Shifting Power:

Learning from women's experiences and approaches to reducing inequality

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Summary

Inequality is widespread and deepening, with the impact falling heavily on poor women who face a range of different intersecting challenges. Solutions are hotly debated by powerful decision makers in and outside government who sit far removed from the lived experience of inequality.

Shifting Power is based on focus group discussions and interviews in communities in seven developing and emerging economy countries where ActionAid is active: Brazil, Haiti, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. Groups of women were asked how they experience inequality and, most importantly, how they are addressing inequality. We found that across the countries, when women take collective action on the many challenges facing them, they feel better equipped to address inequalities within their families and communities. This process is often accelerated for women whose first meetings are around income generating activities, and we have identified that women who are economically autonomous tend to be more involved in organising. We also found that when women's groups collaborate, their collective capacity to bring about change is strengthened. When women's voices and collective action are amplified, they are better able to impact and influence decision makers and those in power. Amongst the challenges, we show how three inspirational women are taking steps to dismantle power imbalances in their communities:

- Ma Zoe Taweh, the first woman to be a town chief in Gbarpolu County, Liberia, is inspiring women in other districts to become leaders;
- Jacqueline Morette in Haiti, whose organisation AFUP [Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly -the Association of United Women in Pouly] is connecting with others in the region to increase women's power when addressing authorities;

Jacqueline Féquière Morette, Co-ordinator of the Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly (AFUP) in the Central Plateau region of Haiti, standing outside the association's peanut depot. Peanuts are an essential source of income for the women, which they augment by transforming the nuts into peanut butter to sell in the local market.
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ACTIONAID

- Nirmala Mahatara is from a rural community in Nepal which has been marginalised, and is now working with a network of rural women which has recently been part of a 3000-strong sit-in outside the constitutional assembly to ensure women's legal, social, political and economic rights are central to the constitution.

These women have found that local organising influences not only their lives, but also the lives of those in their communities, on a daily basis. This report sets their experiences in their distinct contexts. It first explores the intersecting inequalities faced by women in each of the communities. It then explores the unique case studies of inspirational women leaders. Next it analyses the challenges and opportunities these women have faced to shift power across the countries studied.

Finally, the report outlines what the women seek as alternative policies to combat unequal power dynamics.

Our recommendations show how various actors including local and national governments, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations including religious institutions and media, can address systems of oppression perpetrated by different stakeholders (including at times themselves) by supporting these women as they take action to (re-)claim power. While the contexts and solutions vary, two of the most successful approaches, found in disparate settings, are investing in gender responsive public services and supporting women's own peer organising.[1]

Nirmala Mahatara after participating in a national conference on women's rights.
PHOTO: BISESH SANGAT/ACTIONAID

1. Women are impacted by multiple, intersecting inequalities

▶ *'Inequality is where one gender wants to dominate the other gender in having power and property.'*

Justine Nabwiire, UWONET coordinator of Namutumba District, Busiki Sub County, Uganda.

▶ *'Inequality is a basic characteristic of Nepali society; class, education, gender, region, caste.'*

Narendra Khatiwada, President of Youth Advocacy Nepal & convenor of the National Youth Alliance.

▶ *'[Inequality is] a way of handling people differently in various spheres of life. A situation where people are treated differently in terms of education, service delivery etc.'*

Bena Arapta, District Office of Benet Sub-county, Uganda.

Women's experiences of inequality are manifold; they can be economic, as well as social, cultural and political. In every way, be it income, education or health inequality, it is deepening and becoming more entrenched. Poor women bear the heaviest burdens of gender inequality in almost every aspect of their lives: many are disproportionately responsible for unpaid care work – supporting children and elders and sustaining households - on top of their income-earning labour; many have little or no access to and control over economic and environmental resources; some are unable to leave their villages or even their homes; most struggle to find decent work or to get involved in community activities; and most remain vulnerable to violence in their homes and in public spaces. Our evidence from Brazil, Haiti, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda shows that the discrimination women face purely on the basis of their gender is multiplied when they are also marginalized because of their ethnicity, religion, class background, sexuality, marriage status, or disability.

Aitamaya ('Aitu') Limbu, is a member of a *Reflect* circle in Nepal. The group was involved with raising awareness of the time and energy women spend on unpaid care work, and changing perceptions that this work is not valuable. As a result, Aitu has become much more active in the community. She is a member of five different community groups, and now represents the women of her community on the Village Development Committee (VDC) council.

