

A woman is shown in a rice field, smiling and holding a bundle of harvested rice. She is wearing a pink cap, an orange long-sleeved shirt with a patterned scarf, and plaid pants. The background is a lush green rice field with water.

**act:onaid**

# **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND VALUE CHAINS**

**EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN:  
CAMBODIA  
PALESTINE  
UGANDA**

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ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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# Introduction

ActionAid is a global federation dedicated to ending poverty and social injustice. ActionAid works in 45 countries with a focus on building women's access to and control over resources, and ending violence against women and girls. With funding from the Australian Government's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), ActionAid Australia and partners have supported women to realise their rights through economic participation. An evaluation was conducted between April and July 2013 to draw out key lessons, by listening to the women involved.

The evaluation was designed as a series of case studies, which provide insights as to how 'value chain analysis' impacts on women's empowerment. Women from ActionAid projects in Cambodia, Uganda and Palestine participated in the study. The information they shared confirmed the significance of economic empowerment for women on the one hand, and, on the other, highlighted the nature of the challenges it brings. It is timely to revisit these issues as aid agencies around the world recognise the importance of supporting women and increasingly focus on economic empowerment as a tool to do this.



# Findings

- Economic empowerment is far more than a question of money. Women also value the relationships they form, the freedom they achieve to think and act, and the greater respect and power they experience at home and within the community as a result of paid work. Social support, mobility and solidarity with other women were highly valued by the women in this study.
- Projects that strengthen women's engagement in value chains are making important contributions, not just to improved household income and local economies, but to gender relations at the individual and societal level.
- ActionAid's intentional focus on addressing power relations, including building women's individual and collective power to influence policies and decision making, is a critical element in making value chains work for women
- Value chain analysis and ActionAid's human rights-based approach should be integrated, to better support women's empowerment. 'Chain empowerment' reflects improvements in women's position within a value chain, based on changes in women's capacity and power. These changes can only take place with the clear focus on addressing power dynamics that is articulated through ActionAid's theory of change.
- Increased income is a means for change as well as an end in itself. It is a tool for women to change power relations in their households and communities.
- ActionAid's projects are successfully supporting women to achieve economic empowerment.

# Data collection

Data collection tools were developed drawing upon material within the resource book focused on gender and rural value chains titled *Challenging Chains to Change - Gender Equity in Agricultural Value Chain Development*.<sup>1</sup> The study also drew on project reports and staff observations. Information was collected in Cambodia, Palestine and Uganda at project sites and triangulated against information in project documents.

- Cambodia - Two focus group discussions (FGD) with 22 women from six villages were held in Oddar Meanchey. One group of women were producers of green leafy vegetables; the other worked with non-timber forest products (NTFP). Individual interviews were also conducted with six households across five villages, five consumers (two male and three female) and one agricultural supplier in Samraong, the district centre.
- Palestine - A focus group discussion was conducted with 12 women from A'Samu, Hebron, West Bank. A further in-depth interview was conducted with one participant.

- Uganda - Focus group discussions were held with 27 women in Kapteret; and 30 women in Kwosir. 182 randomly selected women completed a questionnaire. Men, including some husbands of women participating in the study, were interviewed to assess how they supported or blocked women's involvement and empowerment in the value chain.

The findings in the study are based on a small sample, and are presented as case studies across the three countries. The study focus is on women's experiences of power within the value chain. ActionAid Uganda also prepared a survey from the perspective of income generation.<sup>2</sup>

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1. KIT/IIRR/Agri-ProFocus, *Challenging Chains to Change - Gender Equity in Agricultural Value Chain Development*, KIT Publishers, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, 2012.

2. The final report for the Vegetable and Garlic Value Chain Study in Kapchorwa and Kween districts is a separate document available from ActionAid.

# Key terms

## Value chain analysis, upgrading and chain empowerment

Value Chain Analysis is a business development tool that has been adapted for reducing poverty. A value chain is the chain of production for a commodity, from its origin as raw materials to its marketing and sale as a finished product. Value chain analysis (VCA) involves assessing all processes, issues and actors who affect the chain, in order to identify potential for adding value to a product. Important terms associated with value chains are:

**Context:** social, political and economic context within which an economic activity takes place, as well as structural factors

**Actors:** all those directly involved in and/or profiting from a value chain

**Supporters:** service providers who are needed by or otherwise impact the value chain.

Most products go through the following stages of value-adding (Figure 1): input; farming/planting; harvesting; grading; processing; packaging; transporting; wholesaling; retailing/marketing. Costs are incurred and profits made as products exchange hands and move 'up' the chain.

