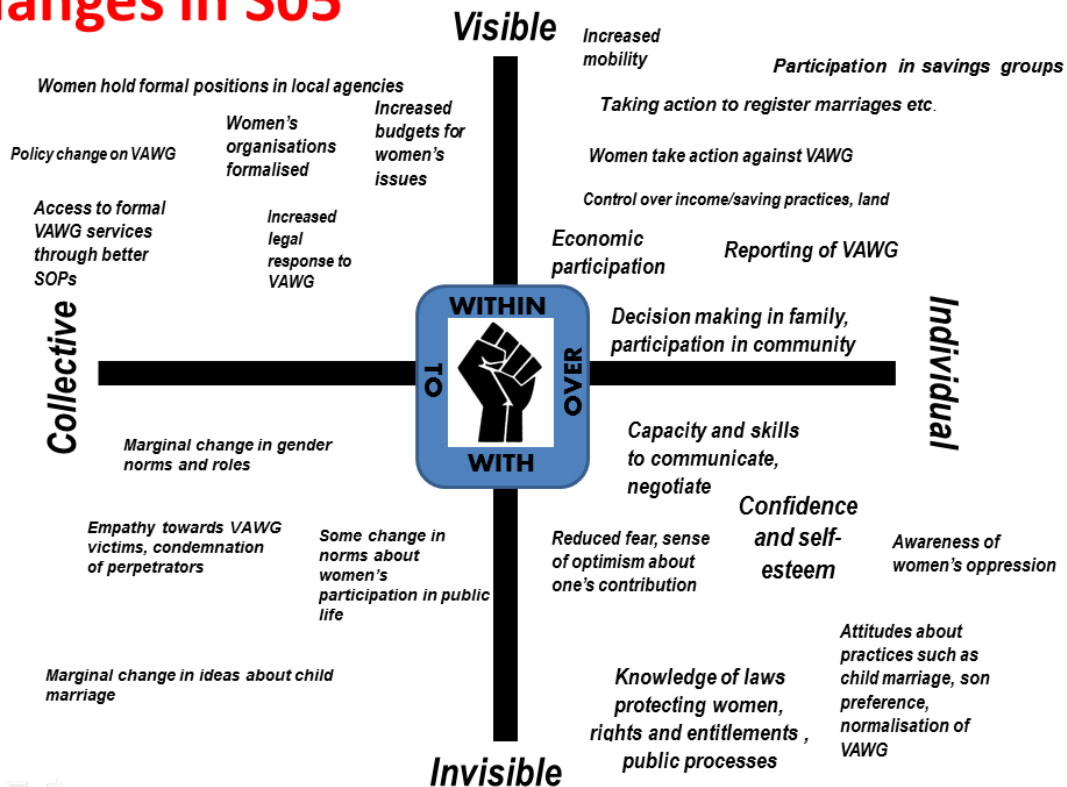
These findings suggest that AA's programmes may be failing to deliver transformational change on the ground. Perhaps unintentionally, our HRBA has led us to work on citizen-state relations, focusing on individual women, and changes in government policy and services. This approach has not given sufficient attention to the importance of working with the wider community and decision-makers on changing social norms that often sustain the harmful practices we seek to eradicate. **The review recommends that AA should consider how it can deepen impact in the area of social norms** in order to maximise chances to deliver transformational change for women and girls.

The figures overleaf illustrate changes under the four different dimensions of power in SO1 programmes-access to natural resources and SO5-violence against women.

# Changes in SO 1



# Changes in S05



## 2.1. WHAT WE DO WELL

The following sections present the strategies that were effective across programmes and the results these generated.

**EMPOWERING WOMEN** training women and working with them through REFLECT builds women's confidence, increases their knowledge of rights and builds soft and technical skills. This increases women's participation in decision-making in the family and community.

Women gained 'power within' – or the invisible individual power. The findings demonstrate how 'power within' and the visible 'power to' are interlinked and reinforce each other.

**Programmes contributed to increasing women's self-confidence, awareness of their rights, and knowledge of their oppression.** They improved women's negotiation, communication and problem solving skills. They also improved skills relating to economic activities and agriculture (particularly in SO1). In turn, knowledge and skills gave women more social capital, increasing their self-esteem.