Aitu feels that although women are paid when they do agricultural work in fields belonging to other people, this is not enough. Women must be able to earn enough for themselves by participating in more paid work and engaging in community life.
PHOTO: NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPTI/ACTIONAID

Guilvana Valmont from the Central Plateau region of Haiti is a member of AFUP, the Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly. She says: 'Inequality is about some categories of people being prioritized over or more than others'.
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ACTIONAID

BOX 1: What are women in focus groups in our study countries saying about inequality?

In Brazil, inequality was largely perceived as gender-based. Although women mentioned inequalities of class, race, ethnicity and disability, gender was the overarching factor. Women in the focus groups felt that their identity was cemented through their role in relation to men. For example, the gendered division of labour underpins how women feel about themselves and how other people perceive them. In Haiti, Mirlande Laconne analyses gender inequality as a result of women's unpaid care work: 'at home, women are expected to do the majority of the work. The men do not assume their responsibilities the way they should; they say that they did not carry the children and so it's up to the women to do everything'.

Gender inequality was also identified as the main inequality in Uganda. As Bena Arapta from Kwosir sub-county commented, 'Inequality is a situation where women tend to be oppressed by men'. Gender inequality is often maintained through violence. In Kween district, the women stated that 'if you question [household affairs] as a woman, you can end up being beaten by the man'. In Kwosir subcounty, one woman said 'it's hard to sit at the same table and eat with your husband; and we sleep on the bare ground, using tarpaulins [used for threshing] as covers [to avoid our husbands' beds].'

For the majority of women in the focus groups, a realisation of their inequality and difference as compared to men came early on in their lives, sometimes accompanied by violence and often manifested through attempts to control the woman's body. In the far west of Nepal, during their menstruation, women were not allowed to stay inside their compounds, but rather slept in cow sheds with snakes, mosquitos and insects. Men suffer no such indignity.

Mirlande Laconne lives on a remote plot of land in the Central Plateau region of Haiti. She moved there having suffered abuse from her previous two husbands, re-married and now receives training from MPP, the Peasants' Movement of Papaye, one of ActionAid's local partners and a grass-roots organisation with a mission to support the rural poor. She acknowledges that 'as women you are always mistreated. You're like a servant. You have to do the domestic stuff. I have seen it often that a man is riding his horse and the woman is just carrying the stuff on foot.'
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ ACTIONAID

Mirlande Laconne, a farmer from Haiti, acknowledges that whilst inequality is worse for women in general, certain women experience it more severely. This includes: women who don't work (as they have no bargaining power with men); women and children living with disabilities; girls who get married early or who are trafficked, and women who have limited understanding of their rights. Across the countries studied, other intersecting areas of exclusion include: young people in Nepal who are excluded from community decision making and are treated as a homogeneous body, and amongst these, young women who have fewer economic opportunities than their male peers; black and indigenous women in Brazil who said that they experience institutional racism, which prevents them from accessing education and public spaces and exposes them to daily insults, which prevents them, more than other women, from integrating with other members in their communities; rural women who felt that they were excluded by urban women; people of different ethnicities or castes, such as in Nepal where individuals of different castes do not go into Dalits' homes or use water after it touches a Dalit; and poor women farmers who, for example in Brazil, felt their work 'is not valued [even though] if there were no farmers, high-income people would not have food on the table'. Indeed, both men and women in Kwosir focus group in Uganda agreed that: 'you are not listened to unless you are rich, and they are listened to even if they do not have anything sensible to say'.

Women see the roots of their inequality in patriarchy, a system that prevents women and girls from accessing quality education, natural resources, including land, and the opportunity to earn money. This can be remedied in part by shifting "visible" power - the laws, systems and legislators that govern society. However, underlying all of these gaps is a socially and culturally determined power imbalance maintained by unofficial, or "invisible", power. Invisible mechanisms of power work through the internalisation of patriarchal norms and beliefs; this manifestation of power can invisibly shape policy choices or the extent to which women participate in social life. Changing this requires shifts in the cultural practices and attitudes of institutions, people wielding power within these institutions, and throughout entire societies.