VCA has become a widely used poverty reduction strategy, centred around the concept of upgrading. Upgrading refers to improvements that chain actors (like the women involved in ActionAid's income generation and livelihoods projects) can make to receive better financial returns from their products.

Inequality, lack of knowledge and lack of power make such change difficult for people living in poverty. Without considering issues of power, 'upgrading' potentially results in poor female farmers gaining skills and increasing production, but without real benefit. For example, a woman farmer could learn new agricultural and processing skills to increase the quantity and quality of her crops and in turn earn more, but her husband could still control the household income.

The concept of 'chain empowerment' evolved in response to such concerns. Chain empowerment occurs when participants add value to their products, and also increase their control over income and the processes involved in value creation. Chain empowerment looks at who participates in a given value chain (chain actors), and

Figure 1. Value Chain processes

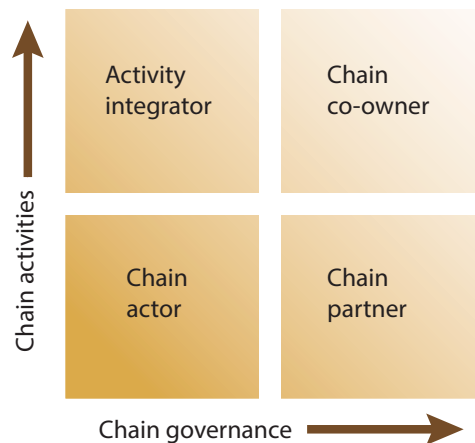


identifies new opportunities to involve those who may be excluded.<sup>3</sup>

The chain empowerment approach addresses concerns related to issues such as power relations within households.

As illustrated in the Chain Empowerment Matrix (Figure 2), chain empowerment occurs in two dimensions: through changes in the tasks or activities a worker undertakes; and through changes related to governance or power in relation to other actors in a value chain. Chain empowerment occurs when participants gain capacity to conduct activities more efficiently and profitably, and when they are able to reduce transaction costs by taking on or integrating activities that previously might have been handled or controlled by others. It also occurs when they gain control over the value chain processes through improved negotiation capacities, and stronger positions in relationships with other key stakeholders across the value chain.

Figure 2. Chain Empowerment Matrix



Source: KIT *et al.* (2006)

3. KIT/IIRR/Agri-ProFocus, *op cit.*

# Women's empowerment and ActionAid

Women's rights are at the heart of ActionAid's human rights-based approach. ActionAid believes that poverty and injustice will be eradicated only when equality and rights for women are secured. ActionAid works with women to increase their rights awareness, to strengthen their ability to take control over their lives through greater knowledge and solidarity with others, and to advocate for changes in policies and systems that disadvantage them.<sup>4</sup>

ActionAid's approach to empowerment fits within the power analysis framework identified by the Powercube,<sup>5</sup> which sees power as a positive force for individual and collective action for change and identifies three dimensions to empowerment. These are:

<b>POWER WITHIN:</b>	a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. It is the capacity to imagine and have hope; it affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfilment.
<b>POWER WITH:</b>	common ground among different interests and building collective strength. It can build bridges across different interests to transform or reduce social conflict and promote equitable relations.
<b>POWER TO:</b>	the unique potential of every person to shape her life or world, opening the possibilities of joint action and advocacy.

## In Uganda

women are considered to be property of men and are not able to own assets. Even if women earn their own money, they rarely get to keep or manage it

Jovia from Kwasir had earned money to pay her daughter's school fees. When her husband learned that she had money, he came and took it from her. Upset, Jovia took the matter to the clan members for mediation. The clan members ruled in the husband's favor saying that Jovia was a woman and therefore the property of her husband. Jovia was unable to obtain the money back, which meant her daughter had to stop going to school.

In another example, Justine planted maize and harvested it with the help of her husband. Later, they sold two bags of maize, earning 100,000 UGX (approximately AUD 40). The next day, her husband woke early and said he was going to look for land to purchase. He asked Justine for the money and warned her not to follow him. He did not return for three days. When he came back, Justine asked whether he had purchased land. He answered: "Do not ask me, who are you to ask me?" Justine did not speak up and was unable to find out what her husband did with the money they had both earned.



4. ActionAid, *People's Action in Practice – ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach 2.0*, November 2012.

5. *Powercube – Understanding power for social change*, [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net), viewed 2013.



# Study context: overview of projects in Cambodia, Palestine and Uganda

## Cambodia

The north-western province of Oddar Meanchey, near the Thai border, is one of Cambodia's poorest. ActionAid with local partner, Children's Development Association (CDA), worked with 940 women smallholder farmers across 16 villages to increase income, access to sustainable resources and engagement with decision-makers. The project worked with smallholder farmers, particularly women, to strengthen productivity through sustainable agriculture, including strengthening access to productive resources and agricultural technologies (land, water, forest, skills). It also focused on improving capacities of civil society organisations to influence decision-making.