**Increased confidence and skills enabled women to challenge male decision making.** Women started making decisions about their lives: a substantial majority of women in Young Urban Women (YUW) programme countries started to take control over their sexuality and reproduction – e.g. marriage and family planning.

**SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT** Skills building and the provision of livelihoods opportunities increases women's economic participation. It also builds their self-esteem, and increases their bargaining power in the household.

Interventions that support women's economic empowerment tackle all forms and dimensions of power at the individual and collective level. The biggest shifts in power occurred in cases where women were able to control the land or their income or make decisions about their lives and bodies. The findings suggest that this was still not the case with most of the women AA works with.

**Training on new technology, agronomic practices and production increased women's knowledge and contributed to their economic participation and diversified livelihoods.** Most of the changes in SO1 showed increased participation in economic activities. However, the quality of women's work did not always change. Women still engaged in work that did not '*suggest an improved quality of life or more dignity or high income: working as construction labourers, cleaners in offices, etc.*'<sup>4</sup> In isolated cases, women started to work in traditionally male occupations like fishing<sup>5</sup>. This suggests a shift in women's own norms related to 'women's work'.

**Increased income was common in SO1 programmes.** Increased productivity, diversified income sources and assets enabled women to increase their income. In some cases, this led to economic self-sufficiency and security. Sometimes increases in income were significant. The *Food for Thought*

<sup>4</sup> Pillai, M. 2016 (a) *Outcomes Assessment for 'Strengthening Women Collectives in Bangladesh, India and Nepal'*, 2013 – 2016. Supported by European Commission. p.144.

<sup>5</sup> 14% of women surveyed in the EC collectives programme in India reported undertaking deep sea fishing.

programme reported increases between USD 10 -USD 100 in monthly farmer household income. However, gender differences had not decreased and men in all project locations continued to earn the most. Vulnerable groups (for instance HIV/AIDS affected) still reported lower incomes. This indicates that the barriers to their economic participation (i.e. social norms) had not shifted sufficiently, or that vulnerable groups had not gained 'power within' or 'to'.

**Women controlled only portions of their income, while men continued to make most financial decisions.** Country context and local culture influenced this greatly. This suggests that the norms about who makes decisions about money had not changed '*it is not considered legitimate for women to have any money*'.<sup>6</sup> The invisible power of social norms still influences women's ability to make decisions about spending in the household. It may be that programmes did not use sufficient gender and power analysis to understand how to change these social norms.

**Women's access (but not control) to land had increased in all SO1 programmes.** Appeals to local decision makers for land were often made on needs (rather than rights) arguments. In FLOW in Ghana, chiefs granted women's groups land '*as long as their interest in the land was subsistence*'.<sup>7</sup> In Rwanda, '*women's right of access and use was always guaranteed, although viewed as subordinate to the men's*'.<sup>8</sup> Women's control of land was also influenced by national policy. For instance, in the EC Land Rights programme women gained access and legal control over land in Andhra Pradesh and Sierra Leone, but less so in Guatemala due to a lack of an enabling policy framework. Again, social norms about women's right to own and control land continued to limit their power.

**Women's improved economic status and social capital gave them bargaining and decision-making power in the household.** Women's economic contribution led to increased respect and recognition from the family and community in both SO1 and SO5 programmes. This built their power to act, and to make the first steps in influencing social norms governing women's participation in decision making. '*Economic empowerment was consistently found to be the most important determinant that influenced the change in power dynamics between women and their husbands and in relation to other family members in the household.*'<sup>9</sup> All SO1 evaluations referred to women's increased participation in household decision-making on issues such as land, children's education and contraception. However, in most cases men still made significant decisions concerning assets and management of farms. Women instead contributed to day-to-day and less significant decisions.

**Economic empowerment drove women's political participation and vice versa.** Women's political participation and women's economic empowerment are strongly linked: "*As the women smallholder farmers gained political consciousness, they realised the importance of economic empowerment.*"; "*The women also realised that without economic empowerment, it was difficult to gain political empowerment*".<sup>10</sup> This shows how women's visible individual 'power to' starts to influence collective forms of power.

