

# Final report

## Evaluation of ActionAid work on women's rights



*Photo by Actionaid, AAIR facebook cover*

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## ACRONYMS

AA	ActionAid
AAC	ActionAid Cambodia
AAIR	ActionAid Rwanda
CFC	Community Fisheries Committees
CRSA	Climate Resilience Sustainable Agriculture Framework.
FLOW Project	Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods Project
FVA	Faith and Victory Association
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HOM	Help Old Age and Miserable Organization
LRP	Local Rights Programme
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NWC	National Women Council
RDHS	Rwanda Demographic and Health <b>Survey</b>
RWAMREC	Rwanda Men's Resource Centre
SO	Strategic Objective
ToC	Theory of change
UCW	Unpaid care work

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

ActionAid is coming to the end of its current 2012-2017 strategy period so during 2016 they will be evaluating a variety of initiatives; including programmatic work and country strategies framed within an overall Taking Stock Review. This evaluation feeds into the Taking Stock process by reflecting on how ActionAid is contributing to shifting power in favour of women.

**Thematically**, the evaluation is limited to assessing the shift in power generated by ActionAid programming on their Strategic Objective 1 (livelihoods) and their Strategic Objective 5 (women's rights). For SO1 this evaluation explores how ActionAid has mainstreamed women's rights into their work related to the right to land and livelihoods, and access to control over productive resources. For SO5 the evaluation team have undertaken an in-depth analysis of whether and how ActionAid has contributed to the shifting power in favour of women in their programming work around Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and around economic justice.

**Geographically**, the evaluation focuses on two LRPs (Local Rights Programmes) in Kampong Thom in Cambodia and in the Nyanza District in Rwanda. These two LRPs were selected by ActionAid's M&E Unit after consultations among relevant staff from the Programme team and the Cambodia and Rwanda country offices. LRPs selection criteria included: a) their ability to provide useful learning on the issues detailed above; b) LRPs with solid women rights/livelihoods programming where learning on methodologies and approaches could be gathered; c) LRPs working on SO1 & SO5 for a reasonable period of time (5 years); d) practical considerations, such as accessibility.

The **specific aim of this research** is helping ActionAid and other stakeholders to understand the extent to which they have contributed to transform gender relations to benefit women in Kampong Thom and in Nyanza, including what strategies/approaches are working and why. In this sense the main users of this evaluation process are; a) **women's groups** involved in the LRPs that will use this evaluation process to reflect on their own processes of empowerment and better understand effective strategies for bringing about changes in their communities; b) **ActionAid in Cambodia and Rwanda** and their partners; to learn how their work has helped shifting power in favour of women in Kampong Thom and Nyanza and showcase their work within the forthcoming ActionAid strategy development process; c) **ActionAid International senior management, programme and M&E staff**; to inform the future strategy development and methodologies for analysing and measuring shifts in power.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we give a brief overview of the methodological framework taken by the evaluation team and the main tools used to generate and analyse information. As part of this assignment we will also write a paper complementing this report where we will detail and we will critically analyse the methodology applied.

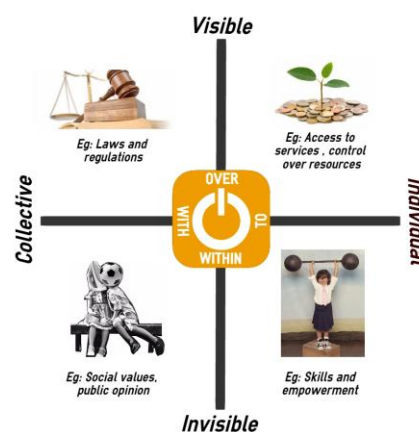
### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The evaluation team has explicitly taken a **feminist approach**. Following Barbara McManus definition<sup>1</sup>, we understand that adopting this approach means "attempting to examine beliefs and practices from the viewpoint of the 'other', treating women and other marginalised groups as subjects, not merely objects". The methodological framework of this evaluation was also inspired by principles and ethics of **Participatory Action Research**: an approach that aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in their daily practice and to further the goals of categorising and conceptualising simultaneously.

Methodologically the evaluation **combined elements of the power cube** analytical framework with an interpretation of Gender at Work's four quadrants holistic framework to organisational gender mainstreaming assessments inspired by Ken Wilber's integral Theory<sup>2</sup> From the Power Cube this evaluation mainly used Veneklasen and Millers'<sup>3</sup> definitions of both *expressions of power* (Power with, power within, power to and power over) and *forms of power* (visible, invisible and hidden) and to a certain extent Gaventa's classification of *spaces of power*.

The **Gender at work four quadrants framework** (see figure 1) have allowed us to analyse *expression and forms of power* in a dynamic way; to see how expressions and forms of power relate to each other in LRPs women "*processes of empowerment*"<sup>4</sup>. This combination of

Figure 1: Our four quadrant framework



1 In McManus, B. (1997) 'Classics and Feminism'

2 From Gender at Work, (<http://www.gendematwork.org>) and inspired by the work of Ken Wilber, A Theory of Everything, Boston: Shambala, 2000

3 VeneKlassen and Miller 2002 "A new weave of power, people & politics: the action guide for advocacy and citizen participation"

analytical frameworks has been used to map out where the efforts and resources are prioritised and to also look at shifts and changes in a dynamic and relational way.

### *INFORMATION GENERATION TOOLS*

This evaluation has used participatory tools and methods to generate reflection and insight that were people centred. We used an intentional non-probabilistic sampling to select participants for workshops, sense-making spaces, interviews and focus groups. This meant that (together with ActionAid and partners) we invited those people who had richer information about the questions posed in the evaluation matrix (see annex 1 for a full list of people consulted).

#### **Workshop with women involved in the LRP**

A central commitment of our feminist methodology was to bring women's voices involved in the LRPs to the forefront of this evaluation process. Their voices are the backbone of our findings. To do so we organised a two and half day workshop in Kampong Thom, Cambodia and a three and a half day workshop and in Nyanza, Rwanda. During the workshops we worked with seven women leaders from the community groups in the LRPs to identify key transformations in women's lives and to analyse power dynamics behind these changes<sup>5</sup>. In both workshops we used raking and scoring tools and community mapping to reflect on what factors women associated or identified as drivers of empowerment and to what extent ActionAid was supporting these drivers.

#### **Sprockler**

In Rwanda, we piloted *Sprockler*, an innovative online tool based on storytelling. We collected nineteen stories related to power shifts from women involved with the LRP. The evaluation team also invited storytellers to interpret their stories around key aspects related to power. This tool provided a unique combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis that was used to triangulate findings ([click here to see the interactive webpage of the Sprockler report](#)).

#### **Focus group discussions and interviews**

The evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with different stakeholders such as ActionAid teams in Cambodia and Rwanda; LRP management (including partners) in Kampong Thom and Nyanza; government officials and groups of men involved with the LRP (in Rwanda). Efforts were made to ensure a range of voices were represented.

#### **Sense making spaces**

Sense making spaces (*thinkshops*) are about understanding what the information gathered meant within the context of the LRP and of this evaluation. Sense making is an organic process that brings to the surface assumptions, explores data in light of those assumptions and goals, and then synthesises it all to be able to create some means of guiding future action.

During this evaluation we facilitated formal and informal sense making spaces with multiple stakeholders, most significantly with: a) the seven women leaders involved in the LRPs during the last day of the workshop; and b) the M&E ActionAid team and ActionAid EAGLES who accompanied us during the visits to Rwanda and Cambodia.

#### **Documents consulted**

ActionAid provided a large preliminary body of documents. They include strategies, evaluations and other reports that were examined together with additional relevant documentation gathered during the field trips. We also reviewed a number of third party reports and official documents. We relied on secondary data to extract quantitative information that we used to triangulate findings. (see annex 2 complete list of document consulted).

### *MAIN LIMITATIONS*

#### **Around subjectivity**

Our working hypothesis on using this approach and methodology was to generate insights about shifts of power, it is therefore important to map out first the local social meanings of concepts like "power" or "empowerment". Consequently, we have looked at motives, meanings, reasons and subjective experiences of participants to better understand what is, for them, to be empowered and then critically examine AA's contribution. Specifically, our aim has been to interpret the participants' meanings of gender roles, power, empowerment and rights.

To do this we have given importance to subjectivity (how subjects interpret reality). In this sense we have not intended to be neutral or unbiased, but rather self-aware and explicit of our position, interaction, interpretations and worldview. We accept that we may have

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<sup>4</sup> for detailed information see the Inception Report of this evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> In Rwanda, on the third day of the workshop the seven women facilitated small focus group discussions where they identified and analysed together with another 34 members of their cooperatives changes happening in their communities that were relevant to this evaluation. In Cambodia, on the second day of the workshop another 35 women were invited to reflect on key power aspects relevant to our inquiry questions.

wrongly interpreted stakeholder's ideas, and seek to share this document with some of the participants who kindly reflected with us on power and empowerment. In this sense we encourage AA to translate this document both into Khmer and Kinyarwanda.

### **Lost in translation**

Many of the workshops and other info-generating sessions were conducted in Khmer and Kinyarwanda assisted by translators. As such, this introduces a non-measurable degree of deviation that should be taken into account when considering findings.

### **Time constraints**

Common time and resource constraints limited the ability to capture all the relevant information in most evaluations. In this particular case, time constraints affected the design of the methodology and hindered further participation of the country offices, particularly in the case of Cambodia.

### Sensitive issues

Time constraints also affected the quality of information gathered during the field visits, particularly when attempting to generate information around sensitive issues such GBV. In general, it would have required different research methods for the evaluation team to fully generate robust findings around these themes. Most significantly, the time available for the evaluation severely constrained the possibility to reflect with enough women in safe spaces to the point where we were sure we were getting quality information around GBV.

### Time with women leaders

During the field missions we took the intentional decision to generate information with women involved in the LRP. However, Women leaders could have benefited from more time to train them in conducting the facilitation for the exercises. We could have also had more time for the exercise with the larger group of women. In addition, more time would have been needed with women to probe further the issues that were arising out of the stories they were telling.

### Other stakeholders

The strong focus on putting women at the heart of our info generating methods implied that due to the limited length of the field work we did not have as much time as we would ideally require consulting a broader range of other stakeholders.

## 3. RWANDA

This chapter presents the findings of the Rwanda case study that focused on the LRP that ActionAid has in the district of Nyanza.

**Contextualizing:** The first part of the chapter gives a brief context of the situation of women's rights in Rwanda and a description of how ActionAid has been working in Nyanza through its LRP.

**Framing:** The second part frames and focuses our reflections around power issues. Here we give some conclusions on how power is perceived by the women involved in the LRP. We focus concretely on those factors and spaces women found to be more important to determine power.

**Substance:** The third part of the case study reflects on what types of changes have occurred for the women in Nyanza; how they have occurred, the power dynamics behind them and how ActionAid is contributing to them. This section is organized thematically. We start with changes that have occurred at the personal level. Then we discuss changes that have happened at home: around mobility, around gender based violence (GBV) and around unpaid care work (UCW). The third part of the section deals with transformations occurring at the community level: around access and control over resources, and around women's political participation. Finally, we reflect on how ActionAid's work at the national level links with the LRP.

**Concluding:** The last part summarises the main key points of the chapter and provides top level analysis on how gender power relations are changing in Nyanza and what is ActionAid's role.

### 3.1. CONTEXT

#### 3.1.1. WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN RWANDA

In 1996, two years after the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, 58% of the population aged 15 to 65 were women<sup>6</sup>. Many adult men were in the army and another 150,000 men were in jail awaiting trial for genocide crimes. As a result, the participation of men in the national reconstruction and other economic development activities was severely limited<sup>7</sup>. Women who survived the genocide faced a destroyed society. They did not only lose their families and properties, but had to rebuild their communities and livelihoods. Suddenly, they found themselves responsible for their households and communities; *"this disruption in social order is what truly sowed the seeds of the gender revolution in Rwanda"* Edouard Munyamaliza, RWAMREC's executive secretary<sup>8</sup>.

The Rwandan government has since introduced several laws to empower women including a 30% quota of women's representation in decision making positions, enshrined in the 2003 constitution. A significant number of women-oriented legal measures have also been adopted, including laws extending inheritance rights to women and key legislation on women in the workforce or laws about gender based violence (GBV). These measures have translated into considerable gains for women, most noticeably around women's impressive political participation.

However, despite the huge advancement, Rwandan women still face considerable challenges. Women-headed households are the majority of all poor households. Patriarchal attitudes restrict women and girls' access to education, training and employment. Furthermore, culture and traditional beliefs are still major obstacles to the implementation of laws promoting gender equality. The patriarchal power relations between men and women continue to undermine women's ability to contribute and benefit from development initiatives<sup>9</sup>. Finally, Rwanda continues to have one of the highest incidences of gender-based and domestic violence in Africa<sup>10</sup>.

#### 3.1.2. THE LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME IN NYANZA

ActionAid Rwanda (AAIR) has seven Local Rights Programmes (LRP) throughout the country. LRP have traditionally focused on food rights, women's rights, and education.

ActionAid Rwanda has worked in the LRP in the Nyanza district since 1997. From this year until 2002 its main emphasis was on the reconstruction of houses and the rehabilitation of genocide survivors. An intermediate phase from 2003 until 2008 saw a transition from a humanitarian response to a fully-fledged development programme where the LRP started working on education and on supporting cooperatives. From 2009 to 2013 the LRP thematic areas expanded from education and cooperatives to capacity building, rights training, sustainable agriculture and partnership. These themes were also the base of the LRP 2013-2017 strategic plan.<sup>11</sup> From 2013, the work done on women's rights in the Nyanza's LRP has been channelled mainly through the *Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods*

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6 Hamilton, H. Rwanda's Women: The Key to Reconstruction; Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, 2000

7 IBID

8 <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/nov/22/rwanda-gender-based-violence>

9 Beijing +20 Rwanda Country Report, 2014

10 <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/nov/22/rwanda-gender-based-violence>

11 The LRP Strategy focuses on "the Right to Education, Women's Rights and rights to food and livelihood" Nyanza LRP Strategy 2013-2017



Project (FLOW)<sup>12</sup> whose main aims are improving food security for women farmers in Rwanda; reducing and redistributing their unpaid care work and improving their farming practices<sup>13</sup>.

This evaluation looks at the period where ActionAid's work in Nyanza became more developmentally focused, i.e. from 2009 when they started to clearly work on women's rights and rights to food and livelihoods.

### Who are the women that ActionAid and its partners work with in the LRP?

The LRP in Nyanza works for and with women in three sectors of the district (Mukingo, Rwabicuma and Busasamana). It is important to state that ActionAid is often reaching the most vulnerable women in these communities: outcasts, single mothers, widows, sex-workers, etc.<sup>14</sup>

#### A note of caution

By this characterisation of "*vulnerable women*" **we do not mean to make the automatic assumption that women who do not have a husband are worse off in the Nyanza society. Actually we got mixed messages in this regard.** In one of our group dynamics we asked openly to women involved in the LRP if having a husband made women more powerful. The answer to our question was a unanimous "No". Nonetheless, in many of the stories collected, women linked their perceived vulnerable situation in relation to the circumstance of not having a man "I was a widow...", "I was a single mother..." etc. There were also stories where the main indicator of success was getting a man back: "*They lent me some money and I used that money to start a business. I became someone and shortly after that my man came back to our house*" (woman from Nyanza)

Moreover, as it will be addressed under the section of *changes* (6.3.), most testimonies point out that the control over assets is still heavily linked with the figure of the husband. Therefore, not having a husband may imply losing control over resources, which further increases the perception that women without a husband are more vulnerable.

## 3.2. DESCRIPTION OF POWER: FACTORS AND SPACES

In this section we give voice to the women involved in LRP activities and present their own definitions and understanding of power. We also give some consideration to how the concept of power differs across different stakeholders such as: ActionAid Kigali, the LRP management staff, the women themselves and their husbands.



There were three factors of power that women in Nyanza ranked as significantly important: confidence, working collectively, and control over resources. We found however some significant discrepancies in different stakeholders' views on what (they thought) were the most important factors of power for women involved in the LRP.

While the perceptions of LRP management were extremely accurate, ActionAid in Kigali had one important difference in their analysis. AAIR in Kigali predicted that for women in Nyanza the most significant factor of power would be to know their rights as women and being able to claim them. This factor did emerge, but was not among the most significant ones.

Another important difference emerged in our focus group with men in Nyanza. They did not identify *access and control over resources* as an important factor of power for women. This gave us an indication of how the control over resources is still considered to be a male domain in the Nyanza society. Finally, the factor *use and control over our own bodies* did not emerge as a significant one among women. This shows how women's analysis of power in Nyanza differs from that of ActionAid institutionally. ActionAid often mentions the use and control over the body as a key factor to empower women.

About spaces, women indicated that at the present new spaces have opened up for them, most significantly the cooperatives, the bank, the cattle farm and local government. Most of the spaces where women have felt an increase of presence and power are related to changes in *control over resources*.

### 3.2.1. MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTORS OF POWER TO WOMEN IN NYANZA

As table 1 illustrates, **there are three factors of power that women ranked significantly higher**: confidence (9 points), working collectively (9 points), and control over resources (7.5 points)<sup>15</sup>.

12 In Nyanza, ActionAid Rwanda implements this project through its partner Faith and Victory Association (FVA), a Christian Faith Based and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to providing orphans, women, and minors a safe haven, training, schooling, and opportunities since 2003.

13 Final FLOW evaluation, 2016

14 We made this assessment after having worked only with women involved in the FLOW Project. However, this Project channels the vast majority of the LRP work since 2013.