Methodology & implications

The methodology used for this research involved focus group discussions and interviews in two communities in each of the seven countries; Brazil, Haiti, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. In Nigeria and Uganda, there were also discussions with men, and in South Africa only interviews were conducted. The focus groups began with an analysis of inequalities from the women's perspective. The groups used several participatory tools to explore how inequalities had changed over time and who held power. Groups concluded discussion through semi structured interviews; further details can be found in the annex. As the research was limited to two study sites in

each country, and most women had participated in ActionAid programmes, there is a bias in terms of data collection. While we are wary of extrapolating any specific overall findings given the different contexts, it is clear that across the varied geographies women were using and finding useful similar approaches to addressing inequalities at a family, community and sometimes national level. The key approach to change at a local level is to support women's peer organising and create space for and support existing women's groups to hold duty bearers to account. The policies women want can be clustered broadly under what we describe as effectively implemented and publicly funded gender responsive services.

Women use a web tool to assess the impacts of inequalities in focus groups in Kaduna, Nigeria.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Power and patriarchy

Women's experiences of inequality may be different depending on their cultural context and other intersecting factors which marginalise them, but a common thread prevails: women are all affected by patriarchy. As a system of oppression, patriarchy

both creates and maintains power imbalances. Unequal distribution of power along economic, political and gender lines marginalises women both in their homes and in public. These pervasive power imbalances make it more difficult for women to tackle the structural causes of inequality in their communities, countries and across the world.

BOX 2: The many faces of power

We all have and experience power in different ways. Klassen and Valerie Miller, drawing on political sociologist John Gaventa, argue that, at an individual level we can distinguish between power within, power with, power to and power over.[2] "Power within" refers to self-knowledge and a sense of self-worth. "Power with" refers to mutual support and collaboration, and the finding of common interest. "Power to" draws on our ability to mobilise ourselves to act. "Power over" is a more insidious form of power that is easily recognisable in abuse, violence and control.

What makes "power over" more challenging to analyse is that you can't always see it. Identifying three faces of "power over" is helpful.[3] *Visible* power is manifested at the "official" level: formal laws, rules, and regulations which explicitly guide how people act and interact. In some countries, for instance, women are explicitly forbidden to be in public without a male relative. Those in positions of power can use such formal regulations to maintain power and control. *Hidden* power is a political tactic that is expressed as subversions or manipulations of formal, visible structures by those who have accumulated power. The motive of exercising hidden power is usually to accumulate more power or to maintain their dominance by excluding others from organising and decision making spaces. For example, women's rights organisations are seldom consulted by government in making laws, but representatives of big business commonly participate in those decisions. In this way, women's rights issues are devalued or even excluded. *Invisible* power is a form of social control. Even those experiencing this power may not realise or respond to it: it is what we are accustomed to, what we grew up with, and shapes both the physical and ideological boundaries of participation and inclusion. In countries where there may be no laws prohibiting women from being in public, many women will feel as constrained by the social norms that prohibit them being outside the home without a male relative as in a state where such laws exist and are enforced. This form of power is particularly challenging to address as the general population tend to unquestioningly believe these discriminatory practices to be "right", or may not even recognise that they are discriminatory at all.

The multiple forms of power

Structural inequality refers to the ways in which social and institutional structures - such as governments, public policy, organisations or social networks - work in varied, often reinforcing ways to provide advantages for some members of society whilst marginalising or producing disadvantages for others. Women are often placed at a structural disadvantage to men due to different, but interrelated forms of power. The power that women face can be **visible**, for example, when a woman is excluded from owning land because the legal system does not allow her to inherit it. They may also face **hidden power**, which is more challenging to shift as it is expressed as subversions

or manipulations of formal, visible structures by those who have accumulated power. By creating or maintaining barriers to organisation and decision-making spaces, or excluding key political issues from the public arena, power holders use hidden power to maintain their power and privilege or accumulate more.

Sometimes exclusion is very obvious. Mirlande Laconne, a farmer in Haiti, says 'sometimes, your own children and your husband arrange together to sell what you [as a family] have and you're left with nothing'. In Liberia, Ma Zoe Taweh, the first female town chief in Gbarpolu County, is excluded from "men-only" meetings. Indeed, women are fined for even trying to participate. Since these

meetings are where the highest form of decision making takes place, women's systemic exclusion is all but guaranteed. At other times, exclusion may take place in less overt ways. Poor women and men in Haiti, for example, are not able to participate easily in commenting on policies or decision making processes as key documents are in the official language, French, rather than the common national language, Kreyol.