Although gender equality is enshrined in Article 45 of Cambodia's Constitution as well as in government policy documents such as the Socio-Economic Development Plan, National Poverty Reduction Strategy, Cambodia Millennium Development Goals and the Policy and Strategy on Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture, significant issues remain. Broadly speaking, women are perceived as the weaker sex and social attitudes about what they can and cannot do preclude them from having the same educational and employment opportunities as men.

ActionAid's livelihoods project supported women smallholder farmers involved in the production and sale of vegetables and NTFP. The vegetables included water spinach, cabbage, cucumber, eggplant, long bean, tomato

and melon. NTFP refers to wild fruit, potato, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, plant fibre (for making rattan mats), honey and frogs.

The key actors in these value chains were women, men, children, extended family members, collectors, external traders and middle-people, as well as consumers within and outside the villages. The chain supporters are input suppliers, ActionAid and CDA.

Cambodia: Mourn Ley holds fish from a community fishing lot in Beung Real Lake. Photo: Savann Oeurn/ActionAid



# Palestine

One hundred and fourteen women from the Hebron Governorate in the West Bank were engaged in savings and loans groups supported by ActionAid. The project initially provided capital to women to start small businesses or savings and loans groups in 2011. It later introduced separate activities to increase women's awareness of their rights and to identify opportunities for improving policies and initiatives that promote women's empowerment.

Since 1967, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip have been occupied by the Israeli. The Palestinian economy is affected by factors including military occupation, trade restrictions and border control, and is highly dependent on foreign aid. It is characterised by growing rates of poverty and unemployment, and decreasing access to and availability of land and water for farming.<sup>6</sup> The town of A'Samu is located along the 1949 Armistice Line (Green Line) and employment opportunities have reduced significantly since the building of the "Segregation Wall" which is close to this line and separates Palestinian from Israeli territory.

The Palestinian Authority recognised CEDAW in 2009, but obstacles to women's full enjoyment of rights include:

- Limited participation of women in decision-making;
- Violence against women, including honour killings and a lack of legal protection;

- Patriarchal culture: both men and women believe that women are not equal to men and have little reason to contribute to public life. Home is considered the appropriate place for women, unless there is an urgent financial need for women to work away. Female labour force participation was only 15.1% in 2009, although women make up the majority of Palestinian students;
- Military occupation limiting women's freedom of movement and access to services, and leaving women at risk of arbitrary arrest, harassment and abuse at checkpoints; and
- Political will and stability: geo-political issues remain the priority and unstable governments in the region inhibit consensus-building for social and legal change.<sup>7</sup>

The members of the savings and loans group in A'Samu participated in this study. This group started seeking income through collective processing/production and marketing of four products: maftool (Palestinian couscous), loofah (derived from the Luffa vine, dried and used to exfoliate skin), packaged vine leaves and embroidered clothing. They later dropped maftool production as they felt it was too labour-intensive, although it was profitable. They preferred working on products which allowed them more time to interact with one another. The key actors in the value chain were identified by the women as: women involved in the A'Samu Savings and Lending Group; and consumers (friends, relatives and people in the community of A'Samu). The chain supporters were input suppliers and ActionAid.

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6. World Bank, 'West Bank and Gaza – Area C and the future of the West Bank economy', October 2, 2013. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/10/03/000456286\\_20131003173450/Rendered/PDF/AUS29220GZ0Are030Box379840B00OUO090.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/10/03/000456286_20131003173450/Rendered/PDF/AUS29220GZ0Are030Box379840B00OUO090.pdf)

7. Euromed Gender Equality Programme, 'National Situation Analysis: Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2009-2010', viewed June 15, 2013. [http://www.enpi-info.eu/files/publications/Situation%20Analysis\\_Report\\_OPT.pdf](http://www.enpi-info.eu/files/publications/Situation%20Analysis_Report_OPT.pdf)

# Uganda

Kapchorwa and Kween Districts lie in the north-east of Uganda. The Women's Rights in Agriculture Project (WORIA II) supports 500 women on their journey to empowerment by developing their capacity in the agriculture value chain. Women in eight REFLECT<sup>8</sup> circles have developed vegetable collectives which link women producers to markets and reinvest income in ways that strengthen women's capacity to generate income and realise their rights in other ways. The intermediate outcomes are improved income, food security and access to productive resources. ActionAid, along with two partner local organisations, assists women in this process.