15 The ten factors of power are listed here as they were formulated and nuanced by the seven women leaders.

**Table 1: Factors of power as defined and ranked by women involved with the LRP**

FACTOR THAT IS IMPORTANT TO FEEL/BE POWERFUL	SCORING
<b>Confidence</b>	
1. Having confidence and assertiveness	9
<b>Access to networks/collective action</b>	
2. Working collectively	9
<b>Assets and services</b>	
3. Control over assets ( <i>umutungo</i> )	7,5
Access to medical insurance	1,5
<b>Participation in decision making</b>	
Participation in decision making	6
Being recognised by others as a person of integrity and being appointed as a leader because of this	4
<b>Knowledge and information</b>	
Having access to study tours	3
Having access to information	2,5
Knowing the laws and rights as a woman that the government gives you	2,5
Having formal education	2

We clustered these factors into five themes (assets and services, knowledge and information, confidence, decision making, and access to networks/collective action).

**These themes can be read in the light of our interpretation of gender @ work<sup>16</sup>**

(see figure 2).The theme “control over assets and services” includes factors of power that are exercised individually and in visible spaces. Those factors under “knowledge and information” and under “confidence” operate at the individual and invisible level. Finally, the themes “access to networks” and “decision making” as formulated by women, belongs to the visible and collective quadrant.

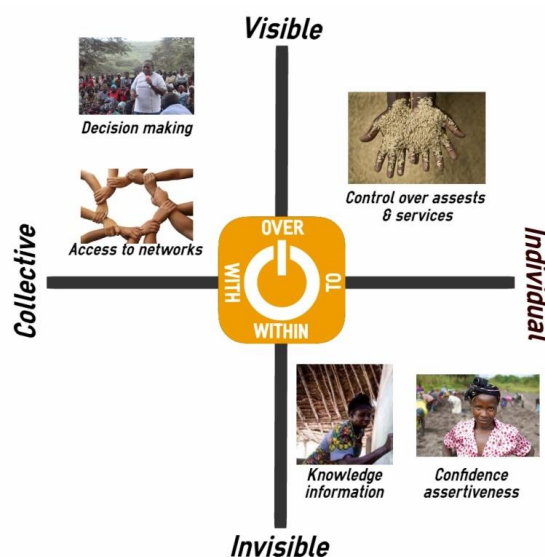
**We found some significant variations in how different stakeholders view what were the most significant factors of power for women in Nyanza.**

The perceptions of LRP management<sup>17</sup> were extremely accurate and they were very similar to those identified by the women. However, ActionAid in Kigali had one important difference in their analysis. **AAIR in Kigali predicted that for women in Nyanza the most significant factor of power would be to know their rights as women and being able to claim them.** This factor did emerge strongly from the exercise with women, but was not among the most significant **three factors of power.** ActionAid staff from Kigali identified increasing women’s confidence was a necessary precondition for them to claim their rights. This important factor of power for the women in Nyanza was therefore implicitly present in ActionAid’s understanding of how power changes happen.

Interestingly, when we asked **men** in Nyanza what were the most relevant factors of power for women, they **did not identify access and control over resources as one that was important.** This gave us an indication of how the control over resources is still considered to be a male domain in the Nyanza society. This has consequences for how legitimate it is thought to be by men and women for a woman to exercise (for example) her right to land. We explore this further under the section *umutungo*.

Several women spoke of sexual and physical abuse (see GBV section). We also heard stories and reflections around personal hygiene/health and beauty, which could be considered as a stepping stone of body awareness; *“I did not know the importance of hygiene, I would not feel the need to bathe and socialize”* (woman from Nyanza). However, **women never identified explicitly the aspect control over my body as a factor of power.**

**FIGURE 2: THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF POWER**



**A reflection**

The complex nature of violence in Rwandan history and its consequences on its people, especially on women and girls, should be brought to provide a nuance. Within the context of ‘empowerment/disempowering’ it will be legitimate to ask ourselves to what extent there is a **connection between the respect women feel (or do not feel) for their own bodies and the effects of such traumatic past?**

<sup>16</sup> See the Inception report of this evaluation

<sup>17</sup> Staff from partner FVA and local AAIR staff in charge of the LRP in Nyanza

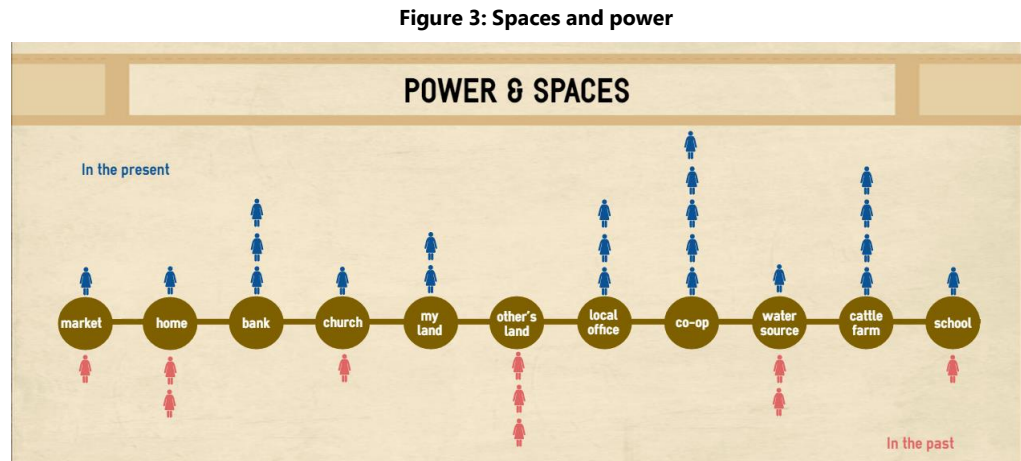
The fact that women did not identify control over their body as a factor of power indicates how **women’s analysis of power in Nyanza differs from that of ActionAid institutionally**<sup>18</sup>. ActionAid often mentions the use and control over the body as a key factor to empower women. As such it is captured in one of the five strategic objectives of the organisation<sup>19</sup> and in the ActionAid poster *Women smallholders’ empowerment framework*<sup>20</sup>.

Women consulted in Nyanza did not seem to recognise control over one’s body as a factor of power, not even after four days of discussion around power shifts when, sometimes very explicitly, we discussed issues such as marital abuse, sexuality or health and beauty<sup>21</sup>. This lack of awareness about the control and use of their own body as an important factor of power seems to be having consequences, especially around women’s responses to GBV, which is addressed under the GBV section.

### 3.2.2. SPACES & POWER

The following infographic (figure 3) illustrates how women in Nyanza have changed their perception about in which spaces they feel more or less powerful.

The number of figures associated to each space in the past and in the present indicates the weight women gave to each space during the community mapping exercise (see methodology piece for a full description). For example, women indicated that before they started working with ActionAid they had no power in the cooperatives, but in the present here it is where they feel more powerful.



It is important to point out that in this exercise the groups **mixed the concepts of power and presence**. This is particularly relevant when reflecting on the power at home. The fact that there is more weight in the past in this space (home) does not necessarily mean that women felt more empowered in the home then, but could mean that they spent more time at home. We analyse the extent of the shift in power in this space in the section *“at home”*.


**As we can see, in the present, women are present and/or feel powerful in more and different spaces** in the community than in the past. New spaces have opened up for them, most significantly the cooperatives, the bank, the cattle farm and local government.

**Most of the spaces where women have felt an increase of presence and power are related to changes in control over resources**, i.e. cooperatives, cattle farm, bank and land. We have organised the section *“umutungo”* (control over resources) under these four headings to explain why and how that happened as well as what is ActionAid’s contribution.

### 3.3. CHANGES AND HOW THEY HAPPENED

We analyse in the following sections how the changes that we are seeing in Nyanza relate to these factors and spaces of power as defined by women. We will also explore if/how ActionAid is contributing to the shifting power in areas that women feel are the most important.

#### 3.3.1. MYSELF

 The vast majority of women consulted felt that their confidence and self-esteem have increased in the last few years. ActionAid is credited with having contributed to this. However, confidence like any other change related to “power within”, is not considered to be a transformation in itself by the women but a necessary precondition for other changes (to control assets, to be elected, etc.). Therefore, an important internal transformation is still not considered to be a key transformation as such. This requires women and communities to have a genuine belief that women are full agents of rights.

<sup>18</sup> Control over own body is mentioned in AA strategic documents at the international level but it is not that explicit in strategic documents related to the LRP

<sup>19</sup> “Ensure that women and girls can break the cycle of poverty and violence, build economic alternatives and claim control over their bodies” People’s Action To end Poverty; ActionAid Strategy 2013-2017

<sup>20</sup> Women smallholders’ empowerment framework, ActionAid International, 2016

<sup>21</sup> It is important to state that we did not give them the opportunity to refine these factors of power at the end of the four-day workshop. We have included this reflection under the methodology piece that accompanies this report.

*"Everything that I have been able to achieve can be summed up in two words: confidence and self-esteem. It is my belief that there is nothing one can achieve without confidence" (woman from Nyanza)*

We heard testimonies and discussions coming from all three sectors<sup>22</sup> that illustrate how **women's confidence is increasing** in Nyanza. Confidence was the number one factor that triggers change according to women who shared with us their stories via [Sprockler](#). This is consistent with the discussions we had with women leaders in Nyanza, *"after getting acquainted with ActionAid, I heard a voice in me saying I have something to offer others"* (woman from Nyanza). As this quote illustrates, ActionAid's activities in communities are perceived to contribute to increases in women's confidence.


Confidence is considered as a necessary precondition for most of the transformations. However, women never recognised this as a transformation in itself. **Power was only perceived when it was exercised or recognised by others, but not when power was felt by the woman herself.** For example, when we asked women to analyse whether their story was about invisible or visible forms of power, almost all of them positioned their stories at the "visible" end, even when we explained that they did not have to choose only one extreme if their stories spoke of transformations that were both visible and invisible (*click in the image on the right to go to the Sprockler interactive webpage*).

Internal and invisible transformations are not considered to be transformations. Actually, in this evaluation process several of the leaders expressed to have had an *aha!* moment when they grasped the concept of *power within* as another face of power (not only as a precondition of power): *"the concept of "power within" has helped me reflect and explain my own life"* (woman leader during sense-making session).

There is one important internal transformation that is still not emerging in the women in Nyanza and that has key implications to our analysis of power. As we will see throughout this report **women still do not see themselves fully as agents of rights** and at the same time the community does not perceive them as such either. Women's rights are still seen frequently as instrumental in achieving other ends, rather than as ingrained and inalienable. Women and those around them do not yet believe that their rights are ingrained and not granted (by husband or society); and that these rights derive from women being humans rather than believing that women's rights are beneficial to their family or community (*instrumentalisation*). Nor was it apparent that ActionAid is specifically reflecting on the issue of *instrumentalisation* with women and the wider community.

### 3.3.2. AT HOME

#### Mobility

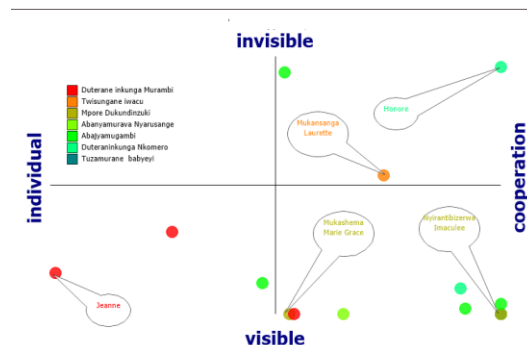
 Many women now feel freer to leave their homes and move around the community. More symbolically, a women's role that was once confined to certain spaces is now changing. They have "conquered" new places in the public sphere where they exercise power, most significantly the cooperatives, whose establishment has been facilitated by ActionAid. This has occurred because of an increase in confidence to bargain at home, although these discussions are still based largely on **instrumentalising women** as economic agents, and on legitimising **men as guardians** of women, i.e. men allow women out because it is financially beneficial for the family.

Discussions revealed that women now feel freer to move around in the community. As we pointed out under "spaces and power", the community mapping exercise with the larger group told us clearly that **women have now "conquered" more spaces outside those associated with strict gender roles**, i.e. the house, the church, their husband's land, the market and the schools (to supervise children). They have increased their presence in alternative spaces in the public sphere, and often their power too.

The establishment of **cooperatives** facilitated by ActionAid was frequently mentioned as the **number one factor** that triggered negotiations at home **to gain mobility**. *"Before joining cooperatives some women were not allowed to leave their homes but after women contributing to the families, men realized it was useful for the whole family"* (woman from Nyanza)

This quote illustrates two important nuances:

- a) For this change to happen women had to negotiate at home with their husbands. The way women tell these stories reveals that they did **not stand firm for their right** to move freely. They asked their husbands to **grant them permission**, therefore legitimising men's role as women's *guardians*. Women still do not recognize moving outside of their house (physically or symbolically) as their full right.



22 Mukingo, Rwibucuma, Busasamana

- b) In the quote the **“instrumental”** tone is clear. Women were allowed to go out **because it benefits the family, not because it is their right**. This *instrumentality* is present in the analysis of several of the identified transformations, such as those referred to unpaid care work in the next section.

These nuances illustrate that changing mind-sets and patriarchal structures fully is a very long-term and complex process, full of inconsistencies. There is a paradox between making men understand that **their** women (legitimising ownership of women) can be **economic agents** (legitimising *instrumentalization*) and contributing to opening up spaces for women. Despite this paradox, these spaces give women an opportunity to learn, to consolidate their awareness and knowledge of rights and to exercise power.

## Unpaid care work (UCW)



Women involved with the LRP in Nyanza now spend less time on unpaid care work as a result of measures that reduce the time needed to perform such duties, and to a lesser extent as a result of men sharing the burden at home. ActionAid has contributed significantly to these transformations. The two most important factors of power related to these changes around UCW were self-confidence to bargain at home and the access (and potential access) to resources. This last factor has been used as an argument in women's negotiations for the redistribution of UCW. ActionAid has made a significant contribution to challenging gender roles at home through the use of the time diaries. Other initiatives to reduce UCW through water harvesting have not translated into an increase of power for women as they do not challenge gender roles. However, these measures have tackled women's time poverty, as they have reduced the time women spend on certain duties.

In the past years, unpaid care work patterns in the LRP in Nyanza have been changing. ActionAid has documented this through research related to the FLOW Project<sup>23</sup>. This research indicates that in the two LRP where the project is present (Nyanza and Gisagara) *“there is a 12.5% reduction in the number of hours women spend on unpaid care work”*<sup>24</sup>. This tendency also surfaced strongly during our visit to Nyanza, which is unpacked in the following paragraphs.

**Recognizing:** There was a wide and explicit **acknowledgement that women's burden on UCW is disproportionate**. This emerged strongly during most of our info-generating spaces with members of the community, both men and women. These findings are in line with those of the FLOW evaluation; *“practically every stakeholder met by the evaluation team and asked to talk about the FLOW project mentioned the issue of unpaid care work. It has been popularised and talked about freely by the communities”*<sup>25</sup>.

**Redistributing:** There was a wide consensus among all stakeholders consulted that redistributing UCW among men and women is a complex and long-term goal that requires challenging traditional gender roles embedded into cultural and social norms. As such the advancement we identified in this sense was controversial, non-linear and with plenty of nuances.

Multiple testimonies (from women and men) suggest that **indeed UCW was starting to get redistributed among men and women** *“previously I wouldn't even take off laundry from the drying line and often the clothes would be drenched by the rain, now I do it, even fetching water and firewood and when she comes back home everything will be in order”* (Men focus group).

The arguments backing why this was happening (and should be happening) were still largely **instrumental and not right-based**, as we advanced in previous sections of this report. Even the FLOW evaluation states: *“(…) but above all, the benefits from sharing in UCW were seen to benefit everyone in the household”*<sup>26</sup>. Women themselves also used these instrumental arguments as ways to point out why UCW should be redistributed at home *“if you help, I'll have more time to be pretty for you”* (thinkshop with seven women leaders).

We recognise that this **“instrumentalisation”** (as we stated when we talked about mobility) is a **natural stage in a complex process of change**. However, it would be worth reflecting and linking this with the fact that while women do not see inner transformations (power within) as full expressions of power, it will be difficult for them to genuinely see themselves as agents of rights. That is to hold strong convictions such as *UCW needs to be redistributed because it is fair*. Equally important will be for others (**men and women** in the family and in the community) **to recognise** women as full agents of rights.

However, social change is occurring to a small extent and the reason why we know this is because of cases of **conflict and identity threats present in women's and men's stories, which tell us that gender roles are indeed being challenged** in the community; *“People still consider us (men) brainwashed but we are determined to set an example”* (men's group); *“When my (male) neighbour started selling milk and cleaning the house everyone was laughing at him”* (thinkshop with seven leaders).

There is evidence to affirm that **ActionAid has contributed to challenging social values through the use of the time diaries**, a methodology used in the FLOW Project consisting in using time diaries filled by women and men periodically. These diaries track the reduction and redistribution of time spent on collecting water, firewood, child care and other unpaid care work. Time diaries methodology was very frequently mentioned as a valuable space for family reflection and for challenging gender roles and not only as a

<sup>23</sup> Baseline report on unpaid care work, 2014; Recognize, redistribute, reduce women's unpaid care work, 2016; Final evaluation of FLOW, 2016

<sup>24</sup> Final FLOW evaluation, 2016

<sup>25</sup> IBID

<sup>26</sup> IBID

research tool; "I brought a time diary to him and we discussed my activities and he realized that I am more overloaded than him" (woman from Nyanza).