**Women and their families benefited from increased food security and nutritional status.** Increased income enabled women to pay for school fees and health insurance<sup>11</sup>. In some cases women's health improved due to reduced drudgery and workload<sup>12</sup>. However, even if women ate more because

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<sup>6</sup> Pionetti, C. and Bilgi, M. *The Long Road from Household Food Security to Women's Empowerment: Signposts from Bangladesh and The Gambia*.p.16

<sup>7</sup> Kandyomunda, B, Morales, V C, Millard, A S, (2015) *Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods, 2012 – 2015, End of Project Evaluation Report. (FLOW project)* Nordic Consulting Group and Policy Research Group. P.52

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Dyer, S, Matiko, C. (2016) 2016 Evaluation Report, 'Food for Thought, Rights for Action', 2011 – 2016. P.51.

<sup>10</sup> Kandyomunda, B, Morales, V C, Millard, A S, (2015) Op.cit. p.30

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. and Pillai, M. 2016 Op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Pionetti, C. and Bilgi, M. Op cit.



more food was available, they still ate last, suggesting limited change in the invisible dimension of collective gendered norms<sup>13</sup>.

**Women's increased economic contribution tended to improve relationships between husbands and wives, though not in all cases.** Women's greater economic contribution '*eased marital tensions (where a man formerly regarded his wife as a financial burden) or led to a sense of pride in men about their wife's contribution to the household.*'<sup>14</sup> The FLOW programme noted anecdotal reductions in VAWG in the household as a result of women's economic participation. This indicates that successes were limited as women could only challenge gender norms, for instance, by working outside of the home, but only because it benefited family's finances. However, '*the relationship between women's increased earning capacity, women's bargaining power, and women's status at household level is both complex and location-specific.*'<sup>15</sup> In some cases in Bangladesh, women's economic empowerment led to a backlash or even domestic violence.<sup>16</sup>

**SUPPORTING COLLECTIVES** women's organisation into collectives increases their access to market opportunities and assets, provides them support mechanisms and facilitates their participation in community decision making.

Collectives had multiple benefits and built women's invisible and visible forms of power, both at the individual and collective level. Women's collective visible power enabled women to increase their power 'within' and 'to' and amplifying their voice, enabling them to have more visible collective power.

**Groups and collectives increased women's confidence, knowledge and sense of solidarity.** REFLECT groups, support to women's collectives and associations, and the investment in women's networks contributed to increasing women's knowledge and skills, their sense of self-esteem and confidence. These groups enabled common issues to be discussed in a safe space, creating a sense of solidarity between women, in some cases enabling women to join and even lead other groups<sup>17</sup>.

**Groups increased women's access to market opportunities and assets.** This was more pronounced in SO1 programmes. Collectives helped farmers produce at a larger scale, opening new market opportunities, and enabled them to negotiate fair conditions and terms of sale.<sup>18</sup> Without group membership women did not experience economic improvements.<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates the importance of women's collective visible power in negotiating better results for individual women.

**Collectives improved women's access to assets, such as savings and loans and (to some extent) control over assets and income.** For instance in FLOW in Rwanda, many cooperatives became savings and loans groups. They provided women livelihood security and increased their control over resources. '*This trend is important, because it highlights that the women became conscious of their ability to empower themselves rather than looking elsewhere .....*'<sup>20</sup> Cooperatives decreased women's dependence on men, providing an avenue for loans. In programmes where resources were not collectively managed, like in Gambia in the *From Household Food Security to Women's Empowerment* programme, women had less control over their assets.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Port meadow consulting (2015) *Walking in a woman's shoes: Results and lessons from the Women's Rights Programme 2012-15* (Irish Aid Women's Rights Programme), p.82.

<sup>15</sup> Pionetti, C. and Bilgi, M. Op cit.p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gold, Judy, Eva, Gillian (2016) Endline Evaluation: Young Urban Women project.

<sup>18</sup> Dyer, S, Matiko, C. (2016). Op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, EC Land Rights programme participants in Sierra Leone that received training but were not part of garden group (or did not have an individual garden) or did not receive therapeutic foods experienced limited improvements in their situation EC Land Rights programme

<sup>20</sup> Kandyomunda, B, Morales, V C, Millard, A S, (2015). Op.cit.p.30

**Membership of collectives legitimised women’s political participation in communities. This built their collective visible power.** Thanks to collectives, women were often recognised as political actors and were invited to community decision-making spaces. This shows the increased ‘standing’ and social capital women gained from group membership. For instance in Bangladesh, women felt that *“Now we can influence men in the village”; “Even the police listens to us.”*<sup>21</sup> Marginalised women, such as Dalits, still faced more constraints to participation. Forming discrete groups Dalit women groups increased women’s leadership and participation and decision making.<sup>22</sup>