It is equally challenging to shift **invisible power**, where deeply embedded cultural and social norms operate to discriminate against women. Invisible power can be a vicious circle. For example, women in the Benet community in Kapchorwa district, Uganda, most of whom are smallholder farmers, say that when women participate in community development meetings, their suggestions are rarely listened to or acknowledged. This reduces women's confidence to suggest changes. Attitudes can be so deep rooted that even affected women do not recognise their hold. Some women see themselves, perhaps sub-consciously, as less deserving than men to participate in community decision making or to enjoy meeting with peers, an attitude derived and reinforced by socio-cultural norms.
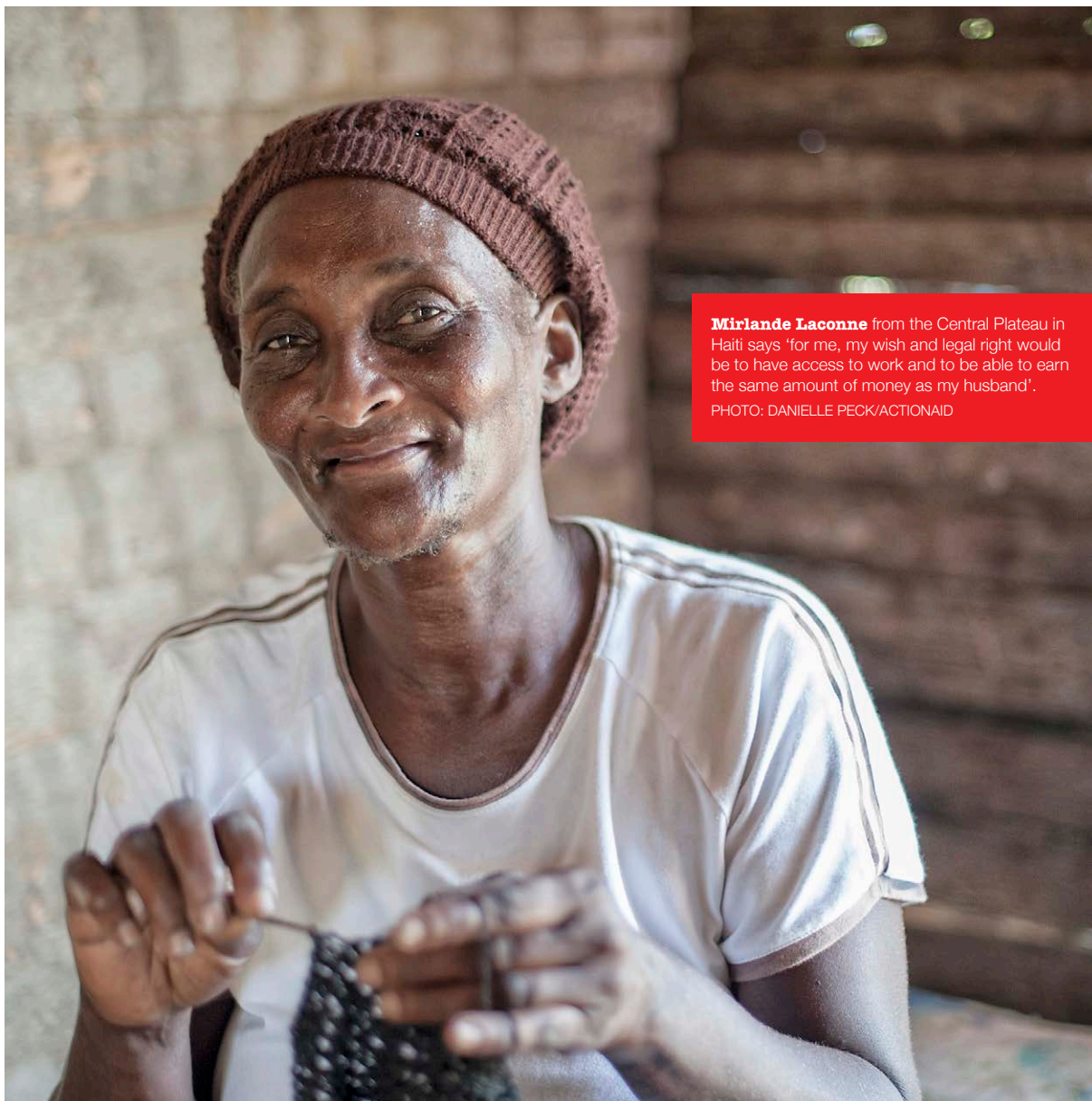
Mirlande Laconne from the Central Plateau in Haiti says 'for me, my wish and legal right would be to have access to work and to be able to earn the same amount of money as my husband'.
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ACTIONAID