**Reduction:** Measures to reduce the UCW are less controversial than those intending to redistribute them among men and women. These **measures address practical gender needs rather than strategic gender needs**<sup>27</sup>. In Nyanza, ActionAid through the FLOW Project has introduced successful measures, such as rain water harvesting that have reduced the number of hours women devote to collect water<sup>28</sup>. Going back to "spaces and power", we can see how women pointed out that they now spend less time at the water pump.

Reducing UCW has obvious advantages for the advancement of women as it tackles the issue of *time poverty*<sup>29</sup>. However, we could **not find evidence that initiatives that reduce the number of hours women spend on UCW contribute to women being more powerful** as these measures do not seriously challenge gender relations. This means, for example, that women may spend less time fetching water but this duty is still seen as a woman's duty.

## GBV: Physical & sexual violence



The prevalence of GBV in Nyanza is very high as it is in the rest of Rwanda. To fight it ActionAid is advocating for just and conducive legislations, helping women to be aware of these laws and helping them to have the institutional channels to claim their rights. However, most frequently, women would opt for ways to cope with a situation of violence at home rather than challenging it through formal channels, as this could mean retaliation, conflict and ultimately loss of resources. In this situation, women would relatively opt to give up power or control over their own bodies in favour of other factors of power (control over assets).

ActionAid is institutionally aware that these formal channels are not enough to challenge GBV and in practice the LRP is contributing to challenging social norms and power relations in families and communities. This has been done through trainings and through providing safe spaces in the cooperatives (*see chapter umutungo*). However, these initiatives are scattered and/or not deliberate.

### Prevalence of GBV in Nyanza

**Gender based violence is** one of the **pending tasks** in Rwanda's gender revolution. The 2010 Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey (RDHS) found that two in five women (**41%**) **have experienced physical violence** since the age of 15 and more than one in five women have **experienced sexual violence (22%)**. According to the survey, the main perpetrator of the first experience of sexual violence against women is a current or former husband or partner.

Testimonies and reflections collected in **Nyanza are coherent with these staggering statistics**. It was shockingly easy (even with the little time we had) to get stories on severe abuse, most of them referred to **marital life**: "I used to hide and sleep out of home as he wanted to beat me" (woman from Nyanza).

A number of these stories were about **forced marriage and rape**. In these testimonies the rapist *corrects* the situation by bestowing honour on the woman or girl through marriage<sup>30</sup>: "A boy of that family raped me and made me his wife without my consent or my parents'" (woman from Nyanza)

Official reports indicate that GBV **prevalence is decreasing** "from 5358 cases reported in 2008 to 1071 cases reported in 2012"<sup>31</sup>. However, this information should be taken **with caution**. It is widely accepted that GBV tends to be under reported everywhere in the world and as the same source indicates "official statistics only reveal part of the problem".

In Nyanza, we found many testimonies and reflections suggesting an **increased perception that the levels of domestic violence are reducing** "there is peace in the homes now. Even some deaths which used to be caused by conflicts in the home have been avoided". It is important to notice that in this testimony there is also an instrumental tone. The quote indicates that it is good that GBV has decreased not because women have the right to safety but because there is more peace at home, i.e. beneficial for the family.

### Working with men

When we asked for the reasons why women thought that GBV was decreasing, women overwhelmingly identified that the main trigger to reverse situations of violence at home was to do with **men changing their aggressive behaviour**: "Today, he no longer abuses me

27 Practical needs: Coming from roles & responsibilities that both roles have in a given society; Strategic needs: they refer to women subordinate position in society and the awareness and possibility to revert this situation – Moser 1986

28 Final FLOW evaluation. 2016

29 The concept of women's time poverty stems from what feminist economists refer to as the double shift, i.e. number of hours that women spend on paid work (in the formal or informal economy), and on unpaid care work. There is also the triple shift, which includes often low-income women's unpaid community labour. See Sethi, M. "What contribution does feminist economics make to the understanding of gender equality?", 2011

30 This response to rape is acceptable in several cultural contexts around the world

31 Beijing +20 Rwanda Country Report, 2014, pg 29

*because of the trainings ActionAid has given us, he has allowed me to join the cooperatives, and I also contribute in helping other women that face domestic violence in their homes"* (woman from Nyanza)

AS we see in the quote, this **change in men's behaviour was attributed often to the trainings that ActionAid** and others (such as governmental bodies) were providing. We did not have enough time to investigate if this was actually the case or if women's answers were triggered by "social desirability"<sup>32</sup>.

There is growing recognition that working with male perpetrators - alongside intervention and protection for women - is an effective way to reducing the violence<sup>33</sup>. ActionAid itself, under its Programme "*Access to Justice and Preventing Sexual Violence Initiatives*" is training men in Myanmar to be role models in their communities, which has reportedly modified men's behaviour notably around GBV<sup>34</sup>. In Rwanda, organisations such as RWAMREC run training schemes for male perpetrators of domestic violence with very good results in terms of raising their awareness<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, it could be that training provided by ActionAid is producing similar results in Nyanza. However, despite these promising indicators, **it seems adventurous to conclude that occasional trainings are producing meaningful results** in such a complex issue that would require a sustained and long process of *conscientisation*.

### *Power to...cope*

In the *thinkshop* we had with the seven women leaders on the fourth day of our info-generation workshop we talked at large about the information generated in their groups on GBV. The main conclusion of our discussion was that **women in Nyanza (most frequently) would opt for ways to cope with a situation of violence at home rather than challenging it.**

Interestingly, in several occasions women brought up the power factor **control over assets** as a means to cope with a situation of abuse. As the following testimony illustrates the power they get through becoming self-sufficient economically reduces the margins of conflict at home: "*I have suffered a great deal of GBV but I have stood the test and I am now strong and I have the capacity to sustain. Thanks to the village savings and lending groups, I am now able to make some savings or lend for money that I use to cultivate my own land, the product of which I am able to take to the market and gain some money to buy other necessities and because of that I have been able to take care of my own household and my children for five years*" (woman from Nyanza)

### *Seeking help through formal channels*

Only on one occasion did we hear of a woman bringing her **husband to justice** "*Fellow women in the group advised me to take the issue to the authority, as a result my husband was summoned by the latter and was rebuked and encouraged to change his behaviour*" (woman from Nyanza).

This is consistent with official reports that reveal that in Rwanda **very few women would opt to claim their rights through the legal/formal routes**<sup>36</sup>, as this **could translate into hate and retaliation** from her husband and other members of the community. As a staff member from AAIR puts it "*in Rwanda all family issues/conflicts are settled or handled at the village level by mediators and most of the conflicts are resolved at that level, unless it has failed, that's when it is referred to legal/formal routes*". Several testimonies and discussions from the focus groups also indicate that the most frequent option to response to GBV cases would be to intervene informally through community mediators rather than refer these cases to any duty bearer. As a consequence men very rarely have to face any penalties or legal action.

Moreover, even if in theory new laws protect women's interests and uphold gender equality, in practice in the event of a divorce husbands are more likely to keep all the assets. In this situation, **women would relatively opt to give up power or control over their own bodies in favour of other factors of power** (control over assets). The fact that women do not identify the control over their body as a factor of power could be behind this decision (conscious or not) to prioritize control over resources instead of control over their own body. It could also indicate that they do not yet identify that they have the right to have power and control over their own body. It would have been **interesting to probe this further.**

ActionAid is promoting an **implicit but clear map of how power change happens where the emphasis is placed on advocating for just and conducive legislations, helping women to be aware of these laws and helping them to have the institutional channels to claim their rights.** These would involve training on the steps to go through if women want to make an accusation/legal referral, register marriages, refer to health services, etc.

However, following this formal route often comes at a very high cost to women, socially and economically.

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<sup>32</sup> Social desirability bias refers to the fact that in self-reports, people will often report inaccurately on sensitive topics in order to present themselves in the best possible light, <http://www.psychologyconcepts.com/social-desirability-bias/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/changing-behaviour-male-perpetrators-domestic-violence>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.actionaid.org/2014/11/should-men-be-involved-addressing-issues-violence-myanmar>

<sup>35</sup> "96% of the men who attend its training programmes show an understanding of the need to re-examine notions of masculinity. In addition, 78% recognise that violence against their wives may harm their marital life and undermine their children's wellbeing". <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/nov/22/rwanda-gender-based-violence>

<sup>36</sup> The 2010 RDHS survey shows that 56% of the women who had experienced violence did not seek any help. Of the women who sought help, the majority reached out to friends, neighbours, family or in-laws. Only 6.5% reported the violence to the police.

*"But even if progressive laws and policies are in place and resourced there may still be crucial work to change attitudes and behaviours of both the intended beneficiaries and the implementers of these. A progressive law on domestic violence will have little effect if police and court officials believe it is OK for men to beat up their wives – or if women themselves believe the same. Changing invisible / intangible values and beliefs is thus essential"<sup>37</sup>.*

As the above quotes shows, **ActionAid is well aware that progressive laws are not sufficient to fight GBV**, advancing on other invisible aspects such as social norms and women feeling like full agents of rights are equally important. On this last point, we also collected testimonies around the theme of GBV that suggest that women themselves have not fully internalised their right to not have to be subjected to violence in their homes. For example, one of the women we talked to explained how violence happens when a woman *has disrespected her husband*, which suggests that women themselves may see that their 'disrespectful' behaviour is a legitimate cause of violence.

### 3.3.3. IN THE COMMUNITY

#### Umutungo

*(Anything owned or controlled, tangible or intangible, that has monetary value and was acquired at a measurable cost<sup>38</sup>)*



Women in Nyanza have gained (and increased) access and control over assets and income in the past few years. This has been key for them in order to gain power. ActionAid has contributed to this in several ways, most significantly through the cooperatives. These spaces have contributed to the generation of wealth for the women following a model of a market that is not exploitative but empowering for women smallholders. Cooperatives are also the expression of collective power (power with). Both the women themselves and AARI at the local level share that this concept of working collectively is central to their understanding of how gender power relations work.

In addition to cooperatives, ActionAid has supported women to claim their rights to land. Women appreciate this work which has involved increasing their knowledge of their rights (one of the identified factors of power). However, as happens with other types of GBV, women when personally invested sometimes opt for alternative routes to claiming their rights to land as this can come at a high price. We documented several testimonies of conflict related to this. These episodes of conflict are a sign that power gender relations are really being challenged.

**Owning and controlling assets and income** (what in kinyarwanda is known as *umutungo*) ranked third in the list of important factors of power, with 7.5 points. *Umutungo* refers to access to (and control over) income but also includes access to financial services, livestock, and land.

The perception of the vast majority of women consulted was that **they have gained access and control over assets and income in the past few years**. This is consistent with the results of the FLOW evaluation that found that women in Nyanza **have improved food security** and have gained income<sup>39</sup>.

More significantly, this increase in women's *umutungo* **also meant that they have increased their power**. This was apparent in a number of transformations where *umutungo* was identified as a key trigger. For example, at home, controlling income meant that women could decide what to buy and sell, or had a say in how to use the money. This means she increased her negotiating **power over domestic finances**: *"Today I have a say at home, we plan together and I have a say on income"* (woman from Nyanza)

In the community, women with more *umutungo* have been **recognised as role models**, i.e. *umutungo* increases women's status in their community's eyes and aids other factors of power such as 'recognition by others'. *"We started as women who had nothing and now we can buy medical insurance for our families, our neighbours got a bit inspired. They seek advice from us about how to sell vegetables somewhere else, how to come together and save the money"* (thinkshop with the seven leaders)

#### Cooperatives

The cooperatives are proven to be **an excellent way to contribute to livelihood security for women and to ensure that they increase their control over productive resources<sup>40</sup>**. This model promotes that income is not generated through an exploitative/extractive system but through an economic notion of market **where wealth generated remains under the control of the women<sup>41</sup>**. This concept was resoundingly appreciated by the reflection groups from the three sectors where the LRP operates: *"Women*

37 Core insights to shape ActionAid's future HRBA and theory of change, ActionAid, 2016

38 <https://glosbe.com/rw/en/umutungo>

39 Final FLOW evaluation, table 2: summary assessment of the results against the indicators, 2016

40 According to the final FLOW evaluation "in Rwanda 34 women smallholder groups have successfully been registered as cooperatives under Rwanda Cooperatives Agency (RCA) while 46 are currently in the process of applying for registration as cooperatives under RCA, although they have completed the registration process at the sector level which allows them to operate legally as informal groups"

41 Fully aligned with AI strategy 2013-2017, pg 4



gained the power of working together and through cooperatives they were able to learn about working to sustain their own income" (notes from sense-making session)

But the cooperatives are more than income generating spaces in terms of power dynamics.

#### New public spaces for decision making led by women that legitimize their power

The cooperatives have become formal community organisations with functional governance structures led exclusively by women and well respected by members of the community including their husbands<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, cooperatives as **legitimate power spaces are also contributing to changing the community views about the power that women hold**: "Before ActionAid interventions, women (...) had no idea of joining a cooperative or a group or of thinking of being a member of any other community structure" (notes from sense-making session)

#### The power with...

The cooperatives (and before that the REFLECT circles as the FLOW evaluation points out<sup>43</sup>) in Nyanza are the **entry points** to any shift of power benefiting women according to the implicit AAIR **at the local level**, as stated by several AAIR staff "It all starts with "power with"; from there other transformations take place". Indeed, many testimonies collected identify the moment of joining the cooperative as an inflection point:

**Related to GBV** "Before joining a cooperative, I was abused at home I was given no rights to assets and I couldn't see my significance. But, after joining a cooperative (...)" (woman from Nyanza)

**Related to confidence & recognition by others**- "I heard a voice in me saying I have something to offer others. After joining a cooperative, I was trusted and appointed as a leader" (woman from Nyanza)

**Related to assets** - "Before joining "Duterane Inkunga" cooperative, I used to beg for money and ask my husband for each and everything. But, after joining it (...)" (woman from Nyanza)

Furthermore, as presented in the section "factors of power", women ranked the factor *working collectively* very high. We can therefore conclude that **the concept of working collectively (power with) is central to how AARI in Nyanza and the women themselves understand power**.

#### Safe spaces to discuss gender sensitive issues

Cooperatives have **become healing spaces** where women can tackle sensitive issues with peers including issues to do with GBV. For example, in two of the groups and during the *thinkshop* with the seven leaders, the figure of **informal "watch-dogs"** surfaced. These are women who have gone through violence themselves and have overcome somehow the situation. They become an informal stop-over for women to seek comfort and advice. Often these encounters occur in the **cooperatives**: "These spaces (cooperatives) make us free to talk" (*thinkshop* with seven women leaders)

#### *Cattle farm*

As we saw in "spaces and power", the cattle farm is one of the places that women identified as having been more powerful/present. This was directly related with **ActionAid's programmes** where it directly **gives livestock to women**. For example, under the FLOW Project "in Rwanda by the time of the evaluation at least 252 women were reported to have received a cow, 552 women received a pig and 250 women had a goat"<sup>44</sup>.

This scheme was **important for the power** analysis because of three things. Firstly, **cows are ancestral symbols of wealth and power** in Rwanda, as the FLOW evaluation points out "animals were considered by farmers as a symbol of status". Secondly, the scheme **contributed to increase peer support and solidarity** as it was organized in a way where "they (cattle) were given to the women beneficiaries on 'produce and pass on the first birth to the next beneficiary basis', and by the time of the evaluation other members not given in the first round reported to have already received from the initial beneficiaries"<sup>45</sup>. Finally, in Rwanda, traditionally men bear the primary responsibility for overseeing livestock<sup>46</sup> while women were relegated to farming crops. Therefore, women **owning cows do challenge traditional gender relations**, "G. was given a cow, she milked the cow hidden away (as this is a man's job) but later she asked other women what would happen if she milked in public" (seven women leaders workshop, first day).

#### *The bank: SACCO*

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42 Final FLOW evaluation, 2016

43 "These groups have been the kingpin of the project. Almost every activity starts and ends with the benefits accruing to the women in these groups. The groups have initiated themselves into savings and loans associations, and many are transitioning into cooperative societies". FLOW evaluation, 2016

44 Final FLOW evaluation, 2016

45 IBID

46 <http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Rwanda.html>

Women now have **better access to financial services**. The LRP management reported that all cooperatives and many of their members have bank accounts, many of the testimonies we collected and other info-generating exercises<sup>47</sup> backed this up. **ActionAid has contributed to this by providing women with information** and supporting them while approaching the banks. Notice that this is heavily related to one of the factors of power women identified; *having access to information*. *“(Before they started working with ActionAid) the women said they did not even know what SACCO (local saving entities) meant and where it is located as they had no access to money. Only men had full control on money income or other family income”* (notes from sense-making session)

Having access to financial services is a widely accepted factor that supports economic empowerment as it increases savings, facilitates control over income, and opens the door to credit<sup>48</sup>.

It is worth noticing as well that even if ActionAid’s contribution is acknowledged, it seems clear that **the increase in access to financial services is very connected with a strong political will of the Rwandan government**: *“In 2009, it (Rwandan government) launched an ambitious programme to establish community savings and credit cooperatives – known as U-Saccos – in all of Rwanda’s 416 sectors. The aim of the programme was to give people who’d never had a bank account before access to financial services, especially savings, at low transaction costs. In three years it attracted over 1.6 million customers”*<sup>49</sup>.

## My land

An issue that emerged strongly during the visit to Nyanza was women’s rights to land. Women in Rwanda have equal rights to men in all aspects of acquisition, management and inheritance of land. This was granted by the 1999 Inheritance Law and further revised in 2013, according to the *Beijing + 20 Rwanda Country Report* *“this (the law) has greatly improved women’s access to productive resources and reduced their economic dependence”*.