**Collectives and links to wider women’s networks enabled women to participate in decision-making at other levels.** Links to wider women’s networks often facilitated participation of women’s groups in planning processes. For instance in Kenya<sup>23</sup>, local-level women’s networks were linked to those at county and national level, enabling participation in county budgeting processes.<sup>24</sup> Equally in Nepal, links to the national women’s network (Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM)) enabled collective members to participate in MAM groups at community, district and national level to advocate on women’s issues related to the Rural Women’s Policy.<sup>25</sup> In some cases women joined external groups, such as unions for home-based workers.<sup>26</sup>

**Women’s participation in groups started to change community attitudes.** In Palestine, women proved ‘their worth’ in the public sphere through activities linked to the REFLECT circles. Women’s standing in the community improved when the Ministry of Local Government consulted the REFLECT circle as part of local planning processes.<sup>27</sup> However, women’s participation in community decision-making was mainly allowed in cases where it benefited the family. This demonstrates the slow progress in changing the invisible social norms about women’s participation in the public sphere.

## 2.2. WHAT WE DO LESS WELL

**Our work was less effective in shifting some of the collective visible forms of power, such as changing national policy and the invisible collective power of social norms - the attitudes and expectations about typical and appropriate behaviour of women. This could undermine the sustainability of our work.**

**Programmes influenced changes in government services and policies mainly at the local level.** In SO5, these included small increases to budgets for survivors of VAWG and increased street lighting. In SO1, there were changes to by-laws and regulations, local government agencies setting up seed banks, provision of fertile land to women and construction of child care centres. There were fewer changes at the national level (e.g. revisions to national land reforms policy to include women’s rights<sup>28</sup>), reflecting the limited ability of short programmes to influence policy.

**Changes in social norms were limited to small ‘indications’ of progress.** Examples are community attitudes to child marriage and VAWG, women owning land and resources, and UCW. Women

<sup>21</sup> Pionetti, C. and Bilgi, M. Op. cit. p.21.

<sup>22</sup> Forsythe, Lora and Wellard, Kate (2014) Final Evaluation: ActionAid Women’s Right to Land Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich.

<sup>23</sup> Port Meadow Consulting () Op.cit.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Pillai, M. 2016 Op.cit.

<sup>26</sup> Gold, J. and Eva, G (2016). Op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Barclay, A (2014) Independent Evaluation of the ActionAid Palestine Empowering Women in Hebron (Area C) project, Think Out Loud.

<sup>28</sup> Forsythe, L. and Wellard, K. (2014). Op.cit.

challenging gender norms in the household could be seen as a first step of change as women themselves internalise beliefs about their role. Evaluations cited examples of women asking sons to undertake housework, for instance<sup>29</sup>.

**The use of time diaries and the provision of simple technologies contributed to some change in community recognition of UCW and some small-scale redistribution in couples** in programmes such as *FLOW* and *EC Collectives*.<sup>30</sup> However, women still typically shouldered the main burden of UCW. *FLOW*'s 'non-confrontational approach' that used an 'everyone benefits' message that framed male spouses as important allies in economic and political empowerment of women was found to be effective. However, it is worth exploring whether this approach really shifted power or simply allayed men's fears that changes in women's roles would still 'respect' gendered hierarchies. The fact that women in all countries in the *EC collectives* programme reported receiving greater support from men and boys, but often experienced 'discomfort' about men performing 'women's work', demonstrates the huge cultural shift this requires.

**REFLECT groups, community activists and engaging with community leaders contributed to changing attitudes towards perpetrators and victims of VAWG.** Campaigning and social media work raised the visibility of VAWG in the public discourse in a few instances. Most SO5 evaluations cited improvements in people's awareness of and behaviour towards survivors of VAWG, including those of service providers and local authorities and increased condemnation of perpetrators. Community activists and REFLECT/group mediators influenced changes in attitudes about gender norms and the normalisation of VAWG.

**Changes in norms about women's ownership of land or inheritance were limited.** Perhaps one of the most significant shifts in power was Dalit women's access to land through joint and individual ownership in the EC Land Rights programme.<sup>31</sup> However, many of the social norms-such as dowry and inheritance- that influence women's ownership of land had not changed significantly. Male participants in India, for instance, revealed that that would not pass land to their daughters as this would be 'lost' as part of her marriage dowry anyway.<sup>32</sup> This demonstrates that the issue requires simultaneous work on multiple norms.