Economic empowerment is key to tackling power imbalances

Although many women in the focus groups talked about how they felt empowered by participating in women's organising, they tended to focus on the economic value they add through their income generating activities in women's groups, rather than their sense of personal autonomy. The research found that in the countries studied, economic autonomy accelerates women's empowerment and often precedes political participation. Many of the women we spoke to indicated that they were taken more seriously in both private and public spheres of influencing when they were economically autonomous.

Women strategically use instrumental arguments to negotiate their presence in groups rather than claim that they have equal rights to men.[4] For example, a married woman in Mukinko, Nyanza district, Rwanda said 'before joining cooperatives some women were not allowed to leave their homes but after women [started] contributing to the families, men realized it was useful for the whole family'.[5] Earning money is crucial for women's sense of autonomy and also for their ability to influence their community in recognising their otherwise concealed struggles. In time, this can lead to changes in power dynamics within the family, for example, the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work might be more equally distributed within the household, and to broader societal changes in attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality, which can take generations to dismantle.

Power imbalances are maintained through violence and discrimination against women

The use of violence against women is a way in which the power imbalance between men and women is maintained on both a large scale (such as when rape is used as a weapon of war) and on a personal level (such as intimate partner violence). Violence against women may be sexual, physical, psychological or a combination of each. In Kwosir, Kapchorwa District, Uganda, Sylvia Yesyo shared a story of her neighbour Jovia Sabani who bought rice for a meal rather than maize, against the wishes of her husband. When Sylvia's husband learned that she offered the neighbour maize, he beat her so badly that he broke her leg. Women in the Benet focus group in Uganda talked about how men rape girls with impunity because 'the woman isn't supposed to speak out'. The women from focus groups in Brazil talked about how men try to control all aspects of their lives, 'if we wear a different outfit, the man complains. If we put on lipstick, the man complains. If we need money, we have to ask'.

Laxmi Sonha, from Nepal says 'Women have to ask husbands if they have to go out but the husbands do not need any permission from anyone'.
PHOTO: BISESH SANGAT/ACTIONAID

Power impacts self-worth

▶ *'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.'*

Single woman in Busamama, Nyanza district, Rwanda.[6]

Power imbalances can impact both women and men from marginalised groups socially, economically and psychologically. Yet women suffer a double disadvantage due to prevailing gender inequalities. Diumène Dorcé, a farmer from Haiti says, 'sometimes in the community, other members don't care about you because you're so poor.' Dorcé describes how she feels a sense of isolation from her family and from wealthier members of the community. This feeling is echoed by focus groups in Brazil, where it was noted that 'women, lacking power, experience depression, loneliness and isolation'. These experiences can manifest into low self-esteem which acts as a barrier preventing poor women and men from claiming their rights, finding their voice to negotiate power in the home and speaking up when facing disempowering situations in public. It also reinforces the idea that economic autonomy is an important element for addressing power imbalances both within the home and society.

Multidimensional expressions of power

Power imbalances are multidimensional in nature, often comprised of different, but reinforcing, forms of inequality. For example, ActionAid's work with young urban women in Ghana, South Africa and India indicates that lack of sexual and reproductive rights, economic inequality and violence against women are all strongly linked and interplay with one another.[7] A girl who is excluded from school because her parents cannot afford to send both her and her brother may be more at risk of violence and early marriage. Early marriage is often linked to early pregnancy, either because cultural norms dictate that a young pregnant girl is

required to marry or because of pregnancy following early marriage. One of the risks of becoming pregnant when young is increased health issues, such as fistula.[8] If the girl recovers, the additional burden of unpaid care work means she is unlikely to be able to leave the house to access economic or educational opportunities. Even if a young woman is able to access these opportunities, she is still at risk of violence and has no certainty of decent work on the basis of her gender alone.