However, the same source points out that the main challenge remaining is the lack of information and knowledge about the law, especially for women<sup>50</sup>. ActionAid International Rwanda (AAIR) shares this analysis and has invested a lot in training women and supporting them to claim their rights.

As with GBV (see physical and sexual violence), AAIR is following the same **implicit pathway to change** to fight gender discrimination in access to land, **where the emphasis is placed on a) advocating for progressive legislation, b) helping women to be aware of these laws and c) ensuring they claim their rights**. This change route is articulated in promise 1 of the ActionAid Strategy *“by 2017 we will have organised and supported rural women to claim access to and control over land”*<sup>51</sup>

In Nyanza we collected testimonies that tell us that this strategy is working to a certain extent. Several testimonies acknowledge and **appreciate ActionAid’s work on making women aware of their rights and how to claim them**.

*“When ActionAid came, sensitized us to form groups and trained me on the matrimonial regime and inheritance law. I realized that I am strong and came to know that I have right to family land and other properties. I fought for the land and now I cultivate the land safely.”* (notes from sense-making session)

*“(…) she was able to approach the local authority and claimed for the land that was taken from by her in-laws without her consent. Despite resistance from both her sisters and in-laws who considered her decision to be of an outcast people (an abominable thing to do, taboo), she persevered and was able to have her land back. She is currently cultivating it”* (notes from sense-making session)

However, as this last story illustrates, **this road is not free of conflict** (as we saw under UCW and GBV) and we have to ask ourselves how much women are willing to challenge the powers that be when they have a personal stake in this. Often when women opt to claim their right to land through official routes they face retaliation. Furthermore, (even if we did not hear this explicitly) we can safely assume that they would face the same type of situations even when they have success while exercising their rights.

As a consequence, **women are finding alternative ways to access land beyond formal channels to claim their rights**, such as buying their own land. *“After I separated I didn’t fight for my property. Trying to claim your rights creates hate with the in-laws and I don’t want to break links. I bought my own land”* (thinkshop with seven women leaders).

## Women’s political participation

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47 Power shuffle with seven women leaders on 1st day of the workshop

48 The Global Findex Database 2014 Measuring Financial Inclusion around the World, pg 2, World Bank Group, 2016

49 <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/aug/25/rwanda-gender-gap-banks-failing-female-entrepreneurs>

50 “This means that many of them do not claim their rights and do not seek legal protection when their rights are violated”, Beijing + 20 Rwanda Country Report

51 ActionAid Strategy 2012-2017



There has been an increase in women's political representation especially for National Women Council (NWC) positions. ActionAid's trainings (and other empowering spaces such as the cooperatives) are credited with contributing to increasing self-confidence which women identified as a key precondition to lead in the community. However, there is no evidence that women elected to these positions bring a shared narrative to these spaces and it is not clear how much decision-making power these spaces really hold.

Much of what the world perceives as the Rwanda gender revolution is to do with **women's impressive presence in institutions**. While clear progress on political representation has been made thanks to the quota system, **it is still not clear how meaningful that is in terms of substantive participation in decision making**. Rwanda currently leads the world in women's representation in parliament at 64%. Furthermore, women constitute 50% of the judiciary, 39% in Cabinet, 40.3% of Provincial Governors, 43.2% of district council members, 83.3% of Vice Mayors in charge of social affairs<sup>52</sup>

Despite these important gains, some argue that *"the majority of women have benefited little from government policies to promote gender equality and empower women"*<sup>53</sup> and suggest that high political representation of women in parliament has not necessarily yet translated into substantive legislative gains for women. However, no one denies the value of the presence of women in decision making spaces, and some go even further to suggest that this presence has *"increased respect for some women and given them a greater voice in the family and community, a greater autonomy in family decision-making and greater access to education"*.<sup>54</sup>

Behind this increase there are assertive legal guarantees such as the constitutional provision of the minimum 30% quota for women in all decision-making positions. In Nyanza, ActionAid was credited with linking empowerment to women's participation in elections through their training programme.

Women in Nyanza frequently linked **ActionAid's training** with an increase of **confidence** that would in turn lead to a certain **sense of agency**: *"Women feel more empowered and are ready to lead other women in the community"* (workshop with women leaders, second day)

**This sense of agency has translated into political participation**. The recent FLOW evaluation gives us information about the scale of this transformation *"550 in Rwanda (in the two LRPs of Nyanza and Gisarara) have applied their leadership skills in to formal and informal leadership positions in the community"*<sup>55</sup>.

In informal decision-making spaces, women reported to have been elected as **community mediators (umwunzi)**; who are in charge of solving local disputes and finding common ground for citizens.

At the formal level, **most frequently these leadership positions were linked to with the National Women Council (NWC)**: *"We stood for elections and we were voted by the community and now many of us are representatives of national women's council"* (woman from Nyanza)

As Elizabeth Powley explains *"the women's councils are grass-roots structures elected at the cell level (the smallest administrative unit) by women only, and then through an indirect election at each of the successive administrative levels (sector, district, province). (...) They operate in parallel to general local councils and represent women's concerns"*<sup>56</sup>.

In the same publication Powley cites Berthe Mukamusoni, a parliamentarian elected through the **NWC**, to explain the **importance of this institution as a mobilizing tool, civic education space, and a means to increase women's confidence**<sup>57</sup>.

However, the NWC, especially at the local level, **has important pitfalls most significantly related to the lack of resources** and the fact that the women elected to be part of the local councils are volunteers who have to juggle their work in the council with a very busy life at home and in the field. This situation seems to be encouraging a *triple shift* for women exacerbating their time poverty. This means that to the *double shift* paid work/UCW, women have to add unpaid community labour for example working as a member of the NWC. This is recognised by the local gender representative who told us how during elections it was difficult to get equal representation. Women are not confident to be elected because they have other responsibilities at home; on the contrary men do not feel this way, they are always confident to step up.

52 Beijing + 20 Rwanda Country Report, 2015

53 <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/OxHRH-Working-Paper-Series-Number-5-Abott-and-Malunda1.pdf>

54 IBID


55 Final FLOW evaluation

56 Elizabeth Powley, Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers Case Study: Rwanda: Women Hold Up Half the Parliament, 2005

57 IBID, "In the history of our country and society, women could not go in public with men. Where men were not supposed to talk or to show their needs. Men would talk and think for them. So with [the NWC], it has been a mobilization tool, it has mobilized them, it has educated [women]. It has brought them to some [level of] self-confidence, such that when the general elections are approaching, it becomes a topic in the women's [councils]. 'Women as citizens, you are supposed to stand, to campaign, give candidates, and support other women'. They have acquired a confidence of leadership"

A legitimate question will be if this increase in women's time poverty is translating into increased power for them. In this sense, in Nyanza, consultations with women pointed to a significant **increase in women's political participation or at least in the presence of women in political spaces**. However, **the quality of this participation, meaning what kind of power these positions carried, was not that clear**. Women felt it was important being elected as a means to be recognised by others. What we did **not see was that these elected women had a shared narrative**; common issues that were brought collectively to these spaces and therefore translated into concrete policy gains.

### 3.3.4. ACTIONAID WORK AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND HOW IT LINKS TO THE LRP

 At the national level AAIR, through its influencing work, is addressing strategic gender needs that are relevant to the work done at the LRP level, for example on women's right to land and unpaid care work. The organisation makes efforts to contribute to transformations around these themes that are structural and systemic through influencing progressive legislation. This approach is touching the lives of women in Nyanza to a certain extent. However, we also saw that there is a disjunction between what the laws say and what the community thinks is justice.

At the National level, from the capital **Kigali, AAIR designs and carries out influencing work on issues such as UCW or the right to land that are fully aligned with the work we have seen at the local level in the LRP**. For example, a senior AAIR staff member explained to us how AAIR was part of the collective effort of the Women Umbrella Association that contributed to the drafting of the 1999 Law on **Inheritance** and Marital Property Rights.

When we were in Rwanda, we documented a communication exchange (April 2016) where the government of Rwanda asked civil society organisations, including AAIR, to give comments to the *National Gender Strategic Plan*. AAIR commented on the need for actionable measures on UCW and women's rights on natural resources/land which are themes totally in line with the types of transformations we identified in the LRP.

These indications suggest that AAIR has a long standing relation with the government of Rwanda and that their influencing work takes the 'inside track', i.e. working closely with decision-makers, versus 'outside track' approaches that seek to influence change through pressure and confrontation<sup>58</sup>. Their approach is also led by evidence and research versus those approaches that involve, primarily, values and interests.: *"ActionAid has two ways of doing advocacy but all are based on evidence through research and then convene meetings with the public and the Government officials. Dialogues, consultation and lobbying are mainly our approaches for advocacy". (Senior staff AAIR)*

#### NATIONAL INFLUENCING EVENT ON UCW ORGANISED BY AAIR IN KIGALI, 2016



#### How does this work link to the LRP?

AAIR works at the National level to ensure progressive legislation is in place. In doing so, the organisation **addresses strategic gender needs that are relevant in the LRPs**, and makes efforts to **contribute to transformations that are structural and systemic**. Once the legislation is in place AAIR organises training to make women aware of their rights as we have seen under several sections in this report.

This approach is bringing changes to women's lives up to a certain stage. However, we also saw that **there is a disjunction between what the laws say and what the community thinks is justice**; *"(claiming rights) is of course not for*

*everyone. It is all in the law, but many people don't believe in the law" (thinkshop with women leaders).*

## 3.4. CONCLUSIONS ON RWANDA

We were asked to assess if **ActionAid is contributing to changing the gender power balance in Nyanza**. The answer to this question is a loud yes. ActionAid and its partners are contributing to significant transformations in the lives of women involved with the LRP which are making them more powerful.

Action Aid is credited with having contributed to increasing **women's confidence**, which is one of the most important factors of power in their eyes. The organisation has helped to increase their **power to bargain at home** and it has helped them to **conquer new spaces** in the public sphere where they exercise power, like being **elected leaders** for the NCW or being part of legitimised structures like the cooperatives, whose establishment has been facilitated by ActionAid.

ActionAid has also made a significant contribution to **challenging gender roles at home making the community aware that the burden UCW** is unbalanced, through the use of the time diaries methodology. The organisation has also challenged (to a certain extent) through its training programme, **social norms and power relations in families and communities that sustain GBV**.

58 For more information on these concepts see, A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence, ODI, 2011

Most significantly, ActionAid has contributed to women in Nyanza **gaining and increasing access and control over assets and income**, which is another key factor for them in order to gain power. This is done through working collectively in cooperatives following a model of a market that is not exploitative but empowering for women smallholders. Finally, ActionAid has devoted considerable efforts to **training women on their rights and how to claim them**. This has translated (for example) into several women being able to exercise their rights over their land. These are all significant transformations for women's lives in Nyanza and they should be celebrated!

Moving forward, we have also seen that there are important challenges while redefining power gender relations. Firstly, we found that women and their communities still do not have a genuine belief that **women are full agents of rights**, meaning that these rights are intrinsic to them as human beings and not just granted because having rights is beneficial to their family or community.

Subsequently, many of these power gains are still based largely on **instrumentalising women**. For example, *women are allowed into public spaces because it is financially beneficial for the family; or GBV should decrease because this will bring peace at home.*

Finally, in the face of injustice and unbalanced power, we found that women frequently would **opt for ways to cope with the situation** (like violence at home or not being able to access and control land) rather than challenging it through formal channels, as this could mean retaliation, conflict and ultimately (could also mean) loss of resources.

## 4. CAMBODIA

This chapter presents the findings of the Cambodia case study that focused on the ActionAid's work in Kampong Thom LRP

**Contextualizing:** The first part of the chapter gives a brief context of the situation of women's rights in Cambodia and a description of the LRP and the work ActionAid in Kampong Thom.

**Framing:** The second part frames and focuses our reflections around power issues. Here we give some conclusions on how power is perceived by the women involved in the LRP. We focused concretely on those factors they have found to be more important to determine power and reflections around those spaces where they feel they have gained power over the years.

**Substance:** The third part of the case study reflects on what types of changes have occurred for the women in Kampong Thom; how they have occurred, the power dynamics behind them and how ActionAid is contributing to them. We start with changes happening at the personal and the household level (*myself and at home*). Here we address changes around confidence and self-esteem, social respect and recognition, control over income and GBV. The third part of the section deals with transformations occurring at the community level; around access and participation to public spaces. We then address ActionAid's work at the national level and how it is linked to the provincial and local level. Finally, we include a reflection on gender roles transformation in the LRP.

**Concluding:** The last part summarises the main key points of the chapter and a final reflection on ActionAid's work on women's empowerment in Kampong Thom.

### 4.1. CONTEXT

#### 4.1.1. WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA

After decades of a civil war that had "*devastating social, family, interpersonal, economic, and political effects on women*"<sup>59</sup>, Cambodia has progressively re-established peace and stability.

Adopted in 1993, the Constitution of Cambodia guarantees civil liberties and fundamental rights, including equality between men and women<sup>60</sup>, equal employment opportunities for women, maternity benefits, and the equal right to vote<sup>61</sup> and forbids "*all forms of discrimination against women*"<sup>62</sup>. Since 1997 gender equality efforts have been gaining momentum and a number of mechanisms, such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) or the Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW), have been established and a significant number of laws to promote and protect the rights of women have been adopted, including a Law on the prevention of domestic violence and the protection of victims (DV Law).

The Government's commitment to improving the situation of women is also reflected in the Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency in Cambodia Phase III and the Neary Rattanak IV a five-year strategic plan that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment.

However, although steady progress in key areas such as access to primary education<sup>63</sup> and women's political participation<sup>64</sup>, has been made, important challenges to gender equality still remain.

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59 Aftermath: Women and women's organizations in post conflict Cambodia, USAID2000

60 Article 31. "Khmer citizens are equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, liberties and duties regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religious belief, political tendency, birth origin, social status, wealth or other status [... ]".

61 Article 34 "Khmer citizens of either sex shall enjoy the right to vote and to stand as candidates for the election"

62 Article 45

63 "More children in Cambodia are entering school and the gender gap is quickly closing as more girls make their way to the classroom. In the 2010/2011 school year, the overall rate of children enrolled in primary school was 95.2 per cent (95.8 per cent for boys and 94.6 per cent for girls), showing that the gender gap at primary level has essentially been eliminated". UNICEF Cambodia <http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/3.Education.pdf>

64 "Since 1993, women's representation has increased from 6% to 22% within the National Assembly. In commune/sangkat councils, the percentage of female councilors has increased by 3%, from 14.6% to 17.79%, within one election period alone from the 2007 to 2012 elections". CCHR, 'Politics in the Kingdom: Increase Female Representation' (Report) (2013)

*“Cambodian women are progressively enjoying wider freedoms and claiming their rights through increased employment opportunities and Cambodia’s broader economic development. However women are expected to follow social norms and beliefs which allow men to enjoy their ‘gender privilege’ while women undervalue their own capacity and potential. Invisible social norms continue to confine women to household and childcare duties while at the same time the family’s economic status pressures women to engage in income generating work. Gender dynamics have not been thoroughly examined and reflected in designing national policy and limited attention has been paid to addressing and changing negative gender stereotypes that suppress women’s freedom”<sup>65</sup>.*

Some of those challenges are highlighted in the 2013 Human Development Report. For example, female literacy rates are 71%, compared to 85% for men. 55% of women have not completed primary school, in comparison to 40% of men, only 18% of the seats in parliament are held by women (UNDP, 2013b; Cambodian Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2008). Furthermore, recent research on intimate partner violence reveals that in 2015 1 in 5 Cambodian women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence and that, although attitudes seem to be starting to change a high proportion of women (half of those surveyed) still believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife for certain reasons<sup>66</sup>.

Most literature reviewed tend to associate gender inequalities to the persistence of rigid gender roles and gendered attitudes towards women’s place in the household, which pressure women to remain as subordinate to men in most aspect of their daily lives. The moral codes that underpin such stereotypes, *Chhab Srei* and *Chhab Proh* (“norms for men and for women”)<sup>67</sup> dictate the ideal masculinity and femininity respectively and portray the idea of a polite, soft-spoken and weak Cambodian woman that is trained to obey and respect her husband and to stay in the private sphere.

*“The Cambodian household is traditionally headed by a man, and as with many other agrarian societies, the family is at the core of society and plays a key role in meeting the economic, social and emotional needs of its members. Women are expected to be responsible for housekeeping and child rearing. Women also play a significant role in managing family finances, and have historically had a long history of economic activity, and more autonomy than many other women in Asia”<sup>68</sup>.*

Despite these stereotypes, decades of conflict and recent migration trends have resulted in an increase in female-headed households that according to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs now, constitute about 25% of total households in the country. As we will analyse later in this report, the situation has contributed to women assuming new roles that were traditionally reserved for men, triggering transformations affecting the status of women in Cambodian society. This case study will discuss the complexities of this new role of women to support further reflection on the role of ActionAid contributing to changes in gender power relations

#### 4.1.2. THE LRP

ActionAid has been working in Cambodia since 2000 and currently works in 6 geographic areas in the country. This case study covers the work done in the province of Kampong Thom, one of the 6 areas in which ActionAid Cambodia (AAC) works. For the past seven years, AAC has worked in partnership with *Help Old Age and Miserable Organization* (HOM): a local NGO that works on raising awareness, information and knowledge to enhance gender equality and the realisation of citizen’s rights.

Kampong Thom is located in the centre of Cambodia. Agriculture and fisheries are the main productive activities in the province, with rice being one of the main sources of income. Although in general production at the provincial level is enough to satisfy people’s needs, smallholders still struggle to secure their livelihoods and face many challenges. Poor people’s vulnerability is increased by climate conditions such as flooding and drought and by insufficient access to markets, roads and basic services. Smallholders complement their diet by harvesting wild foods from common agricultural areas, forests and fisheries.