The Constitution of Uganda provides a legal framework for protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality, but more work is needed in its implementation. Some of the issues that affect women's ability to engage with value chains include:

- Marriage and Divorce Laws that effectively exclude women from owning land (for example through non-recognition of traditional marriages);
- agricultural programmes including the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) that provide the bulk of benefits to commercial farmers and require women to be able to read and write English to access services;

- the Public Order Management Bill which restricts the right to public assembly and thus women's ability to organise, which is essential for sustainable change.

Cultural factors such as bride price<sup>9</sup> also block women from owning land and making decisions about income, and create a barrier to their engagement with value chains.

Women farmers participating in the WORIA II project engage in vegetable value chains. They produce vegetables including tomatoes, onions, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, beans, cauliflower, lettuce and greens. Production is small-scale (although increasing). Women are expanding their collective production on land that has been bought in their name. Women have also been selling their household produce to traders at the farm-gate or taking it to market for direct sale to consumers. The REFLECT groups are planning to market their produce collectively and to dry and process their vegetables in the next phase of the project. Chain supporters include ActionAid Uganda, its two local partners and the NAADS.

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<sup>8</sup> REFLECT circles are women or community groups that use participatory reflection and action methodologies to identify problems and solutions to overcome them

<sup>9</sup> Bride price is a customary practice whereby the groom or his family give the bride's parents money or assets before marriage. It once served to strengthen community ties but has led to a perception that women are men's property.

# Study results: Power and Value Chains

## Chain Empowerment and “Power Within”

Across the three projects, women have reported increased knowledge and skills, confidence, assertiveness and access to information and resources. From the perspective of chain empowerment, women report now having the skills to take on new activities that reduce transaction costs and add value to their products, or to work more efficiently and to a higher standard.

### Uganda:

The evaluation confirmed that women involved in ActionAid’s project in Kapchorwa and Kween in Uganda now operate across the value chain, growing, processing, packaging and trading vegetables. Some are involved in a number of different stages of the value chain while conducting activities to a higher standard than they did before the project. Agri-business, record keeping, and savings and credit management training has enabled women to take on new activities and move into new roles. Previously, women were confined to producing goods, and were reliant on others (chain actors or supporters) for transportation and marketing.

Women have experienced positive changes in terms of increased knowledge and skills, and access to information as the following survey results indicate:

- Women have greater capacity and are using new skills and knowledge in cultivation and harvesting. They also state that they have more access to information on vegetable growing (31% of total responses), women’s rights (27%) and access to credit (25%);<sup>10</sup>
- Women have developed their capacity and started using new skills in marketing and business;
- Women have begun to develop their understanding of human rights and in particular their entitlements to public extension services through one of the Government programs, NAADS, which currently excludes them from large scale benefits because they are unable to read and write;
- 38% of women interviewed in the survey said that they can now better influence the delivery of quality services;
- Women report that they have increased input into household level decisions, particularly in relation to schooling but also on household expenditures;
- Some women have been able to negotiate the return of assets seized by husbands, particularly in relation to land and livestock. Others still face challenges in negotiating their return and ownership;
- Women report that domestic violence has decreased and that they now own more small livestock; and
- Seventy-five per cent of women participants have increased their income and 85% have reported increased food availability at household level.

10. A questionnaire was administered to 182 randomly selected women directly engaged in WORIA as part of the mid-term evaluation in June 2013.

## Cambodia:

Women received training in sustainable agriculture techniques, received inputs such as seeds and tools, and participated in training to identify inefficiencies across their local value chain. This enabled them to take on tasks related to transportation and marketing of goods, including running a market stall outlet in the District capital of Samraong. Across the project, 80% of farmers reported increased income.<sup>11</sup>

Women involved with vegetable production stated that they were involved in all stages of the value chain – input, planting, harvesting, transporting, processing and marketing. Among the nine women in this group, two specialised as collectors who gathered products from other women and traded with external buyers who then sold the products at markets or in shops. Women said they received assistance from husbands and children in planting, harvesting, transporting, processing and marketing. Parents also assisted with planting.

Women in the NTFP focus group participated in harvesting, transporting, processing and selling the products to traders and consumers in the village. All but one of the women interviewed collected NTFP themselves, together with husbands and children. Hired tractors, normally driven by men (husbands or sons), were used to transport the goods from the forest to the collectors' homes. All of the women sold their products to external traders who then transported and sold the products near the Thai border. Only two women reported selling their products directly to consumers at the district market, reportedly due to low demand for NTFP there. Women involved in NTFP improved their skills in packaging and negotiating with traders through the project.