Strategies to address power imbalances therefore must address the intersectional and multidimensional factors that maintain and perpetuate inequality. Building women and girls' 'resources, assets and agency' has played a crucial a role in reducing power imbalances and preventing violence against women and girls.[9]

Ajax, a young woman from Orange Farm Township, South Africa, campaigns for LGBTI rights with the Rainbow Activist Alliance. Lack of sexual and reproductive rights, economic inequality and violence against women are strongly linked and reinforce women's inequality.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

BOX 3: Invisible power in Haiti

As told by Yolette Etienne, ActionAid Haiti, July 2016

'We don't have formal barriers [to women's participation] but all these invisible elements in power are there and prevent women from having any real engagement and reinforce inequality. Even when Haiti gained independence, the symbolic references were already there. The elite merely took the place of the former masters, and women are still at the bottom of the ladder. For example, when land was redistributed, first it went to the generals and then to the men and lastly the women.

If I look at the legal framework there's nothing that prevents women from owning and controlling property. However, even where there is a legal framework in place, it doesn't mean that women are able to take control, because invisible and hidden power prevents them. In fact, in this country…the law doesn't apply to the poor and so [poor] women neither benefit from the law or their rights.

Women don't even have access to wealth. According to the law, women have the right to inherit but there are so many other obstacles to gaining access and control over property that women rarely can do so. Women are thought of as belonging to a man, so when it comes to inheritance, women are obliged to sell [to their husband or his family].

Women are completely isolated; they don't have access to the formal spaces, and they don't have identity cards. And women are fearful of entering the formal world, schools, banks and courts. Many women are illiterate and they don't even know where to go [for opportunities] because it's men who have the contacts. They are completely lost beyond the local level. So though in principle women have the right to be elected and to vote, these factors, plus the violence around elections and the money required to register into politics prevents many poor women from doing so.'

2. Women are shifting power, claiming space and changing their lives - Case studies

In spite of difficult circumstances, women community activists are coming together to confront and challenge the systems that exclude them. This process often starts at the local level, where women challenge local power relations by gaining economic autonomy, most commonly through a savings scheme. In Lakenturum community of Kaltungo, Gombe in Nigeria for example, women pool any savings from agricultural work with their mothers (Box 4). Having access to, and control over, their own economic resources increases the women's self-esteem and their bargaining power within their homes. Jacqueline Morette, a farmer in Haiti is a founder of the Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly (AFUP) (Box 5), a women's collective which facilitates the pooling of economic resources amongst women members. Whilst the collective has enabled an increase in women's economic autonomy at the local community level, their organising hits a barrier where changes are required from actors outside their immediate local areas.

For transformational change to occur, women's opportunities and capacity to organise with other local, regional and national women's groups must be strengthened and sustained. Through collective action, the voices and visibility of women and girls are raised. With an amplified voice, women are better positioned to both hold governments accountable for implementing gender responsive laws and policies and to challenge the "invisible" social and cultural norms that exclude women and girls from enjoying their rights. Nirmala Mahatara (Box 6), from a rural community which has been marginalised in Nepal, is part of a network that brings together women's groups from 30 districts. The network has participated in joint action such as a 3000-strong sit-in outside the constitutional assembly to ensure women's legal, social, political and economic rights are in the constitution. The Kamaiya women of Nepal, former bonded labourers, fought long and hard for their lands and freedom signalled by the Kamaiya Liberation Act in 2000. Their long campaign was achieved through a mixture of community organising and high-level policy change. Kamaiya men and women met in small groups and reflected on their rights. These groups, along with NGOs and movements such as the Free Kamaiya Society, Kamasu, Kamaiya Mahila Jagaran Samaj, some political parties and some media groups worked together to build a movement for change.[10]

Ex Kamaiya people have not stopped campaigning since their freedom in 2000. This 2013 campaign is for advocating for free education.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

A woman from Lakenturum community of Gombe state, Nigeria, shares how she has saved money with her mother and this helps her to invest In livestock.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

**BOX 4:** **Nigerian women store money safely**

Women involved in farming and livestock production in Lakenturum community of Kaltungo, Gombe state, Nigeria have devised a way to ensure they can save money and build economic independence. Women in this community are not allowed to own land, but most are given some land to farm by their husbands. In addition to farming, some are also involved in local enterprises and trading. However, they do not have control over their minimal incomes as their husbands insist on it being shared.