AA’s Local Rights Programme (LRP) and HOM’s work in Kampong Thom focus on 3 main areas: food security, education, and women’s rights<sup>69</sup>.

The key Challenges identified by AAC/HOM in food security include: low agriculture productivity, poor access to extension services and information, poor access to markets, poor government regulation and climate change, which is manifesting as severe water shortages.

AAC/HOM aims to contribute to address some of those challenges by using AAI’s Climate Resilience Sustainable Agriculture Framework (CRSA). CRSA is a farming model based on the adoption of resilient sustainable agricultural practices by groups of farmers that are associated in agricultural cooperatives and groups to improve their production, increase their sales, enhance their access to markets and progressively engage with and influence decision makers and governmental bodies.

65 Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2014 ATTITUDES: Gender Relations And Attitudes, Cambodia Gender Assessment, Policy Brief 2 ;

66 National Survey on Women’s Health and Life Experiences in Cambodia, Cambodia Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2015

67 The Chhab Srei and the Chhab Proh are the traditional codes of conduct for women and men respectively. They are part of the oral cultural heritage. The Chhab Srei is an old poem that has long reflected the culture of Cambodian people regarding appropriate behavior for women and girls.

68 Ledgerwood, 1994 in: National Survey on Women’s Health and Life Experiences in Cambodia, Cambodia Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2015

69 Following priorities established in the Action Aid Cambodia Country Strategy Paper 2013-2018

AAC expects that by using this Framework women, small farmers, and artisan fishers will improve their food security and gain control over their livelihood by (1) bolstering agricultural productivity to secure food and generate a stable income, (2) improving access to markets and information with a focus on women and (3) influencing Cambodian Government's investment, policies and support towards a more sustainable agricultural model<sup>70</sup>.

In Kampong Thom, local community groups assemble around issues such as artisan fishing, water resources management, food processing, vegetable production, rice banks and savings groups rather than in formal and legally recognised cooperatives of small farmers. It is important to note that the CRSA programme in Kampong Thom is primarily based on local economy and community basic needs. Thus, it does not address broader issues of agriculture production and access to markets. With the CRSA and the fishery groups in Kampong Thom AAC/HOM aim to create alternative agricultural revenue.

Women are prioritised as the target population in the LRP strategy and, with the exception of the Community Fisheries Committees where leaders are men, the vast majority of groups in the province are conformed and led by women. According to HOM, the absence of men in the area, due to the increasing labour migration is an important factor to consider in this regard. AAC/HOM's work in food security is also crosscut by a strong component on women's rights realisation including: educational and awareness raising activities; training on laws, rights and gender; capacity building sessions on facilitation and negotiation skills and evidence-based research.

This evaluation's focus is on how the work of AAC/HOM over the last 7 years in Kampong Thom is contributing to shifting power towards women; to improving women's security and to enabling women's access to and control of productive resources. We will also analyse what power dynamics and structures have facilitated or inhibited evidenced changes and how has ActionAid been able to identify, build on or catalyse people's own action to shift power in favour of women.

## 4.2. DESCRIPTION OF POWER: FACTORS AND SPACES



Women perceive that the three most important factors with their feeling of empowerment are gaining knowledge, capacity and skills; generating and controlling their own income; and gaining confidence and self-esteem. These are all placed under the individual quadrants (visible and invisible). In fact, Collective action was the factor less mentioned in testimonies and is the less voted factor.

Women, AAC and HOM staff consulted have similar understanding on how the empowerment processes. All three actors identify confidence as a central factor of empowerment, reflecting a relatively strong consensus on the importance and centrality of gaining "power within". Main differences lie in the hierarchies of the preconditions relatively differ between them.

Other interrelated factors contributing to leverage certain transformations on women's autonomy, economic independence and feeling of empowerment are: the absence of men provoked by labour migration (seasonal or long term, national or international) and the increasing participation of women in agriculture.

Through ranking and scoring as well as community mapping exercises aimed to generate reflection, women participants discussed what it is to be empowered and identified different factors of empowerment. Having these factors in mind they also reflected on the spaces where they think they have gained power in the last 7 years.

This section presents and analyses the results from these two exercises. It also includes a comparative analysis of women participants' assumptions about how changes in power relations happen and the perceptions and assumptions of the implementing organizations, AAC and HOM, shared with the evaluator in interviews. This exercise does not pretend to offer a conclusive Theory of Change of either the work of AA or HOM but it is used as a tool to test both the commonalities and potential discrepancies of their vision with that of women.

### 4.2.1. MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTORS OF POWER FOR WOMEN IN KAMPONG THOM

This exercise was done in a workshop with 47 women (including 7 leaders) from three different communes<sup>71</sup>. Participants worked on and ranked 7 factors of power previously identified, discussed and refined with the 7 women leaders who are AAC/HOM community facilitators. The results emerging from these exercises, were later refined by doing an analysis on how these factors were related in participant stories and testimonies.

In the diagram below (Fig.4), bubble size corresponds to the importance given in the ranking and scoring to factors of power developed with the 47 women. The larger the bubble, the more important the factor is perceived by women. The arrows show the

70 Critical Pathway of CRSA Program Framework (page 18)

71 Communes are the third-level administrative divisions in Cambodia. They are the subdivisions of the districts of Cambodia. Communes can consist of as few as 3 or as many as 30 villages, depending on population. They are regulated by the 2008 Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans and the Law on the Election of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Khans



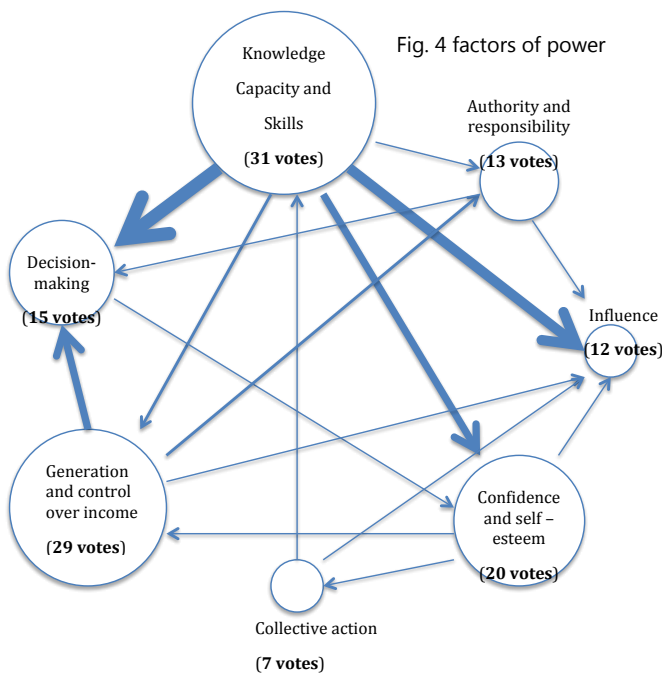
causal relations inferred from the stories and testimonies of these women. The thickness of the arrows represents the recurrence of each causal relation in stories and testimonies<sup>72</sup>.

The seven factors of power identified were ranked as follows:

**Knowledge capacity and skills (31 votes)** These refers, according to women consulted, to:

- Knowing about laws, rights and gender equality– access to information and awareness on women’s rights
- Developing facilitation and negotiation skills and evidence-based research capacity
- Management skills. i.e. revolving funds, natural resources management, water.
- Productive skills to grow vegetables, fish processing,

- **Generation and control over income (29 votes):** Refers to women’s ability to decide over and to manage the income that they generate through productive activities.



- **Self-esteem and confidence (20 votes)** Testimonies focused on feeling more self-valued and having the strength to make oneself respected both at the household level and in public spaces. Participants also linked confidence and self-esteem to the willingness to talk with other women about issues that affect women including GBV.
- **Decision-making (15 votes)** refers to women feeling more valued and reporting that their opinion increasingly counts in decisions over family assets and economy. It also means that women felt more capable to making personal decisions on critical issues such as denouncing Gender-Based Violence cases or filing a claim for divorce.
- **Authority and responsibility (13 votes)** is about performing responsibilities and roles. Examples include the roles that group leaders are playing in managing revolving funds and loans.
- **Influence (12 votes)** Most stories and testimonies tend to interpret influence as leadership of women’s groups/structures as it is the case of the fishery committees or CRSA groups. Other stories associate influence with the ability to access and raise voices in public spaces such as the commune hall meetings and to “talk in front of men” in general.

groups/structures as it is the case of the fishery committees or CRSA groups. Other stories associate influence with the ability to access and raise voices in public spaces such as the commune hall meetings and to “talk in front of men” in general.

- **Collective action (7 votes)** refers generally to collective activities developed by women. Examples include meetings at Community facilitators house to discuss GBV issues and strategies to raise the issues in Commune Hall meetings or in the police station. .

When reading the factors and how women ranked them in the light of the 4 quadrants analytical framework (**gender @ work** framework, see section on methodology) none of the factors identified could be clearly related to the invisible and collective dimension, usually related to changes in social gender attitudes, collective behaviours, and gender norms and values in their families or communities. According to our framework, knowledge, capacity and skills, and confidence and self-esteem operate at the **individual and invisible dimension**. Generation and control over income and decision-making are exercised **individually and in visible spaces**. Finally, authority and responsibility, and influence as defined by women, fall into the **visible and collective quadrant**.

It is also important to note that the **three most important factors** that women associate with their feeling of empowerment (knowledge, capacity and skills; generation and control over income; and confidence and self-esteem) **are all placed under the individual quadrants (visible and invisible)**. About 75% of the votes in during the ranking and scoring exercise referred to individual dimensions’ factors.

In fact, **collective action** was the factor less mentioned in testimonies and is the less voted factor. Women consulted in Kampong Thom did not seem to recognise the collective power as driver of improving women’s status. Despite this apparent weak appreciation of the

72 Annex 3 factors of power in action analysis

collective action factor in the ranking and scoring exercise, the factor was later associated by some as a relevant leverage for other factors such as capacity, knowledge or influence in public spaces.

We also realised that factors are **intertwined and tend to be mutually reinforcing and reciprocal**. i.e:

Nor - " [power] comes from all those factors: the capacities, skills, knowledge, and access to different places, performing responsibilities, making decisions, and believing in myself, most importantly".

Participant- "you need to have income to perform your responsibilities. But to perform your responsibilities you need to have income"

Soam- "To have more influence in the police station we have to create groups of women that help us build capacity and gain knowledge".

Vann- "I am confident and I believe in myself. I have the capacity to influence others. People listen to me because I have skills and capacity, I am trustable and confident".

Participant- "Confidence is very important for leading a group of people. It comes from all the capacities, skills, knowledge"

It is also interesting to note that **Knowledge, capacity and skills** were perceived by women as the most significant key drivers of change in the social status of women but also a source of social recognition and respect both at the household and at community level. Knowledge, capacity and skills on rights were also perceived as necessary preconditions for decision-making and influence. For example, women consulted tended to agree that knowing about rights made women more influential in public spaces such as the Commune hall, the Community Fishery Committees or the school

The same interrelations were found between other factors. For example, **confidence and self-esteem** was also perceived to be a precondition for other factors such as decision-making, generation of income, influence or collective action. But it was also considered to be one of the main consequences or result of other factors such as acquiring capacities technical skills and raising awareness/knowledge of rights and laws. In the words of one woman participant "training gave me confidence; and helped me know how to work, how to mobilise. My confidence grew so that I was able to talk".

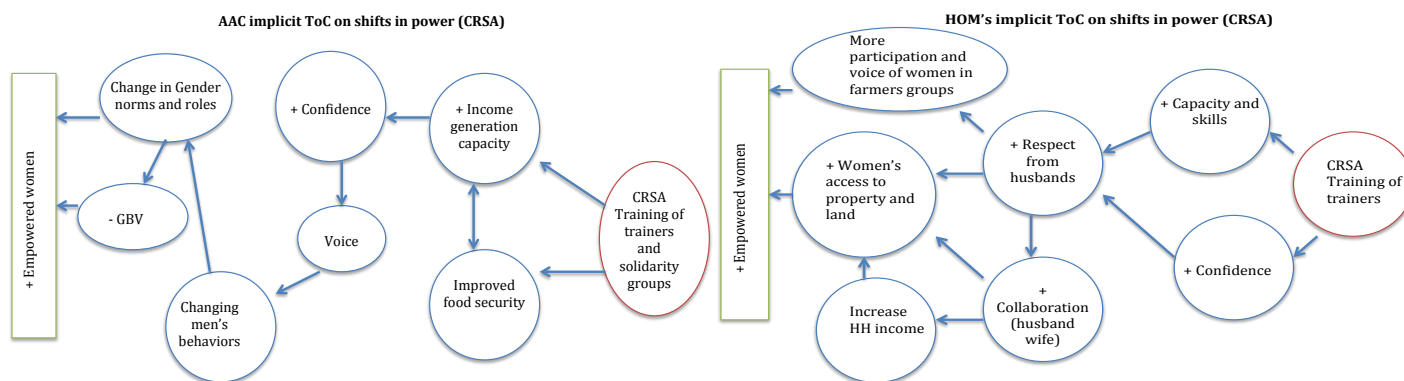
#### 4.2.2. HOM AND AAC REFLECTIONS ON HOW EMPOWERMENT HAPPENS

Parallel to this ranking and scoring exercise with women, the evaluator held a number of interviews and conversations with AAC and HOM's staff that were expected to clarify the implementing partner's perceptions on how changes, and shifts of power, happen and to compare their perceptions with those of women. This exercise was also aiming to unpack some of the assumptions behind AAC/HOM's work and to understand their expected contribution to those changes. Again, the mental maps provided below do not intend to represent neither AAC nor HOM's institutional Theories of Change. They are brought here only as a representation of our reflections and discussions during the field visit.

It is also important to clarify that, due to time constraints, these exercises only covered the work done under the CRSA programme, leaving aside other important work of both organizations in areas such as rights awareness or education programmes, which also affect these processes.

This exercise allowed us to identify similarities and differences on how factors of empowerment are perceived by different actors that are represented in the following graphs:

Fig.5 AAC and HOM empowerment map



As it can be observed both maps show similar understanding of the empowerment processes although the hierarchies of the preconditions relatively differ between them. Some differences in relation to women's understanding of how changes in power relations happen can be also identified.

**The role of capacity and skills:** women and HOM's analysis coincide in understanding the value of capacity and skills as a standalone leveraging factor of empowerment as it represents a source of social recognition. It is also a factor that is not necessarily, or not as strongly linked to income generation as it shows in AAC's implicit map of changes on the left.

**Factors of Confidence:** all three actors identify confidence as a central factor of empowerment, reflecting a relatively strong consensus on the importance and centrality of gaining "power within". The main difference lies in how each actor expects that confidence to be gained. Both HOM and women participants tend to associate confidence and self-esteem with the social recognition of knowledge. Instead, AAC staff's understanding seems to put more emphasis on income generation and food security.

**Changes mostly placed under the individual dimensions:** in general perceptions of factors of empowerment tend to focus a lot on the individual quadrants of change both visible and invisible. AAC's explicit acknowledgement of the gender norms transformation as a stage in women's empowerment processes is a remarkable exception.

#### 4.2.3. OTHER ENABLING FACTORS: THE ABSENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Although not explicitly emerging from our conversations and discussions with women two other interrelated factors contributing to leverage certain transformations on women's autonomy, economic independence and feeling of empowerment were noted by HOM informants: the absence of men provoked by labour migration (seasonal or long term, national or international) and the increasing participation of women in agriculture.

Although women participation in agriculture in Cambodia started during the civil war<sup>73</sup>, this participation has exponentially increased in the last 10 years, mostly provoked by the labour migration of men. This has also been the case in Kampong Thom, according to HOM's staff. Most men migrants work in the construction sector in Phnom Penn during the dry season and come back to work on rice crops during the rainy season. There are also cases of international migration to Thailand. In fact, this is also why most of CRSA training attendants are women, they explain. Men, in general, "have less time for meetings" Village Chief, Vong Nheum and other women participants say.

Although the absence of men for migration seems to open a window of opportunity for women to participate in LRP activities and to probably perform new roles and responsibilities while their husbands are away, it is difficult to extract any conclusive finding without going more in-depth in this particular subject. In fact, the literature reviewed does not reveal conclusive findings about how the absence of men affects the empowerment of women<sup>74</sup>. Studies differ on how and to what extent this absence triggers profound and long-term transformation in gender power relations.

A second but intimately related factor enabling women's empowerment is the increasing participation of women in agriculture in Cambodia. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2015) women in Cambodia show high levels of participation in the agricultural sector<sup>75</sup>. Pem Sai, an agronomist at the Ministry of Agriculture in Kampong Thom, working on multi-agricultural systems confirms that this is the situation in Kampong Thom area as well. He has witnessed how before 2000 it was rare to see women in rice fields or fishing in the lakes. Although rice cropping is still a male-dominated activity, this has changed substantially in the last 15 years, "women know how to grow crops well, sell in the market and generate income." This report also concludes that women's participation in agriculture "is giving them more power within the family".<sup>76</sup>

In the case of the LRP AAC/HOM women participation in agriculture is limited to small-scale vegetables production, under the CRSA framework. As with migration a more in-depth individual study of the subject would be required to be able to reach any conclusion. However, it is worth mentioning that some informants as the male Village Chief, Vong Nheum, noted that recently in his commune, women that engage in agricultural activities seem to participate more actively in commune council meetings. This is however taken with caution and suggested only as a possible indicator to explore and follow up in the future.