Women reported increases in their level of confidence to undertake new chain activities as a result of participation in the project. An agricultural supplier in Samraong who was interviewed for the study reported that women farmers, including those involved in ActionAid's project, often directly bargained and negotiated with him for better prices on agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. The supplier stated that women came alone and once the deal was made, they sent their husbands or sons to transport the products back home.

Women involved in the NTFP value chain still restrict their activities to improving the efficiency and sustainability of collection, quality of packaging, and negotiations in house-gate sales rather than seeking means to increase profits or upgrade by transporting and selling at larger markets, such as the Thai border. However NTFP are valued as a source of income available to whole families, including elderly people, as collection requires no inputs beyond sustainable forest management and occurs close to home. The project has a focus on sustainability and forest conservation which may prove to be the best strategy for upgrading for this value chain, as NTFP are becoming increasingly rare.

Both groups of women involved in NTFP and vegetable value chains reported that the knowledge they gained as individuals was the change they valued most. This knowledge was valued more highly by these groups than inputs such as access to water or agricultural inputs (seeds, tools). Women unanimously saw the value in taking on new roles that reduced their reliance on middle-people, and actively wanted to take on these roles. They identified growth in their confidence as a result of increased knowledge, and key informant interviews confirmed that they were now recognised by others as negotiators and providers of high-quality goods.

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<sup>11</sup> ActionAid Project Evaluation Report, project period July 2012 – June 2013





Women of A'Samu community, in the West Bank. Photo: ActionAid.

## Palestine:

In Palestine, prior to participation in ActionAid's savings and loans groups, women worked alone on livelihood activities such as knitting, sewing and weaving for friends and acquaintances. They stated that they had limited capacity to negotiate prices with suppliers for raw materials because of a lack of confidence and were inhibited by expectations about appropriate behaviour for women interacting with men outside the family. Due to their isolation as a result of the political situation and traditional values, they had extremely limited access to traders or markets. In terms of value chain processes, the women operated only as processors, dependent on others for sales, with little incentive to seek the means to improve or upgrade.

Learning from each other and through experimentation, women gained knowledge, skills and confidence to add value to their work. They tested a number of livelihood activities and selected embroidery, vine leaf packaging and loofah production. The women reported that they joined the project to ease the financial situation for their families and to meet other women to overcome their isolation. Added to this, they stated that they valued the opportunity to learn skills to produce and to manage an economic venture.

All reported an increased sense of satisfaction in being able to market their products to people and places they previously could not access.

The women had not thought about their work in terms of a 'value chain' before the FGD when they were introduced to the concept. However, they reflected that they had experienced "chain empowerment" as they had gained knowledge and power in relationships affecting their profits, which resulted in them becoming more active in livelihood activities and earning increased income. Nevertheless, in the constrained financial context of the West Bank, it remains difficult to develop secure value chains, particularly for women. Security concerns and traditional values, which relegate women to their home, combine to reduce women's capacity to travel to meetings with other value chain actors (distributors, traders, suppliers) or markets outside of their community.

Chain empowerment, in general, occurs when producers gain capacities to add value to the activities they are involved in, and are engaged in managing or controlling the chain. This matches ActionAid's strategy to strengthen women's "power within" as the first step in moving towards the ability to identify goals and take action for change. In Cambodia and Uganda, women valued the capacities they gained as the most important aspect of the project. In contrast, the women in Palestine placed the greatest value against 'solidarity'.

# “Power With”: the role of solidarity in economic empowerment

Each of ActionAid’s projects used groups to build women’s capacities as individuals, and to assist them to work more collectively to gain profits from their products. This represents “power with” in action. The strategy of building solidarity is integral to ActionAid’s theory of change and “collective action” is also identified as an important element in the Agri-ProFocus chain empowerment approach.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of “the group” was strongly evident in Palestine, where the women stated that this was the most valuable element of the project. Beyond capital for the group, solidarity was the women’s only resource. Women spoke of feeling ‘relieved’ and ‘engaged’ to be working together. It decreased their isolation and made their economic activity more productive. All the women reported that they would not have the confidence to market their products alone. They learned from each other and felt they gained power by standing together.

Movement within the occupied Palestinian territory is severely restricted by permanent and fly-in or impromptu check points, which can cause significant delays for people to reach their destination and inevitably personal safety becomes an issue. For this reason, many husbands are reluctant to let their wives travel alone. During the project, the women from the Savings and Loans Group decided to attend a regional festival held in another village. They were able to do so because of their membership in the group, which allowed them to travel together.

They were also able to ask their families for money for transportation because they knew they would be able to pay their families back or that their families acknowledged the financial contribution they were making through their involvement in ActionAid’s project.