Many women say that their husbands only use their money to drink alcohol, but they are afraid that if they refuse to hand it over, their husbands might leave them. Women of all classes – some who are government workers and others who may earn income from grinding - therefore withhold their full income from their husbands. They keep money with their mothers so that they can save money for lean times when there is little work.

The risks involved in this act of resistance cannot be overestimated: ActionAid Nigeria says that if women are discovered saving money with their mothers they may be killed. The women's strategy gives them a measure of control and "power within".

Basti Karimu, a married woman, who makes and sells bean cake, and describes how 'there is a feud [over] income between me and my husband and as such I do not disclose my income to him. The savings with my mother and relatives is used when there is no means in the home…. [if my] husband gets wind of this process of saving for the raining day [I will] face dire consequences.'

Amina Nasiru, who is married and has a grinding machine, says 'from the money I made I buy small animals (sheep and goats). I save part of my income with my mother or sister so that my husband will not collect the money for his own use. I am able to get the money anytime I want to use it, no one will question me or refuse to give it to me. I feel more powerful because this gives me the authority to contribute to the family's decisions as a woman. I cannot keep a bigger saving here because my husband will always demand for it and I have no control. This way I can keep my marriage and contribute only what I feel is necessary for my children's upkeep and school fees.'
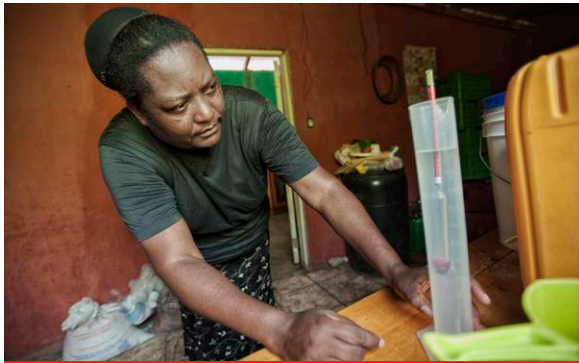
Jacqueline Féquière Morette, Co-ordinator of the Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly (AFUP) in the Central Plateau region of Haiti checks the sugar level of liqueur she makes from cocoa beans. Jacqueline and the women of AFUP work to increase their options for income-generation.
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ACTIONAID

BOX 5: Jacqueline Féquière Morette's story.

'I am the coordinator and founder member of AFUP [Association des Femmes Unies de Pouly]. Initially there were only ten of us. We each made a contribution and every two and half months one of us could withdraw money. We sought legal recognition from the local government and this meant we could open ourselves to more people, and there are now 50 contributors. We wanted the organisation so that we could get stronger and we continue to increase in strength; no matter what the situation, if we collaborate we can achieve great things like everybody else.

The government doesn't really have any policies to support women, apart from a law on violence against women. For example, in agricultural activities, the government doesn't exactly exclude women but it is a struggle for women to find their own place in activities carried out by the government.

I have heard that there is a quota of 30% of women in all levels of decision making but saying it is not doing it. You can see that after all no women were elected in the last parliament [2015] [provisional results from 2016 suggest 4 women were elected of 106 MPs]. The only place where there is, is in town councils; they said every town council should have at least one woman. But you can count on your fingers which are headed by women. Women are human beings. Women shouldn't be marginalised to the point they need a quota assigned to them.

We know that the ministry of women aims to help women improve their social and economic conditions in order to achieve equality. The ministry says it's working to support women but we haven't seen any concrete things to improve women's situation.

[The problem with the ministry's plans is] they are not in the women's language. It's a big problem. For example, when a woman goes into a public office, she speaks Kreyol and they answer her in French and so she just stays quiet. That's not her native language, the language she speaks at home, so that creates an obstacle for her [as women have little formal education of French], and she feels it's not a place for people like her and then she gives up on what she wanted to do as people in that place don't make her feel comfortable. It's essential that this document [the national plan for women] is translated into Kreyol so everyone can have access to it. It's a form of discrimination to block the peasants from being involved in the decision-making space, the space of power.