#### 4.2.4. SPACES AND POWER

The following infographic (fig.6) illustrates how women in Kampong Thom have changed their perception about in which spaces they feel more or less powerful.



The number of figures associated to each space in the past and in the present indicates the weight that women gave to each space during the community mapping exercise (see methodology piece for a full description). For example, women indicated that before

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73 Krishna Kumar , (2001) Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations and Action. Social Science

74 Scott T. Yabiku' , Victor Agadjanian, and Arusyak Sevoyan, (2010) Husbands Labour Migration and Wives' Autonomy

75 Asian Development bank (2015) PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CAMBODIA

76 Idem

they started working with ActionAid they had very little power at the Commune Hall, but at present it is the space where they feel that they have gained more power.

There are commonalities in participants' criteria of choosing these spaces. Main one is **access to information** in places where decisions that affect their lives are made. These include the commune hall, the school, the health center or the village chief house. Other criteria refer to having **more active participation** in these and other spaces. Most of the stories and testimonies refer to issues of transparency and accountability, as it will be illustrated in the section on *transformations in other public spaces*.

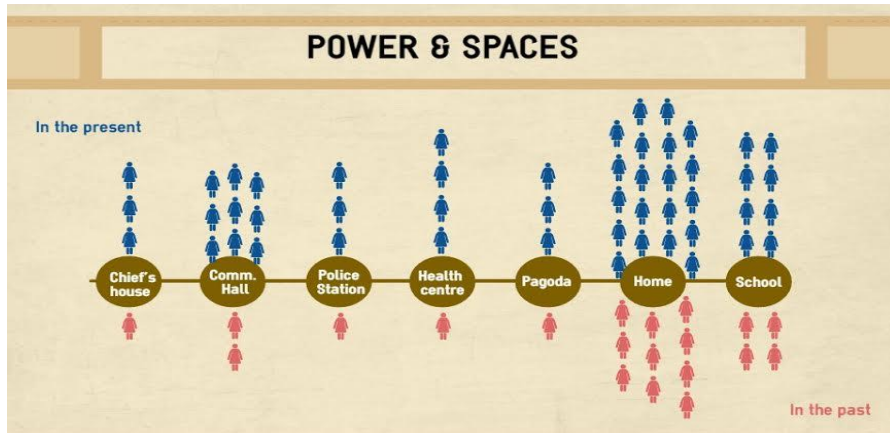


Fig. 6 power and spaces

Although this exercise confirmed that the household continues to be a strongly gendered space, it is significant that in relative terms, the major change is associated to women's presence in public spaces such as the Commune Hall and the Police Station, which women feel, has been reinforced in the past 7 years.

In the exercise, we could identify two differing understandings of what *feeling empowered* within the household meant for women participants. Some women understood that having power was about **gaining voice and decision-making** in family issues. Others expressed a different understanding, associating power to their capacity to **successfully undertake their traditional role as caregivers**. This will have a number of consequences on the extent to which transformations happening are challenging gender social roles, as it will be discussed further in the following section.

### 4.3. CHANGES AND HOW THEY HAPPENED


This section presents the changes identified in relation to factors and spaces of power as defined by women. We will also explore if, and how AAC is contributing to shifting power in areas that women feel as the most important.

#### 4.3.1. TRANSFORMATIONS IN MYSELF AND AT HOME

As already described in the Spaces & Power section, most women consulted feel that they have gained power at home in the last 7 years. According to testimonies and stories, this means:

- Feeling more listened to by husbands and male members of the family, which in some cases has resulted in a significant improvement of communication with their husbands.
- Being more economically independent and as a result, more respected by their husbands.
- Making decisions or participating in decisions that affect their lives. This includes participating more actively in the management of family assets and the economy.
- Feeling more confident to denounce GBV cases.

#### *Being heard and respected*

 Testimonies and cases reported show that women gained new respect and recognition inside the household. In their analysis a main factor of this is linked to the social recognition of knowledge and capacity. They perceived that proving their newly gained capacity and skills from CRSA has affected positively their power at home; improving the communication with husbands and having more access to decision-making in the family.

In Cambodia women are socially perceived as weak and less educated than men, a perception that helps to justify discrimination against women by men in private and public sphere<sup>77</sup>. This is consistent with most testimonies heard during the workshops and meetings with women that clearly associated power with respect and education. It also explains the fact that knowledge, capacity and skills were perceived to be at the heart of the process of empowerment and identified as a necessary precondition to feeling respected and heard by the partner. As Onan from Pren Village puts it *“education is especially important for daughters so their husbands will respect them”*. Sim is a community facilitator from Prekuy Commune. She tells us that since she joined the CRSA programme she has gained knowledge on how to grow vegetables. She feels that sharing this knowledge with her husband has helped them improve their communication. Sim says that now, her husband listens to her more. He also shares ideas with her more often.

Many other testimonies and cases reported by women and HOM staff confirm that women gained new respect and recognition inside the household when they could prove their newly gained capacity and skills to perform new productive roles or tasks traditionally assigned to men both in agriculture or fisheries; capacities that they repeatedly associated with their participation in LRP’s activities. In fact, according to HOM and to the testimonies of the seven community leaders consulted, some husbands now help to grow vegetables, make compost or water vegetables, an incipient sign of power redistribution as a result of AA/HOM’s work worth noting.

Despite some positive trends, the testimonies collected during fieldwork also indicate a strong persistence of the traditional image of women in the household. The housewife identity still prevails as the main role and responsibility of women. Accordingly, the house is perceived to be the “natural” space where women can exercise power. In this sense, most women consulted, even if recognizing their new roles and capacities, tended to associate being “powerful” at home with the capacity of being a good care-taker of the house, bringing up children, cleaning, cooking and other socially-constructed traditional tasks assigned to women. *“I previously used to just cook for my husband; now I have a wider range of things at home which makes me empowered”* a participant from Kampong Kho said when she was asked why she felt more empowered at home. *“I have now power to control and manage husband and child in family, I am responsible for almost everything in the family”* said Nor, another participant.

In this sense this respect gained does not imply direct change in gender social roles but definitely it is a factor that allow them to access to decision-making at home and that may open the door to future wider changes in gender power relations.

### *Generation and control over income*



Women participating in CRSA and fisheries groups have been able to generate income and contribute economically to the household expenses. Women also report more economic autonomy and control over income. Some also tend to perceive themselves as legitimate breadwinners and decision makers in the household. However they also tend to make a strong link between their newly gained economic power and their traditional role of “caretakers”.

Generation and control over family income is proving to be a clear empowering factor in Cambodia. According to a 2010 household survey developed by the general National Institute for Statistics, women who can earn more than their husbands are more likely to decide how their cash earnings are used, if compared with women whose cash earnings are the same as their husband<sup>78</sup>.

In the LRP, HOM data shows that the women participating in CRSA and fisheries groups have been able to generate income and contribute economically to the household expenses. For example, in Kampong Kho commune, 10 groups of women from 5 villages have been trained by HOM on fish processing. HOM provided them with a small interest free loan of \$75-80 for a year per person to help purchase equipment. After the first year, the repayment rate is 100%, according to HOM.

HOM staff estimates that at least 80% of women participants in trainings have acquired more knowledge, now manage money and have initiated new ways to generate income. *Sun Bot is 53 years old and is a participant of the CRSA training. She tells that she now earns her money by herself and does not depend on her husband. Her sources of income are rice and vegetable that she asks her sons and daughters to sell around the village or community. She controls the money they earn. Lately, she has decided to buy a pump to water vegetables. Inampeer, Sun Bot’s husband, doesn’t work and he has problems with alcohol. But she thinks that she has more power than him, because she is capable to provide a better future for her children.*

Slowly and still timidly, generating income and controlling that income seems to be starting to challenge the traditional role of men as natural heads of the household. During discussions most women having control over income perceived themselves as the breadwinner in the household. In Cambodia there is a legal requirement to declare who in the family is the breadwinner and this is by default the husband, even if not necessarily the case. In the case of women consulted, only very few were legally recognised as breadwinners although many felt that they were *de facto* playing that role. The cases identified are mostly widows or divorced women and all of them

77 UNDP, 2014, Leadership: Women in public decision-making and politics.

78 Measuring Women Status and Gender Statistics in Cambodia through the Surveys and Census. PPT to Global Forum on Gender Statistics 27-29 March 2012

admitted having gone through a long and difficult process until being recognised. In their cases, being legally recognised as breadwinners is crucial for not depending on other male family members and for breaking all economic relationship with ex husbands. Other women consulted express their aspiration to be also legally recognised as breadwinners one day. This would help them to be better protected and to secure control over the income they generate.

Despite the legal connotations, testimonies tend to emphasize that income generation and economic independence, even if not legally recognized, are key factors contributing to increase the participation of women in decision-making in the family and reinforce their feeling of empowerment in the household.

*"Now my husband consults on decision making, whether to sell water buffalo or cow, he respects my opinion listen to my ideas"* said a woman participant.

*"He respects me if I decide to buy a motorbike with my children"* said a leader from Sroyov.

It is interesting to note that once they gain control over the income generated women participating in the evaluation tended to prioritise their children's education, wellbeing and future. i.e. extra classes in school, saving for university taxes, school uniforms, books etc... The second priority usually was to buy household assets and other purchases such as motorbikes, agricultural technology or cattle and land property extension.

*"With the money we get from CRSA activities, children can go to school for extra class".* Said one.

*"I spend money on things like buying my children schools uniforms or a bicycle, books, etc."* said other participant

*"I use the income from vegetables to buy fish and meat for my family"* (Participant)

Again here, we see how women tend to make a strong link between their newly gained economic power and their traditional role as caretakers.

## Gender Based Violence



Despite the many contradictions not fully explored in this case study, the generalised feeling among informants was that GBV was decreasing amongst women participating in the LRP activities in the last 7 years. Gaining self-respect and confidence was repeatedly brought as important factors that explain this perception. Some testimonies show that women are adopting better coping strategies that they associate with newly gained capacities to secure "peace at home". Other testimonies indicate that women have gained awareness on gender inequality and women's rights and that they now know the institutional mechanisms at hand. Also there are groups of women creating informal solidarity groups to deal with GBV using CRSA meetings.

The National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences conducted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Institute of Statistics<sup>79</sup> states that one in five women in Cambodia has experienced sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence. This rate is among the highest in the region.

According to HOM calculations, about 20% of women participating in CRSA and fishery groups are victims of GBV. However, the trend is felt to be negative and in the past 7-10 years both the organization and women consulted believe that GBV is decreasing. Gaining self-respect and confidence was repeatedly brought as important factors that explain what women and HOM stakeholders perceive as a relative decrease in the prevalence of GBV in those communes where AAC/HOM intervenes.

Unfortunately the official data available is not regionally disaggregated and we could not triangulate HOM and women's perception with the concrete data in those communes. GBV is a complex issue that needs to be looked at from many different angles. In this evaluation we could not possibly cover the whole phenomenon and therefore can only attempt to grasp the surface of an issue that is often slippery and hidden by society.

In Cambodia the data available tends to somehow contradict some of the opinions heard during our field visit. For example, when women participating in the evaluation believe that violence is decreasing one could think that social acceptance of GBV is not as strong anymore. However, the National Survey shows that, although attitudes might be slowly changing, 58% of women who have experienced physical or sexual IPV in the country condone a husband/partner hitting his wife and that 49% of women who had experienced physical and/or sexual IPV reported that they had not told anyone about the violence. This does also seem to be the case among LRP women. Vann, one of the most active community leaders on these issues confirms that there are still women that are afraid to even share their cases.

However, despite the many contradictions that we cannot fully explore here, the generalised feeling among informants was that GBV was decreasing. We asked women and other stakeholders to explain why they thought that was happening and other contradictions also emerged. These are some of the reasons identified:

<sup>79</sup> National Survey On Women's Health And Life Experiences In Cambodia; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2015

For some, this has to do with women adopting better coping strategies that they associate with newly gained capacities to manage their emotions and to secure “peace at home”.

Male Village Chief Vong Nheum: *“It is observable that women have become more patient and sensitive, less aggressive. Before CRSA both women and men were aggressive, now women don’t answer back so men don’t hit them”.*

Even if this interpretation fails to reveal a clear shift in power and tends to put the responsibility of violence on women’s shoulders, it could nevertheless suggest that the work done by HOM/AA in those communities has made some contribution to a better understanding or communication between partners

Other reason of this positive trend could also have to do with the knowledge and awareness on rights acquired by both men and women during CRSA trainings. The testimonies of women participating in the evaluation indicate that women have gained awareness on gender inequality and women’s rights and that they now know the institutional mechanisms at hand. This was especially evident among CRSA and Fishery group’s community facilitators.

Vann – *“10 years ago, women were dominated by men. There is a traditional belief that men have more power and are by default the breadwinners. Women used to stay at home and just look after the children. Now that has changed, I can confront and challenge him and if he uses violence, I will report him”*

Keo also highlights that for her, getting free from domestic violence was a doorway to being more independent:

*“Having knowledge on rights and being aware of it helped me to take steps to get a divorce as I was facing violence regularly”.*

This, she said, has made her feel empowered. She now wants every other woman to feel like her and to learn more techniques that make her feel as confident as she does. Community facilitators are often themselves victims of GBV and act as champions and multipliers of awareness raising activities. As a young participant stated *“since in future I plan to get married, I need knowledge on how to keep me free from violence and have more understanding on having power at home”.*

They do also fulfil an important brokering role with other women and help them bring their cases to the Commune Council meetings or act as mediators before the commune chief who usually call the wife and husband to give them advice.

Finally, it is interesting to note that although women did not particularly value collective action (as a key factor of empowerment) in some villages, like in the Kampong Kho commune, they are creating informal solidarity groups to deal with GBV, among other issues. Women have the conviction that their work in bringing violence cases to the village chief as first option and the police as the second is working well. However, they also recognise that police are neither independent nor impartial with men and women. They complained about the police being overly demanding when it comes to evidence in order to take action on GBV cases. Groups help them decide on the strategy to follow and ensure mutual support.

These groups are usually linked to other spaces that AAC/HOM are opening and that according to women consulted, provided the seed they needed to move forwards and gain presence and influence in other spaces such as the police station or the commune hall.

#### 4.3.2. MY COMMUNITY

##### *Raising the voice at the Commune Hall*



With the support from AAC/HOM, women community facilitators started to participate more actively in Commune Hall meetings these meetings from 2007. There are both quantitative and qualitative differences amongst communes in terms of participation. In some communes women have been more successful in opening a space for claiming issues of their concern, while in other communes women still struggle to get listened to and taken seriously. Successful cases indicate that getting their voices heard needs time, perseverance and self-confidence. For many women, the increasing performance of new tasks and productive roles was felt to be an additional barrier to their political or public engagement.

As part of a national process of decentralization, Commune councils were created in 2002 to improve dialogue between the state and the citizens. Commune council meetings are regular spaces for consultation and information where all citizens, men and women, have the right to participate<sup>80</sup>.

80 Kim Ninh Roger Henke, (2005) COMMUNE COUNCILS IN CAMBODIA: A National Survey on their Functions and Performance, with a Special Focus on Conflict Resolution. The Asia Foundation

### Commune council roles<sup>81</sup>

- Maintenance of security and public order: this may include taking measures to reduce crime and violence, introducing rules affecting public markets, and cooperating with police.
- Arranging for necessary public services and being responsible for the good process of those services.
- Encouraging the promotion of the comfort and welfare of citizens;
- Promoting social and economic development and upgrading the living standards of citizens.
- Protecting and conserving the environment, natural resources, and national culture and heritage.
- Reconciling the views of citizens to achieve mutual understanding and tolerance; for example, assisting in resolving disputes within the commune.
- Performing general affairs meet the needs of citizens.

Encouraged by AAC/HOM, women community facilitators started to participate more actively in these meetings from 2007. In absolute terms, the women consulted believe that the public space where most of them feel more empowered today is the Commune Hall. This can be easily linked to the increasing participation of women in the Commune Council meetings.

Both quantitative and qualitative differences amongst communes in terms of participation could however be found. Quantitatively, for example, women leaders in Kampong Kho are very active and tend to be regularly present in these meetings. Instead, in Sroyov no community facilitator has attended these meetings in the last 6 months.

There are also differences in terms of the quality of participation. Testimonies show that women leaders in

Kampong Kho have been more successful in opening a space for claiming issues of their concern, while in other communes women still struggle to get listened to and taken seriously.

According to their own testimonies, women in Kampong Kho in general feeling “*more empowered*” when they reflect on their presence and participation at the commune council meetings. These are some of the issues that they get out of that participation:

- Getting first hand information on decisions taken by the local government lets them share that information with other women in CRSA and fishery groups and increase their knowledge and awareness on commune political issues.

*Soan – “In commune meetings I attend and report what I have done, how I have engaged people in the committee, get information from the committee, how much they earn and spend to report back to members of her group. In meetings they are usually talking about what is happening in a village”.*

- Being able to include issues of particular interest to their communities in the agenda of meetings.

*Sann – “Last quarter we brought in issue of illegal fishing. 1 or 2 committee members are corrupt and support the perpetrators. I am trying to raise a case in the commune meeting and demand transparency”.*

- Bringing GBV cases to the commune chief

*Vann – “when other women have domestic violence she brings them to commune hall where chiefs have to solve problems of GBV. Women suffering from GV are afraid to ask for help from commune chief but as commune facilitator I bring them to hall and ask for help from chief who takes action”.*

Getting there was not an easy process. Soan, a community facilitator from Kampong Kho says that it took them almost 5 years of continuous engagement in meetings to create a meaningful space for women and to get their voices heard. Soan and Vann explained how at the beginning they would just seat at the back of the room, listening. Slowly they started raising their hands and talking. Although initially they felt that no one listened they feel that with their persistence men started changing their attitudes. They now feel it is a woman’s right to participate on commune council meetings.