### 2.2.1. IMPLICATIONS AND FACTORS DRIVING LIMITED RESULTS ON SOCIAL NORMS

**The review found weaker results in women's control over land or assets, their decision-making power in the home or the community, and prevention and eradication of VAWG.** Although many of our programmes work with wider stakeholders to challenge attitudes and behaviours, this is done less systematically and intentionally and not at a sufficient scale. Evidence suggests that changing social norms is vital to achieving sustainable and transformational change. This means that the gap in our programming could undermine the sustainability of our work.

**Our limited results in social norms could be due to a number of reasons:**

- **Most programmes did not explicitly aim to change social norms.** The review found very few objectives on social norms, attitudes and informal rules. Only *Safe Cities* had explicit social norm change objectives. In SO1, only *FLOW* had an objective relating tangentially to social norms on unpaid UCW. This might be because programmes are driven by pressures to

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<sup>29</sup> Barclay, A. (2014) Op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> Only a few programmes had specific UCW components, so the findings only relate to these/caution has to be exercised in generalising from these results.

<sup>31</sup> Forsythe, Lora and Wellard, Kate (2014) Op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

demonstrate results; the challenge of measuring results in social norms may hinder work on this front. Because of the lack of specific objectives, norms were not systematically specified and monitored. Although evaluations reviewed made vague assertions of ‘changes in general attitudes’, these were not systematically assessed.

- **Most programmes had a relatively short timeframe, while addressing social norms is long-term and requires intentional and multi-pronged strategies.** The lack of aims and results on social norms could be a reflection of the phase of programmes, which typically start by working with individual/groups of women to empower them. The current context of ‘projectised’ work and short-term funding opportunities may be shaping our programmatic focus. In theory, however, long-term work is possible because of AA’s long-term approach in LRPs. The scale of our work can also be limited, involving relatively small numbers of direct programme participants.
- **AA’s model of change and our HRBA focused heavily on working with individual women, and the state as the duty bearer.** Women and girls are our main target groups, and programmes first focus on empowering individual women, building their knowledge of rights, self-esteem and skills. At the same time, AA concentrates on the state as the main ‘implementer’ of change on women’s rights by influencing the introduction and implementation of relevant legislation. In this model, wider social norm change would then emerge as a later step in longer-term programmes.

**To change norms, evaluations recommend working more explicitly on challenging gendered power dynamics, working with a broad range of stakeholders, particularly girls, boys and men and building incentives for behaviour change.** Social norm change is also needed in government and customary structure actors.<sup>33</sup> This means tackling ‘attitudes towards gender norms and women’s rights that may influence violent behaviour’ and ‘confront[ing] the extended beliefs and cultural norms from which gender inequalities develop, and efforts to engage all stakeholders in the society in redressing these inequalities’<sup>34</sup>. To change attitudes and behaviours around UCW, programmes should scale up the time diaries approach and organise dialogue with the whole community based on the findings.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.2.2. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS

**Social norms are powerful drivers of behaviour** as expectations from others *can ‘be a more powerful driver, or constraint, than individual attitudes, or the law’*.<sup>36</sup> As social animals, people conform to ‘rules of behaviour’ because they believe others also do so. Evidence suggests that increased knowledge or individual attitudes is often not enough to shift behaviour. For interventions to be effective, they need to go beyond building women’s agency. Effective interventions are those that also ‘recognise and address social motivations of violent behaviour’.<sup>37</sup> The key here is to tackle social norms around gender, power and violence. A focus on social norms is therefore crucial for the sustainability of our work on women’s rights.

**External evidence suggests that criticizing ‘bad’ behaviour alone is not enough to change social norms, but that interventions need to promote new positive norms.** Social norms are held in place by approval and disapproval, rewards and sanctions (such as ostracism in a community). Solely focusing on weakening negative forms, by using communications such as ‘1 in 4 women in this community are victims of violence’ can have

<sup>33</sup> Port Meadow Consulting 92015) Op.cit.

<sup>34</sup> Sabina, N. (2016) p.4

<sup>35</sup> Kandyomunda, B, Morales, V C, Millard, A S, (2015).