Acting alone, such activities were impossible. In the case of Najah (*see following page*) the group was able to convince a reluctant husband to support his wife’s participation, which she had been unable and even unwilling to negotiate without their support. Najah states that her life has significantly improved, with greater income, more opportunities to enjoy the company of women and the satisfaction of work and greater support at home.



“Power with”: women in A’Samu.  
Photo: ActionAid.

<sup>12</sup> KIT/IIRR/Agri-ProFocus, op cit, p171.



Hanan Hawamdeh and Raeda from A'Samu selling products at a commercial fair in Dura in the West Bank, Palestine. Photo: ActionAid.

## Najah

For Najah, being a member of the A'Samu savings and lending group provides her with more than an additional source of income.

She benefits from the friendship and support of other women in the group, for which she is prepared to make sacrifices.

Najah is 58 years of age, married, with 11 children. Six of the children live at home and five are married and live separately. Najah cares for her husband, who suffered from a stroke eight years ago. She also has a 24 year old son who suffers from a muscular disorder, the same disorder that killed her eldest daughter two years ago. Her youngest son, who is 18, is affected by a mental disability.

When Najah joined the women's savings and lending group, her husband complained about her being away from home and not fulfilling carer duties such as administering medication to him and their two sons. As time passed, Najah was required to spend more time away from home to participate in the group's economic activities. Najah was forced to quit the group. "I was working hard outside and then coming back home tired to hear his ongoing nagging and complaints...I couldn't take it anymore," she recalls.

However, the other women in the savings and lending group were not going to let Najah go so easily. They came to speak to her and encouraged her to stay in the group. They suggested that she confront her husband and see whether a compromise could be reached so she could continue her participation in the group.

Najah agreed as she felt that aside from the financial benefit, being a member of the group contributed to her emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Najah explained to her husband about her role and responsibilities in the group, including the need for her to stay back and help with cleaning up after processing the products. She also explained that the group was an important source of income for the family. Najah's husband agreed for her to return to the group and Najah made some important changes at home to enable her to do this.

She began waking up early to undertake her household chores before she had to leave home to attend the savings and lending group. Najah taught her husband how to take his own medication. Her daughters also helped by assisting with administering medication to Najah's two sons and taking care of household chores while Najah was away. Now her daughters also assist her with leaf picking and processing of other products. Although working and caring for her family is a balancing act, which continues to fall on the women of the family, Najah is willing to stay in the group because it increases her overall wellbeing. Najah says there has been a change in her husband's attitude and he has now become very supportive. "He values my role and knows that I work hard to secure family needs. He now prepares food for himself, does not wait for me or ask me to do it for him like before."





Saroun in Oddar Meanchey province in Cambodia. Photo: Savann Oeurn/ActionAid.

## Cambodia:

Women in Cambodia did not report the same level of isolation and exclusion due to their gender as women interviewed in Palestine and Uganda. The groups formed through the project were farmer-collector cooperatives rather than women's groups. Participation in the farmers' collective selling vegetables nevertheless enabled the women to build their control over the value chain processes of packaging, transportation and marketing. Two women took on the role of purchasing vegetables produced by farmers at an agreed cost, transporting them to market and selling them on behalf of the group. For the women involved in NTFP sales, the greatest benefit reported came from sharing knowledge and collectively transporting goods from the forest to village. The women in the vegetable collective reported improved community relationships through their participation in the groups, and household interviews indicated that the group was seen as an enabling tool for the success of business activities.



Chebet and her family Kapchorwa District, Uganda. Photo: Harry Freeland/ActionAid.

## Uganda:

Women in the Uganda study started from a position of extreme rights denial. Unable to own land, commonly regarded as chattels, none had experience of controlling their own resources before the project provided them a plot of land. During the evaluation, the women reported that it had been important to have training to develop the capacity to operate effectively in groups, to ensure that all participants have a voice, and to build relationships. Before this, there had been no trust. The change is a significant achievement. As a result of the project, women are working collectively to produce crops on their land, and to bulk and sell their produce, which gives them negotiating power. Women have opened a joint bank account for the proceeds from their collective vegetable sales and plan to use the funds for loans within the group to improve production. This demonstrates their greater capacity, stronger relationships and confidence to take actions to improve their lives.

# Value chain analysis and “power to” take action

Value Chain Analysis requires assessment of the value chain context and the structural barriers to upgrading and value adding. Making use of this knowledge, however, requires power and capacity. This study found that women across the projects, particularly in Uganda, were beginning to take action to challenge such barriers. This is a profound change.