*Soan – “Attitudes of men and authority have changed a lot, before we were not welcome but now we are not only welcome but listened”*

*Kro – “attending meetings is not an invitation, it is their responsibility to report what they are doing in the community”.*

Now Kampong Kho women aim to get more young women to participate and to be better able to discuss Commune Plans and budget on public services.

In Sroyov the situation is somehow different. Although women consulted also recognise the Commune Hall as a public space where they are now gaining presence, they believe that they still need to walk a long way to develop more influence and do not feel confident enough as yet. The process, they say, require “*perseverance, bravery and honesty*” but also more leadership, facilitation and negotiation capacities. Finally, in PreKuy women have started to increase their attendance. Some years ago only two women were usually attending. They think that the training on women’s rights and legal frameworks provided by HOM has helped to encourage women’s participation in these spaces.

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81 idem



When asked to analyse those barriers that usually prevent women in the LRP from engaging in more active political participation, women tend to insist on factors such as lack of confidence, self-esteem or leadership. But there was also another interesting impeding factor emerging from these conversations: the lack of time and availability to participate. For many women, the increasing performance of new tasks and productive roles described in previous sections was felt to be an additional barrier to their political or public engagement.

#### **Power relations amongst women**

The evaluators did not have the chance to delve deeper into the power relationships amongst groups of women and how these may (or not) affect processes of empowerment. We acknowledge that there are important complexities that would need to be further analysed. One of them has to do, for example with the role of community facilitators. Most community facilitators are women over 50. During discussions held in Kampong Thom some younger participants expressed a certain distance with the representative role of Community Facilitators as they suffer from different discriminations in their social role of daughters or sisters. We could also start to grasp that Community Facilitators are not only seen as role models but also as beneficiaries of a status position, something that may be reinforcing unequal power relations within the women's groups.

### *Transformations in other public spaces*



In other spaces women have been active in claiming accountability and the rule of law or simply sticking to previous agreements and decisions made in the meetings they have attended. For example, in the school women's participation is aimed to for example, control absence of teacher and to ensure they perform their tasks according to the law. This analysis suggests that AAC/HOM's work in rights awareness raising is effective in encouraging women to participate in public spaces.

Women's participation at the community level is also evident in other public spaces. Transformations emerging from our discussions with women indicate that women are starting to feel more empowered in key spaces such as the school and the CFC. Testimonies suggest that women have been active in claiming accountability and the rule of law.

#### **At the school**

Most voices agree that in qualitative terms the role women are playing there is linked to their new feelings of empowerment and most particularly to their newly gained awareness and knowledge on children's rights and education laws. This awareness is encouraging women to get more involved in daily decisions of these public spaces and to make public servants in schools or hospitals more accountable as some of their reflections show:

- *"To evaluate and give feedback to teachers who are regularly absent, report to the school director to ensure that teachers perform well"*
- To make sure they start classes on time.
- To reduce violence against children in school
- Follow up on children's progress at school. Share information on the rights of a child with the teacher

#### **At the Community Fisheries Committee (CFC)**

In the last 7 years the increasingly active participation of women in these committees is, according to key stakeholders consulted, improving their transparency. For example, one case reported that in a recent commune hall meeting women brought up a case of illegal fishing in which male members of the CFC were allegedly supporting perpetrators.

The male president of the CFC literally recognizes that women *"help the CFC to be more transparent and to comply with rules. Also they control us when we don't respect the law, both the internal rules and the Fishery law. They know the law to stop us when we cross the limits"*.

This analysis suggests that work in rights awareness is effective in encouraging women to participate in public spaces.

### *4.3.3. NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVEL*



Within the increasingly the constraining political space left for Civil society participation in Cambodia, AAC actively works to influence national policy and practices on access to land, to reinforce legal frameworks that protect vulnerable people from land-

grabbing and advocates for policies that protect land and common property resources (such as water, forests and fisheries) from privatization. However it is not always clear how these issues are covered at local or provincial level. For example, we could not find any examples of groups of women (CRSA or Fishery Committees) participating in provincial and national advocacy activities.

In Cambodia, the political space for civil society organizations, particularly those working on human rights, is increasingly limited. Restrictive government policies and actions tend to confine civil society participation to a few spaces under control of the government<sup>82</sup>. This situation severely constrains AAC's advocacy work at the national level.

Still, ActionAid actively works to influence national policy and practices on access to land, to reinforce legal frameworks that protect vulnerable people from land-grabbing and advocates for policies that protect land and common property resources (such as water, forests and fisheries) from privatization.

This work is done in parallel to the organization's work under the LRP but it is not always clearly related to the main issues covered at local or provincial level by, or with, the implementing partner, HOM. For example, even if very much related to the work done on the protection of natural resources at national level, we could not find any examples of groups of women (CRSA or Fishery Committees) participating in provincial and national advocacy activities. This is partly to do with the fact that both CRSA groups and CFCs are a sort of informal groups, not legally registered as cooperatives or associations, which prevents them from engaging as civil society organizations. But it might also have to do with a certain strategic disconnection in the organization's work at the different geographic levels.

Unfortunately, time constraints did not allow for a full analysis of this apparent disconnection and its effects on the object of evaluation. Thus, the issue is only and briefly brought here as something that the organizations may want to reflect about or follow up.

#### 4.4. GENDER SOCIAL ROLES TRANSFORMATION



Attempting to understand how transformations identified in previous section are affecting changes in gender social roles is not an easy task. Our contacts with women suggest that even if incipiently some change in the invisible collective dimension. Some cases tell us that some are women not fully accepting certain roles anymore or combating certain practices.

However, women still tend to perceive power as the capacity to better play and fulfil traditional caregivers role. Also the access of women to productive and income-generating work is often putting more weight on their domestic burdens. The lack of redistribution of UCW within the household is often resulting in an overburden of women who accumulate responsibilities and sometimes find it difficult to combine their personal (private) and their public life. It seems that processes of economic and political empowerment can some times be exclusive of each other if, in parallel, a redistribution of tasks and roles is not happening at the household level.

The question that this issue raises is to what extent AAC/HOM, working more intentionally and strategically in gender social roles transformation, would contribute to better harmonise women's political and economic processes of empowerment

The last section of this case study aims to reflect on the transformations evidenced at the invisible collective dimension (changes in social gender attitudes, collective behaviours, and gender norms and values in society) and how these transformations are affecting women's empowerment processes. It also includes reflections on how visible and invisible transformations are reinforcing each other and about the role that AAC and HOM's programme is playing in these dynamics.

Assessing if (and to what extent) the transformations analysed in previous sections are affecting the gender social norms of the hegemonic patriarchal culture is not an easy task. On one hand, the invisible characteristic of these changes makes it difficult to visualize them explicitly. At the same time, we assume that changes in the patriarchal culture neither do happen in a 7 years intervention nor are attributable to a sole NGO strategy or programme, but occur in a wider context of interrelated changes happening at local, national and international level.

In previous sections, we have tried to present some of the transformations that could be observed in our interactions with women in Kampong Thom. Transformations that affect themselves personally (self-confidence), their family relations and roles or their participation in the community. We have described how these transformations are often resulting in women assuming new roles and responsibilities at the household (agriculture and productive activities f.e) or at public spaces such as the fishery committees or the commune council.

But, how much are those transformations having an impact on social norms? Are these changes modifying or influencing in any way the patriarchal, hegemonic culture?

<sup>82</sup> Ruth Bottomley (2014) The Role of Civil Society in Influencing Policy and Practice in Cambodia Oxfam Novib.

The answer to these questions is not a simple one. Empowerment processes are, as said, non linear and often involve backlashes and loops. However, our contacts with women suggest that even if incipiently some change in the invisible collective dimension might be happening. Some cases tell us of women not fully accepting certain roles anymore or combating certain practices. For example, HOM reports that there have been a number of cases where violence has emerged because men have felt threatened by women that are now occupying their traditional roles of decision-makers or breadwinners; or when women fail to fulfil their traditional caregiving responsibilities as they access to new productive activities or the public life. Although, it is not possible to analyse in depth all those cases they are presented as apparent backlashes that may paradoxically indicate a very incipient process of change in gender social norms.

However, other than the above anecdotal evidence the evaluation could not find strong signs of changes in prevailing social norms, very much the opposite in some cases. Most women consulted for example, still tend to perceive power as the capacity to better play and fulfil traditional caregivers role and *"invisible social norms continue to confine women to household and childcare duties while at the same time the family's economic status pressures women to engage in income generating work"*<sup>83</sup>.

This last sentence brings us to briefly reflect on an interesting issue that has repeatedly emerged during the field visit.

Women's testimonies indicate that, from a gender social norms change perspective, the access of women to productive and income-generating work is often putting more weight on their domestic burdens. For example, although there was a few cases reported of men helping in the typical female tasks like cleaning fish, this was not found to be a generalised trend, and there is no strong evidence of men regularly taking on household unpaid care work or of a redistribution of tasks.<sup>84</sup>

This lack of redistribution is often resulting in an overburden of women who accumulate responsibilities and sometimes find it difficult to combine their personal (private) and their public life. For example, when Prekuy group participating in this evaluation reflected on how to be more influential at the Commune hall, they recognized the lack of time for joining these social activities and taking care of the household. One of the community leaders from PreKuy said; *"Even though we are busy in the household we need to make time to attend other social activities"*.

To conclude, it seems that processes of economic and political empowerment can some times be exclusive of each other. Adding new private and public roles overburdens women's responsibilities if, in parallel, redistribution of tasks and roles are not happening at the household level.

Although AAC cannot have full control on changes in the invisible dimension, it may be interesting to reflect more in depth on how AAC/HOM contributions are affecting positively and/or negatively those gender social norms and how transformations that AAC helps to leverage can be reinforced by acting more intentionally on the collective invisible dimension of changes.

Despite the fact that AAC staff acknowledges the importance of changes in genders social norms (see fig X) in women's processes of empowerment, working more intentionally in this invisible dimension would help to harmonise women's political and economic processes of empowerment. This would imply to work more strategically on gender power relations in parallel to the work done on women's economic and political empowerment.

## 4.5. CONCLUSION

The evaluation found that the work of ActionAid and HOM in Kampong Thom is contributing to trigger a number of transformations and shifts that are helping to improve the social, political and economic status of women and to promote their empowerment. First, ActionAid's work is ensuring women's access to new productive roles and proving to be a **leveraging factor of women's economic empowerment**. Second, the work done with women and community facilitators through training and awareness raising activities on women's rights is promoting women's **access to new public and political spaces and helping them to raise their voice** on issues that affect their lives

At the personal level the work done by AA and HOM is credited by stakeholders to have contributed significantly to an increased **sense of confidence and self-respect among women**. This was mostly attributed to ActionAid's work on women's rights awareness, which is found to be positively affecting women's empowerment at the private and public spheres.

At the household level, it was found that as a result of that work women now feel that they have **increased decision-making capacity** and participation more actively in decisions or that affect their lives, including **the management of family assets** and family finances.

Actionaid is credited to be contributing to these positive changes in two main directions. In the first place, ActionAid's work with fishery committees and the CRSA is contributing to **increasing the technical knowledge and productive capacity and skills** of women. That is proving to be a key **source of social respect and social recognition** in Kampong Thom and a key factor of empowerment as women feel that the capacities acquired have helped them to gain the respect of their husbands and facilitated their increased decision-making.

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83 Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2014, ATTITUDES: Gender Relations And Attitudes, Cambodia Gender Assessment, Policy Brief 2

84 Asian development Bank ,2015,Promoting Women's economic empowerment in Cambodia

In the second place that work has positively contributed to increase women's **income generation capacity and economic autonomy**. Together with social recognition, the new productive role of women in some cases has led to an evident improvement in the communication within the family and to a widespread perception of a relative decrease of GBV.

Other factors, such as the **migration of men** and the increasing social acceptance of women's productive role in Cambodia, are eventually working in favour of the access of women to new productive roles within the family.

At the community level, ActionAid has played a significant role in **connecting women to public spaces**, such as the school, the health center or the police station. This also includes those **spaces where political decisions are made** such as the commune hall. In some of those, Kampong Thom women seem to be not only present but increasingly active in demanding for **accountability of authorities and public workers such as teachers or doctors and/or structures** such as the Fishery Committees.

These positive transformations have also revealed the **complexities and challenges that changing power relations in favour of women involve**. It is clear that processes of economic and political empowerment do not always happen in harmony and that they sometimes can be contradictory and provoke backlashes. This was made evident in the general claim that opening the participation of women in new spaces, and promoting new productive roles and responsibilities at home, often result in new burdens being added to their traditionally assigned roles.

Furthermore, we found that **economic empowerment and political participation do not necessarily always challenge the patriarchal hegemonic culture**. In fact, some women in Kampong Thom still tend to value their economic empowerment and public participation as to perform better their role of "caregiver".

In this sense redistribution of tasks and gender roles including UCW would be essential to harmonising and reinforcing the power gains that ActionAid is contributing to leverage. This would imply **parallel work that addresses more strategically and intentionally gender power relations** and gender social norms transformation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS FOR A COMMON ANALYSIS ON POWER

### *MAIN TRANSFORMATIONS*

There are indications suggesting that ActionAid and its partners are contributing to promote significant transformations in the lives of women involved with both LRPs which are making them feel more powerful.

Action Aid is credited with having contributed to increasing **women's confidence**, which is one of the most important factors of power in their eyes, both in Rwanda and in Cambodia, where confidence was also consistently linked to the knowledge, capacities and skills gained through their participation in the LRP.

In both LRPs ActionAid has helped women to **conquer new spaces in the public sphere** where they exercise power, like being elected leaders for the NCW in Rwanda, participating in Commune Council meetings in Cambodia, or being part of legitimised economic structures like the Rwandan cooperatives, or the Cambodian Fishery Committees; whose establishment has been facilitated by ActionAid and partners.

In Rwanda, Action Aid has helped to increase women's **power to bargain at home** and it has also made a significant contribution to challenging gender roles at home, making the **community aware that the burden of UCW** is unbalanced. In both LRPs the organisation, through its training programme, has challenged (to some extent) social norms and **power relations in families and communities that sustain GBV**.

Most significantly, ActionAid has contributed to women **gaining and increasing access and control over assets and income**, which is another key factor for them in order to gain power in both LRPs. In Rwanda this is done through working collectively in cooperatives following a model of a market that is not exploitative but empowering for women smallholders. In Cambodia, women have been trained on fish processing and receive small loans that help them to engage in productive activities.

Finally, ActionAid has devoted considerable efforts to training women on **their rights and how to claim them**. This has translated for example into several women being able to exercise their rights over their land or women demanding accountability from public servants such as school teachers or doctors. To a much lesser extent it has also helped some Cambodian women to move forward and report GBV cases.

### *BALANCE OF INVISIBLE & VISIBLE POWER IN AA'S THEORIES OF CHANGE(S)*

#### **A note of caution**

A Theory of Change is a semi-structured change map constructed by multiple stakeholders in a conscious and creative visualization exercise. Elaborating complete ToC(s) with stakeholders was beyond the scope of this evaluation, as it is a very time-consuming task. When we refer here to ToC(s), we mean implicit pathways to changes or broad understandings of how change happens by different stakeholders.

#### **At the National level & LRP level**

We found that **the LRPs and the country offices follow different power ToCs adapted to the different contexts that are often complementary**. For example, in Rwanda we found two implicit ToCs to shift power towards women. One was operating at the national level and it was focused on influencing progressive legislation, training women on acquired rights and opening channels for them to claim these rights. At the LRP level in Nyanza the power ToC has the cooperatives as an entry point, i.e. the collective action. From there ActionAid was aiming to make women more powerful, mostly through increasing their access to (and control over) assets, resources, services and rights.

In Cambodia we observed that the difference between women's ToC of empowerment and the ones of AAC and HOM is their level of complexity. The closer one is to the main agents of these transformations the more complex the ToC becomes. For example, AAC tend to put emphasis on the factor of income generation and food security as a source of self confidence and decision making, whereas HOM's key assumption seems to be that confidence is mostly coming from the fact that knowledge and skills generate respect and social recognition of women. In that same line, women consulted in Kampong Thom tend to associate confidence with the social recognition that their new knowledge, capacity and skills gives them before linking it to income generation and economic control.

**In both case studies most of the assumptions of ToCs relate to visible dimensions of power** (both individual and collective around access to services, training, and social structures and formal spaces). For example, *women will have more power if progressive legislation is in place*; or *women will have more power if they access and control more resources*. We found very few assumptions related to invisible dimensions of power (around self-awareness, attitudes, collective behaviours, gender social norms and values). Potential examples of

these types of assumptions would be: *women will have more power if the collective consciousness in Nyanza genuinely condemns any type of GBV; or women will have more power if they perceived themselves as full subjects of rights.*

In Rwanda, we found **one example at the programmatic level where ActionAid was explicitly challenging gender power relations at the invisible level.** This was the work done through the **time diaries** (FLOW project) on redistributing UCW.

However, most of the **work done in both LRPs focuses on the visible spheres where transformations are more easily measurable and can be achieved in a shorter timeframe.** Generally, adopting a progressive law (and even implementing it) takes less time than a significant change in social values and norms. The same could be said of economic empowerment activities in both LRPs, where results are far more easily measurable in the shorter-term. This has just reinforced what ActionAid already knows, but this has not trickled down to the LRPs yet: *“Do not have enough in our HRBA resource materials about challenging hidden and invisible power and other structural causes of poverty and inequality – including traditional cultural beliefs – as there is a tendency to focus on the “public sphere” (of rights), and duty bearers rather than the private / personal space (despite our focus on women’s rights)<sup>85</sup>.*

In Rwanda, zooming in on these invisible dimensions, we found that in both LRPs those power factors that are individual and invisible (power within), for example acquiring knowledge or increasing self-confidence, were not perceived by women as a *power transformation* in itself. This did not seem to be the case in Cambodia where knowledge, capacity and skills were ranked as the first factor of empowerment by women. Although, here it is not clear it was intentionally helping to slightly transform gender relations at the household.