<sup>36</sup> DFID (2016) Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women. p.6

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.8

drawbacks as they risk can inadvertently drawing attention to the harmful behaviour and reinforcing a perception that the behaviour is normal. Therefore, *'building a new norm can often be easier and more strategic than attempting to dismantle a harmful one'*.<sup>38</sup> This means creating *'new beliefs within an individual's reference group so that the collective expectations of the people important to them allow new behaviours to emerge'*.<sup>39</sup>

**Changing social norms requires shifting individual attitudes and changing social expectations about specific behaviours.** This is done by publicising changes in attitudes, expectations and behaviours. Projects reward, sanction and create opportunities for stakeholders to 'try out' new behaviours to encourage new norms to be formed.

**A range of approaches can be used targeting individuals and groups.** These include processes to promote critical reflection, using experiential learning and popular education techniques and giving community members a platform to speak out against the norm or to have dialogue on it. Projects often work with 'change' agents, organise group workshops and organise social marketing, behaviour change communications and mass media campaigns. The case studies below provide examples from VAWG and child marriage prevention initiatives, which could provide food for thought for AA as it explores how to work on social norms more systematically.

#### **Raising Voices-SASA!**

**Raising Voices-SASA! is a community mobilisation project that aims to rebalance gendered power and social norms that perpetuate VAWG and HIV risk-related behaviours.** 40 SASA aims to influence individual relationships and broader community norms. The approach works in improving intimacy and cooperation in couples.

**SASA! helps couples explore the benefits of mutually supportive gender roles. It focuses on the use and misuse of power, rather than gender** to increase men's engagement. The approach explores how people can use their own power in more positively to prevent and respond to violence. It aims to improve communication on important issues such as women's right to refuse sex, financial decision making and women's work outside of the home and highlight non-violent ways to deal with anger or disagreement.

**The approach combines different strands of activities: work with a 'cadre' of community activists who are trained to have one-to-one conversations; engagement with community and religious leaders and the public.** In four phases, SASA recruits and sensitises key community members and stakeholders; raises awareness about the misuse of power; supports community members who make changes in their own lives; and institutionalise this change within their communities. Activities include community conversations, door to door chats, training, public events, posters, local activism, media and advocacy work, and dissemination of communication materials.

#### **Learnings:**

- **SASA's approach requires high-intensity programming using a combination of communication channels.**
- Engage people in their day-to-day environment through trusted **community leaders** and fellow community members to **achieve high coverage and promote social diffusion of messages**, and promoting local ownership of the problem and its solutions.
- Involve both partners in a couple SASA! as those with the greatest level of exposure to SASA! activities

<sup>38</sup> Heise, L. and Manji, K. (2016) Professional Development Reading Pack, Social norms, GSDR. p.4

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>40</sup> Watts, C. et al (2015) *The SASA! Study A cluster randomised trial to assess the impact of a violence and HIV prevention programme in Kampala, Uganda* October 2015

also experienced the most change. The approach must be complemented by a process of internal reflection by staff, to enable **effective support to community activists**.

### World Vision's work to prevent child marriage<sup>41</sup>

World Vision's programming to reduce early marriage in Nepal and Uganda suggests that changing social norms is **gradual**. It started by working with **local and faith leaders** who are respected by community members. **Church groups became involved in preventing early marriage**, and trained **large numbers of community members** on how to address the issue. Messages warned of **health risks combined with an emphasis on the greater social value in waiting for a girl to marry**. Messaging also used religious scripture, highlighting the lack of precedent for early marriage. **Existing religious values** (social harmony, being a good parent), previously used as a rationale for child marriage, **were used to bolster new positive norms**, such as education and children's rights.

#### Learnings:

- **Start with social opinion leaders** who can influence underlying cultural values such as honour, before mobilising communities.
- Projects should use cultural root values, such as 'honour' or 'karma' as the **foundation for awareness raising on the new norms** that the organisation wants to promote. A new norm emphasised the importance of education and promotion of women and children's rights. These are now becoming key drivers in reducing the incidence of early marriage.
- **Understand the important kinship ties that shape social norms**. For instance, aunties that have a key role in arranging marriages, and projects should therefore engage with them.
- **Address the material drivers of the practice**, such as the economic role that marriage played for poor families, and provide alternate economic opportunities.
- **Work with formal mechanisms that deal with prevention and response**, such as community child protection committees.
- Use a combination of **sensitisation and a soft law approach** that involves prevention and early intervention strategies.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**The review provides strong evidence for AA to continue to support women's collectives and groups and provide economic empowerment opportunities as an effective approach for achieving change for women.**