Women participating in the projects identified numerous barriers to engage effectively with the value chain to earn and control their income:

- Lack of transportation to market and poor road infrastructure;
- Limited access to or ability to analyse or use market information;
- Limited access to government agricultural extension services (Uganda, Cambodia);
- Little power to negotiate better deals on raw materials and quality inputs;
- Limited financial capital to upscale or expand economic activities;
- Lack of facilities to store their agricultural produce (Uganda);
- Limited knowledge of factors such as control of pests and diseases that affect production and of technologies to adapt to climate change;
- Lack of ownership of land and land grabbing (Uganda and Cambodia);

- Illegal logging of communal forest areas including by powerful people (Cambodia);
- Labour and time associated with reproductive functions and a lack of official acknowledgement of this unpaid work (all, but particularly Uganda and Palestine);
- Lack of mobility which is related to customary functions and can affect women's ability to join a group or participate in training opportunities;
- Lack of mobility, isolation and political uncertainty related to military occupation, which severely limits access to markets within and beyond the West Bank (Palestine);
- Other customary factors that limit women's ability to own productive resources such as land (including the bride price in Uganda).

The survey undertaken in Uganda revealed that women participating in the project were beginning to engage in dialogue with decision makers to address factors restricting their economic empowerment as follows:

- Women were starting to use their power as a group to influence government. Some of the issues had direct relevance to their engagement in value chains such as placement of a road near their field, and others indirectly such as schooling and health services.
- Women have added their voice to other women farmers to influence the government around extension services that they have had little access to. The Government has promised reforms to these systems and there will be other opportunities for women to engage and influence the review process.



- Women also reported an increase in their status within the community through forming and participating in women's groups. At the beginning of the project, only a handful of women were members of women's groups because they did not see any benefit from such groups. However, during the course of the project, women were supported to form pressure groups so they could collectively advocate for their needs to government authorities. According to the questionnaire, 72% of female respondents were now involved in women's groups in Kwosir and Kapteret.

ActionAid's framework identifies the way in which these women have built on the experience and skills they gained through participation in the green vegetable value chain to take action to claim their rights. In the language of 'chain empowerment', they are seeking to overturn barriers that restrict their 'ownership' of the value chain and the forces that limit their potential to earn income. They are already experiencing an increase in income due to their increased knowledge and access to resources, plus they have the vision, will and capacity to seek a further transformation.

In Cambodia, the link between the greater efficiency and income women are enjoying, and the desire to take action to challenge policies and structural factors restricting their freedoms and capacities is an area that is likely to be better understood over the next year of the project, when the project design emphasises possibilities for seeking change. It is known that women operate in a context where sustainable access to land and forest are uncertain, and their communities are participating in activities to control illegal logging and document their land ownership, however these issues were not raised in the FGD undertaken for this study.

In A'Samu in Palestine, women focused on power they had gained within their households, their community

and in their immediate relationships with other chain actors. More than half the women stated that they had experienced a change within their families and felt that they were now respected and important family members. Their achievements through the savings and loan group have given them greater influence in family decision-making. Their power to take action on structural or policy issues affecting their income-generating potential however remains severely restricted by the economic and security situation, which continues to compound restrictions on women in line with traditional, unequal gender relations.

Growth in women's "power within" and the positive impacts of solidarity through participation in livelihood activities were not sufficient to act as a catalyst for the women to take action to address these underlying barriers. Nevertheless, the Cambodia and Palestinian groups demonstrated positive change against empowerment indicators related to their visibility and respect within the community. This type of change is an enabling factor when women choose to take action. Some examples of this include:

- In Cambodia, eight out of nine women in the FGD with vegetable producers stated that their husbands appreciated them more than before, and showed support for women to make their own decisions.
- In the NTFP focus group in Cambodia, women indicated that the community was generally more supportive and recognised the important role that women played in income generation. Women felt more valued by village heads, and they expressed a sense of empowerment in having money to contribute towards community projects. These views were validated through consumer interviews carried out in the villages and in the market town of Samraong. Two male consumers who bought NTFP gave the reasons of 'supporting women in their community'

and 'community benefit' as to why they chose to buy NTFP from the women involved in ActionAid's livelihoods project. One consumer explained: "The project is good because it gives women jobs and it has increased their knowledge. Women have also organised groups that benefit the community and they have improved relationships in the community" (see box below).

- Women were inspired by economically empowered women, for example, in Cambodia women consumers

stated that they wanted to be like women involved in ActionAid's livelihood project because they were more economically active, confident and in control of their production, processing and marketing activities.

- In Palestine, all women in the discussion stated that they felt their position within the household was transformed now that they were contributing financially.



Bun Sophan stands in front of her vegetable plot. Photo: ActionAid.