Notwithstanding, in both LRPs these changes were occurring internally and individually and had a central role in women’s own implicit power ToC. In Rwanda, women identified *self-confidence* as the key element that triggers any important transformation in power relations. In Cambodia, it was *knowledge and capacity* and the combination of *income generation and self confidence*.

### At the international level

At the international level ActionAid describes, through its *women smallholders empowerment framework*, nine principles that the organisations feel are key to making women more powerful

**These power principles do resonate with the transformations we identified in both LRPs.** The first seven principles<sup>86</sup> are present (to a different extent) both in Cambodia and in Rwanda and the eighth one<sup>87</sup> was clearly found in Rwanda. Again, this framework (and its translation in the LRPs) is **centred in very visible dimensions** and power relations.

Reading between the lines we can safely assume that there are preconditions behind these principles of power that “live” in the invisible dimensions. For example, only if women have a sense of agency can they participate actively in decision-making. What we suggest is that these preconditions for power and their connections and value in the broader power ToC should be made more explicit. Otherwise, they risk not being explicitly addressed by programmes.

### Time poverty

The **balance between dimensions of power (visible/invisible) is important for very pragmatic issues** related to the transformative impact of ActionAid strategies.

For example, we saw that ActionAid’s lack of proper consideration to these issues (more obviously in Cambodia than in Rwanda) may be exacerbating women’s time poverty without necessarily increasing their power. ActionAid is focusing on helping women to gain more visible power: through assets, through political and economic participation etc. These gains frequently come with new duties and responsibilities. There seems to be the need to work in parallel to make sure that previous paid and unpaid work is being redistributed before women can take on the further burden without compromising their quality of life.

Women’s time poverty usually referred to as *the double shift*, i.e. number of hours that women spend on paid work (in the formal or informal economy), and on unpaid care work. But there is also the *triple shift*, which includes often low-income women’s unpaid community labour; like the work women do for the NWC in Rwanda or in the commune council in Cambodia.

- 1 Increased participation and say in decision-making structures and processes
- 2 Active participation of women smallholders in collective action and solidarity with women who can't join the groups
- 3 Improved access to and control over productive resources (individual and collective) for women
- 4 Increased uptake of sustainable agricultural practices
- 5 Enhanced revenue for women and increased control over household revenues
- 6 Improved access to basic services
- 7 Improvement in women's food security
- 8 Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute time and resources spent in care activities by women
- 9 Women's control over their bodies

85 Core insights to shape ActionAid’s Future HRBA And Theory Of Change, 2016

86 1) Increased participation and say in decision making structures and processes; 2) Active participation of women smallholders in collective action and solidarity with women who can't join the groups; 3) Improved access to and control over productive resources (individual and collective) for women; 4) Increased uptake of sustainable agricultural practices; 5) Enhanced revenue for women and increased control over household revenues; 6) Improved access to basic services; 7) Improvement in women’s food security.

87 8) Recognise, reduce, redistribute time and resources spent in care activities by women

There is only one instance where ActionAid has been working intentionally on redistributing work within the family and therefore challenging gender roles. This is in Rwanda through the time diaries methodology that we have mentioned already.

The case of the dual burden of paid and unpaid work included in the Kampong Thom case study illustrates this idea well. Just looking at the visible dimensions of power changes, we can say that ActionAid is contributing to significant changes in women's empowerment. Yet a closer look at how these changes affect gender social norms and roles makes the whole empowerment picture more complex. In this case, support of women's independence is actually less effective if the importance of transforming gender roles is not intentionally analysed or addressed.

#### *A KEY MISSING PIECE IN THE POWER JIGSAW – WOMEN'S INTERNALISED SENSE OF JUSTICE*

We found that **women** in the LRP still **do not see themselves as full agents of rights** and their community do not perceive them as such either. This has profound implications for their own perception (and the community's perception) about the empowerment processes.

By being a full agent of rights, we mean to have a genuine feeling of property and ownership of those rights. It is to believe that women's rights derive from the simple fact that women are human beings and are not just granted rights by their husbands or society, or because having rights may be beneficial for their families or communities (*instrumentalisation*).

Paradoxically, in both LRPs we often found that women were gaining practical power even in contexts where they were treated as minors or they were being **instrumentalised**. For example, women have gained mobility not because it is themselves and their communities that understand it is their right, but because their husbands "let them out". UCW was being redistributed not because women and men understood that they have an equal right to leisure time or equal obligations at home, but because it was beneficial for the family as the woman would have more time to make money.

What was not apparent was that ActionAid saw these practical gains as intermediate steps in a more complex process of change. Every transformation for the best in the lives of women is significant and valuable and should be celebrated, even if it was achieved through *instrumentalisation*. At the same time it is clear that many in ActionAid would want to have a more explicit reflection on the overarching horizon, i.e. what does success look like? For example, transformations that we have documented here are mostly linked to the notion that the closer a woman goes to a man's status in society the more she can be respected (more assets, more political representation, etc.). A legitimate question for ActionAid would be: *are we really trying to redefine societies where patriarchy is not the standard or are we settling for "low-hanging" fruits?*

#### *BALANCE OF COLLECTIVE & PERSONAL POWER IN AA'S THEORIES OF CHANGE(S)*

We found very **important discrepancies** between the two case studies around the axis individual/collective.

In Rwanda, the collective action was central to the implicit power ToCs of both the LRP management and the women involved in the LRP. The cooperatives were the main way ActionAid was contributing to livelihood security for women and to ensure that they increase their control over productive resources. Furthermore, these organisations were legitimate power spaces that are contributing to changing the community's views about the power that women hold. Cooperatives have also become healing spaces where women can tackle sensitive issues with peers including issues to do with GBV. Most relevantly for this research, joining cooperatives is seen as an inflection point to almost any empowerment process.

In Cambodia, this aspect was not as clearly present as the ranking and scoring exercise showed. However, even if women in Cambodia did not rank collective action high, the evaluation could find some examples where the work done by AAC/HOM with women has spontaneously provided the seeds to form informal collective groups that are helping women in their process of empowerment.

#### *CHALLENGING POWER DYNAMICS REQUIRES A COMPLEX OUTLOOK*

Processes of empowerment are not linear. Challenging gender power dynamics requires taking into consideration aspects that are visible and invisible, collective and individual, all of them intertwined. It also requires taking potential backlashes into consideration.

The expression **shifting power toward women** suggests a ToC that is **too simplistic** and does not reflect fully how power dynamics occur at the LRP level. A "shift" of power implies a (possibly permanent) change (even the slightest budge) in power positions. It may also suggest however a negotiation as a zero-sum with losers and winners. We found that power shifts do occur at the LRP level and are important in the process of empowering women. However, we also found that challenging gender power dynamics requires a wider and relational outlook that comprises, on the one hand helping women to gain more power (having more knowledge; accessing and controlling more resources; being able to claim rights), and on the other reshaping and rebalancing gender relations.

Redefining gender relations means, for example, redefining what communities (men and women) consider being acceptable behaviours for men and women. We found that ActionAid seldom tackles this dimension of power dynamics. Only in Rwanda did we see how time diaries were being used as a space for collective learning aimed at changing **gender power relations** in the family. However a more thorough and intentional reflection could help ActionAid to better capitalize on possible changes in social norms that are taking place – i.e. the understanding of the unbalanced burden of UCW in Nyanza. In Cambodia, stakeholders expressed a generalised feeling that

GBV was decreasing in the area and that violence in the LRP was starting to be less socially accepted. However, this is something to be taken with caution as data is still very contradictory and further investigation on how those perceptions should be interpreted is required.

#### Working with men

The bottom-line is that any attempt **to tackle this relational aspect of power processes** (for example social norms related to gender roles) **requires working with women and men**. This does not mean giving men equal attention or not prioritising giving women power. Work will have to be conducted from a feminist perspective, respecting and prioritising women's agency and autonomy. It means working with men and women to reshape how they relate to each other, very much like ActionAid is already doing, for example through the time diaries in UCW. Here men and women filled time diaries periodically tracking the reduction and redistribution of time spent on care work and reflecting on it. This type of approach is interesting because it challenges men rather than training them and this challenge actually comes from women.

On GBV, ActionAid is already working with men in Myanmar with good results through its Programme "Access to Justice and Preventing Sexual Violence Initiatives". In other words, having more intentional strategies and challenging and proposing new ways and meanings of being a woman or a man.

#### Backlash and conflict as success indicators

This process of rebalancing and redefining power gender relations will necessarily result in some forms of conflict, fear and **backlash/retaliation**. In both case studies we documented some instances of this happening. These are **signs that something is changing** and as such they should be taken as indicators of success. They mean that gender roles are actually being challenged: "*In women's rights work, this is vital because as soon as advances seriously challenge patriarchal or other social power structures, there are often significant reactions and setbacks*"<sup>88</sup>.

#### *THE USE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH*

*"our human rights based approach centres on supporting people living in poverty to become conscious of their rights, to organise themselves to claim their rights, and to hold duty bearers to account. We build on international human rights law, but go beyond a legal or technical approach, supporting people to analyse and confront power imbalances and taking sides with people living in poverty"*<sup>89</sup>

We found that the ActionAid's HRBA approach can work in Rwanda and in Cambodia even if both countries are considered to be restrictive political regimes. In Rwanda, AA uses an insider (rather than confrontational) approach to bring the voice and needs of the women involved with the LRP to the duty bearers: "*the usual way of making noise on the streets does not work in Rwanda due to its association with what happened in Rwanda in 1994*". (Senior staff AAIR)

In Cambodia, AAC and HOM have adopted a different approach and have opted for playing a mediating/brokering role between fishery groups and the fishery authorities.

However, we have also found that this approach **is overly focused on the relationship between the citizens and the authorities**, i.e. the "right holders" and "the duty bearers". Our findings show that this is problematic in the two LRPs visited in this research, where social and legal norms do not always correspond. Moral norms, customs and traditions seem to be as influential in affecting social behaviours as legal norms.

As a consequence we found (in Rwanda) that there is a trend where women would rather cope with a situation of power abuse as opposed to confronting it using the legal routes at their disposal. This happens because confronting power in a context where social norms do not match progressive legislation comes at a very high cost for women. In Cambodia some informants associated the perceived decrease in GBV to women's better coping strategies and improved capacity to behave well in front of their husband.

In Rwanda, it was evident that women are caught between wanting not to affect their social ties with families/communities in their fight for their rights which they know if they exercise will create discord. Therefore, it is plausible that ActionAid should devote more attention to the backlash/isolation that may occur as a result of claiming rights.

**In the face of social and private backlash**, we found there are three *strategies* that are working, although it is not clear that any of them are designed intentionally for this purpose: a) **respecting what women are willing to risk** while confronting power imbalance and intentionally provide (intermediate) coping mechanism. For example, as we saw in both case studies, making women economically autonomous helps them cope with a situation of domestic violence at home; b) **supporting women** (and supporting women to support each other) in the face of a social and private backlash. For instance through community-based protection spaces, cooperatives in Rwanda and Income generation-related gatherings (Such as CRSA meetings at Community facilitators houses) in Cambodia, are filling this function; c) **working to change those social norms** that fuel aggressive reactions towards women challenging power.

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88ActionAid Reflections on Inequality Under Each Strategic Objective, 2016

89 Peoples action in practice, ActionAid



## 6. IDEAS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

### *KEEP WORKING MORE INTENTIONALLY IN “THE INVISIBLE” SPHERE OF POWER*

This evaluation shows how ActionAid is contributing to significant changes in women’s empowerment. These transformations are both individual and collective. At the individual level women are incrementing not only their access but also the control over productive resources that ten years ago were only in hands of men. Collectively, women are both accessing local visible social structures and they are increasingly raising their voices concerning decisions that affect their lives.

These changes are also affecting the invisible dimension of social change and the empowerment processes. This evaluation has found that these changes are positively affecting women’s perceptions of themselves and improving their self-esteem and enabling women to leverage different changes in their societal status.

Nevertheless, our findings suggest that **a more explicit and intentional work on gender relations and social norms** would complement the work developed by AA in the visible dimensions of change. One way of doing this could be to develop more explicit and shared ToCs with key stakeholders on gender social norms transformations. This would necessarily mean designing and undertaking multi-stakeholders learning exercises involving partners and ActionAid staff who equally may hold a traditional understanding of women’s and men’s roles.

This would help identify **synergies happening between the visible and invisible**, and how these are affecting and affected by AA work. This would lead to develop better corrective actions and more efficient strategies resulting in a better adaptive capacity to how change is happening.

By corrective actions we mean activities aimed to assess, for example CRSA’s work on generating income and control over assets is contributing to a redistribution and sharing of tasks of unpaid care work at the household level. This will help to check if the gains coming from economic autonomy and new responsibilities are being translated into a renegotiation of gender social roles or if it is actually emphasizing the dual burden dynamic.

In this sense, parallel to the work developed in the visible dimension, it would be important to increase efforts to open spaces where women and men can analyse and reflect on gender social norms changing amongst women. This could be something similar to what is already being done using the **time diaries in Rwanda**. We recommend ActionAid to **build on this approach**.

In the case of Cambodia, HOM includes in the LRP programme activities addressed to open these spaces. We recommend keeping these activities and carrying them out in a more planned and strategic way. Since changes in the invisible social dimension are slower, promoting a process of change that attempts to question gender roles needs to be based on building trust and long-term relations. People need to be able to access safe spaces and support to continually review their social habits, beliefs, and attitudes, their behaviours and progress.

Apart from the fact that working intentionally on the invisible requires time, another challenge is the visibility and measurability of changes. Measuring how a women is accessing and controlling her own income is simpler than making sure that these changes are having an effect on social norms. In this sense, working in the invisible dimensions requires accepting these limitations and therefore it requires analysis that includes different stakeholders’ views and triangulation.

### *WOMEN AS RIGHT-HOLDERS AND “RIGHT-BUILDERS”*

As stated in the conclusions, ActionAid frequently focuses its work on the relationship between the citizen and the state and its visible formal structures and legal frameworks. This approach of seeing women as mainly *right-holders* sometimes prevents one from seeing the whole picture, especially when moral norms, customs and traditions come into play. For example, in Nyanza women frequently would rather cope with a situation of power abuse than using legal frameworks. In Kampong Thom they expect to be “trained” in their rights to deal with gender inequality.

The prevailing theory of change - seems to be that societies become more just by the creation, adoption and/or enforcement of progressive and more equitable laws that are acknowledged by right holders to cope with situations of inequality. In this sense, the change is just expected to happen from the collective visible dimension (formal structures and legal frameworks) to the social norms, and beliefs. While this is happening, as some stories and testimonies confirm, this ToC does not focus sufficiently on those changes that should occur in the invisible dimensions i.e. how changing social norms and power relations between people also affect the formal structures of society and legal frameworks.

In this way, claims that people make in connection to what they think is just and equitable, no matter if it is *justiciable*<sup>90</sup> and therefore included in specific national and/or international laws, seems to be as important as the awareness of the rights already codified in a national or international law or agreement.

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<sup>90</sup> “capable of being decided by legal principles or by a court of justice”

As Zwingel (2005) puts it when exploring the social impact of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), “instead of assuming a ‘trickle-down’ dynamic as a consequence of global agreements, it is argued that the legitimacy and authority of global norms depends on their active interpretation and appropriation within national and local contexts all over the world.”

In this line, a **balance between top-down (change coming from improving and enforcing progressive laws and rights, education, and awareness) and bottom-up (change coming from peoples claims of what they think is just) theories of change** would help the process of appropriation and local adaptation and interpretation of Human rights. At the same time it would enrich the development of the HRBA by linking both collective visible and invisible dimensions of societal change.

#### *RE-EXAMINING WHAT A SHIFT IN POWER MEANS AND IMPLIES*

We finally recommend having a **collective reflection on how power changes** and to explore what a shift in power means and implies. We propose using the term transformation in *power relations*. According to our findings, this phrase describes better the dynamics AA deals with and contributes to rather than *shift in power*.

One of the main lessons learnt from this evaluation is the complexity that empowerment processes entail. By complexity, we refer to the non-linear and non-simple characteristic of these processes where changes are coming from different factors and dimensions at the same time.

In this complexity it is difficult to clearly state which of the transformations or group of transformations identified constitute a “*shift in power*”. Several times we have asked ourselves these questions: Is it generating and having control over income or is it in itself a shift in power? Or does it contribute to it? Is the access of women to public spaces in itself a *shift in power*?

Furthermore, can a change that is not having a visible impact on gender social roles generate a *shift in power*? For example, would having a woman as a village chief in a commune of Kampong Thom, be a *shift in power*? Would this end with the culture of patriarchal hegemony? Would she last long in power if she does not behave and follow the patriarchal dominating social norms and values?

If this is to be considered a *shift in power*, although it is definitively a visible change, without transformations in mind-sets, beliefs and social values, is it really challenging power relations? Without acting on those social norms that underpin the exercise of power, could it just be perpetuating hegemonic gender social roles? This is a risk that should be borne in mind.

A working interpretation of the **understanding of a shift in power as a transformative, complex, non-linear and profound process of change** would certainly help in showcasing AA’s relevant contribution to women’s empowerment.