**To ensure that the changes achieved are sustainable and transformational and that women can achieve genuine control over their lives, AA needs to implement more 'holistic' programming.** In particular, AA needs to focus much more on the invisible collective sphere of **social norms**, and **diversify its methods**. This is very much in line with *Action for Global Justice* that aims to shift visible, hidden and invisible power -i.e. the patriarchal norms that uphold the denial of women's rights. AA's approach of working with REFLECT groups provides a good foundation. The length of time AA

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<sup>41</sup> Cook P., Nelems R., Wessells, M. (2016) *Something old, Something new: the evolving social norms of child, early and forced marriage*. World Vision UK.

works in communities is an enabling factor, as shifting social norms is long-term. Influencing social norms requires working both with men and women, adolescents, local leaders and officials.

**Our HRBA needs to be revised based on this evidence.** The focus of working with individual women in REFLECT groups needs to be complemented with larger scale work with women and men, change makers in the community and both formal and traditional decision makers and leaders. Social norm considerations need to be integrated into our analysis, programme design and monitoring and evaluation.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Continue to support collectives and women's groups, promoting a holistic/integrated programming approach.**

Continue to provide a holistic package of interventions, combining support to women's collectives, training, inputs and awareness raising on rights. SO5 programmes could provide more consistent economic empowerment opportunities for women, in order to address their practical needs.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Integrate UCW more fully into programmes, for instance by engaging men and communities to a greater extent through dialogue on the findings of time diaries exercises.**

Integrate UCW into programmes by using time diaries and promoting dialogue with couples and communities on the results of the exercises. To make changes more ingrained and sustainable, more dialogue is needed on UCW with the whole community. In particular adolescent girls and boys need to be targeted.

Programmes should also take steps to alleviate women's UCW in order to aid their participation. This could be done by providing child care support or financial assistance to enable women who cannot take time away from paid/unpaid labour, to participate in training and project activities. This will build women's visible power, and start to shift the invisible collective power of social norms.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Increase programme focus on changing social norms, involving a variety of stakeholders.**

Without diverting from its primary focus on women, AA should target a wider group of stakeholders in particular men and boys to build incentives and motivation for behaviour and attitude change. Influencing change makers and community activists is one method widely used in different countries. Another approach is to work with social movements to catalyse changes in social norms, or to advocate to government to implement behaviour change communication in its strategies in order to influence social norms.

Overall, AA should use a Theory of Change (TOC) approach to its work, designing explicit TOCs for programmes that also address social norms. This means having a holistic problem or situational analysis, using a power lens to understand what different forms and dimensions of power are at play, and what the roles of different actors are, both as causes and solutions to the problem, and how they could be allied with in promoting social norm change. It also making assumptions explicit about how and why ours/our partners actions will lead to the changes we desire, the conditions that are needed for the changes to occur, and what evidence exists to support this. A TOC approach also involves understanding our niche and added value-i.e. what we can do best given our expertise, capacity and networks, in a particular context or situation.

AA should consider what a social norms approach means operationally for conducting situational analysis, designing programmes and implementing them, the partners we work with, and M&E. In particular, the capacity and resource implications should be carefully considered.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Use a transformative approach to programming to address the root causes of women's rights violations.**

A transformative approach means working on the structural causes of gender inequality, influencing the attitudes and beliefs of men, boys, women and girls towards gender norms and women's rights that influence, for instance, violent behaviour towards women.

Operationally, this implies extending feminist/transformative approach staff training to partners. It could also mean encouraging more reflection on the types of messages AA and its partners are using on the ground, their pros and cons, and alignment with our HRBA.

Particularly SO 1 programmes should integrate more of a 'challenging' women's rights message into programming, focusing on the drivers of gender inequality and the norms and attitudes that shape harmful traditional practices. Making a case for women's rights by arguing that everyone and families benefit from women's economic empowerment, may work in the short term to get men 'on board' of programmes may work in the short term. This message, however, can be instrumentalist, and in the long-term will not change the status quo, as men will continue to see the importance of women's 'empowerment' only in so far as it contributes to the wellbeing of the family.



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