## Sophan

Kong, 40, lives in Sambourmeas and he is proud of the achievements made by his wife Bun. Bun collects wild vegetables and fruit from the community forest and sells them to external middle-people, and she also grows vegetables. Since taking part in the ActionAid-CDA project, Bun has been able to earn more income for the family

Kong says he values his wife's financial contribution. "She is very important for my family. She manages all the income generated from her business and she is responsible for household income and expenses." Kong is happy that his wife is able to participate in activities that generate income for the family and he believes she has gained new skills. "She has increased skills in communication, bargaining, leadership in the family and also in the community. She is a vice-chief of the Village Development Committee in Sambourmeas". Kong recognises this as a valuable contribution to the community's development.

## Grace

Grace is a 42 year-old resident of Kere Parish, Kwosir sub-county in Kween district, Uganda. She is married with six children. She explains the changes that she experienced from being involved in ActionAid's project.

"In 2012, I was chosen as a REFLECT group member of Kere parish where in all we are 30 women. The group participated in fortnightly lessons led by REFLECT circle facilitators supported by ActionAid Uganda, Kapchorwa through their partner BLG. Kere REFLECT circle group is one of the five active groups initiated by ActionAid Uganda, Kapchorwa. The lessons included record keeping, women rights, farming practices, savings and credit management and soil conservations.

"ActionAid Uganda provided land to Kwosir women groups for growing high value crops. The land was divided in small portions for each of the five groups. In the first season, we planted

cabbage. In this season we are planning carrots. We anticipate getting 10 bags of carrots which will earn us 700,000 Shilling (equivalent to AUD 290). The money will go into Kwosir Women Development Association's bank account. As agreed, the money will be reinvested into the village savings and credit association where members will be borrowing to support household developmental plans.

"I intend to be among the first beneficiaries to borrow to facilitate my business in basket making and buying and selling of produce. By having land, it has taught us that we too as women can manage personal assets, control proceeds of our sweat and participate in decision making processes which we have been for many years locked out of.

"I wish to see a general improvement in the lives of everyone in my village. Since this program started, life has never been the same for me."

## Conclusion: Value chains and ActionAid's rights-based approach

The study has confirmed that changes in women's empowerment are occurring through participation in income-generating activities, even on a small scale as in A'Samu, Palestine. Income is increasing and is an important tool that gives women power to strengthen their positions within the household.

The women participating in the study valued aspects of economic participation beyond the purchasing power of the income they were generating. They also valued knowledge,

relationships and support from other women, as well as greater freedom to travel and negotiate with others. In the case of Uganda, they were confident and knowledgeable enough to demand stronger services from government. It is very clear that economic empowerment is not merely a question of money.

The study showed that ActionAid's program framework provides important tools needed to support women to strengthen their livelihoods and upgrade within a value chain,

but also to move beyond this by valuing and building on the non-financial benefits of economic participation. For example, the value chain approach seeks to build women's capacity to be more efficient and profitable. ActionAid seeks to build women's capacity for the same outcome, but additionally seeks to support women to use their newly acquired confidence, respect and skills to seek changes in their household and communities as well.

Value chain analysis, chain empowerment and ActionAid's approach with its focus on power complement one another well. Women need to build their 'power within' in order to make changes in terms of the activities they undertake in a value chain. For women to change the level of control they have in a value chain, they need to be able to take a more dominant role in relationships with other chain actors, and gain "power to take action". "Power with" has been shown to be a great enabler for the women in this study. Without changes to women's capacities and the strength gained through solidarity and collective action, women cannot begin the journey towards economic empowerment, nor will increased income automatically lead women to seek to overturn unjust policies and practices. Indeed, the study highlights that chain empowerment cannot take place without the focus on power articulated in ActionAid's program approach.

It is clear that economic empowerment and social justice outcomes are highly complementary, but the link is not automatic. ActionAid's projects are ambitious, seeking transformational change that goes beyond the individual. While economic empowerment approaches suggest that increased income is the key to transforming the position of women, ActionAid's program approach emphasises the importance of building the power of individuals to realise their rights and sees

income in terms of the power it provides women as a tool that supports this change. Income is a means for change as well as an end.

Economic empowerment initiatives need to be set within a broader human rights framework to build a link to social justice goals and outcomes, including women's empowerment, and transformational change that goes beyond the individual.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See also *Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC, 'Empowerment: A journey, not a destination'*, 2011. <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/PathwaysSynthesisReport.pdf>.

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Cover: Mein, a farmer from Kampong Cham province, Cambodia, who was provided with rice seeds by ActionAid. Photo: Savann Oeum/ActionAid.



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