In rural areas women don't have the right to land. It's very uncommon to see a family where the men and women work together… If there are two boys and two girls, the two boys think that they are entitled to inherit their parents' land, that they are going to build their own house on that space, and the women will be married off. Once the parents have died, it might happen that the men will take the good, fertile land, and they give the women a small patch and sometimes the men will even buy the women's portion. In my own experience, we bought some land, we were surveying it, my mother was there and when the surveyor asked which name should go on the title, my husband agreed to put Jaqueline Féquière Morette [both our names] but my mother said 'NO! Women don't have land! How can you say that your wife's name should go on the title for land? But my husband was quite committed [and so both our names were written].'

Nirmala Mahatara addresses students on issues related to women's rights, sharing her experiences.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

BOX 6: **From a rural community to representing 30 districts.**

Nirmala Mahatara, central committee member of Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM), a national network of rural women in Nepal:

'Being able to raise my voice in front of the government officials, asking questions to the minister, and being able to represent thirty districts, makes me feel very strong. I can make sure my voice is heard even by the [local] government or at national level.

My family comes from a rural community, and is marginalised. Before I joined MAM I had no identification with the issue of women's rights. For me, men went outside and worked and women worked inside the house doing unpaid care work. After I joined, I got familiar with the amount of work the woman does in the family and how much input the man has, and after identifying and taking that issue to my family, the male and female members help each other in household work and in income-generating work. I've been involved at the community level since 2008 but in 2016, I become a national representative. MAM is a network of rural women across 30 districts. It is led only by women and campaigns on issues of rural land ownership - only 19.71% of women own land. MAM aims to eliminate violence and discrimination against women. We've campaigned against rape, the abuse of those accused of witchcraft and the dowry system, and have lobbied for joint land ownership, recognition of unpaid care work, and women's participation in all state apparatus (3000 women slept on the road outside the constitutional assembly as part of a campaign for participation and women-friendly policies). MAM has assisted women as well as other organisations in the local community to find resources for women in the group to train other women to be entrepreneurs.'

Whilst these women's contexts are all unique, the way that they have advocated for change is similar: the starting point to challenging power is through peer organising and collective action. Women's collective strength is critical to hold people with power accountable for discriminatory laws and cultural norms that maintain power imbalances, and to call for gender-responsive policy making and implementation that upholds and protects women's rights.

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3. Challenges and opportunities for organising

When women challenge power they inevitably face barriers, including resistance and violence. Women are better able to shift power when they organise together, when their analysis of targets enables them to lobby and campaign effectively, and when they can link up with broader progressive women's movements to influence high-level decision making.

What are the opportunities to shift power?

▶ *'Confidence, collective activity and access to and control over resources [are the…] three key aspects of power'.*

Women in Nyanza, Rwanda.[11]

Women's organising creates "power with" – collective action shifts power

Through mobilising, the power of women's grassroots organising and social movements is amplified, allowing them to shift power imbalances and to challenge the legal and social norms that exclude them from enjoying their rights at home, at work and in all public spaces. Grassroots organising and movements should not be underestimated: the Arab Spring brought regime change and, despite the risk and violence, saw the emergence of creative young women's movements.[12] The South Africa student-led protest, #FeesMustFall, first mobilised in 2015 around tuition fee hikes at South African universities, and led to the national government promising no fee increases in 2016. Originating in the African-American community, the now-international activist movement #BlackLivesMatter campaigns against violence and racism experienced by black people and is continuing to effectively raise awareness and stage direct actions.

Women's rights and feminist movements at all levels from across the globe have worked tirelessly to eradicate the structural causes of gender inequality and push for laws and policies that support and uphold women's rights. There have been limited but significant wins that have brought about shifts in global and national laws and policies to target the root causes of gender inequality. They include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a defining framework for advancing women's rights; Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality, the global commitment to eradicate gender inequality and end all forms of discrimination against women and girls by 2030; and regional processes such as the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, guaranteeing comprehensive rights to women.[13]

Grace Yeko, a member of Kapteret Women's Cooperative, Uganda says she has been able to defend her body and that of her girl children against the harmful cultural practices because of the economic autonomy gained from collective irrigation farming.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Women's organising starts at the local level and can build "power within" and "power with" others in solidarity. When women gain awareness and understanding of their human rights, they are motivated to pursue their rights by organising and taking collective action for change. Aisha Nangobi, a smallholder farmer and member of Nsinze Reflect circle from Namutumba District in Uganda, said that women in her community only began to articulate inequalities when they started to attend meetings organised by other women. 'Once we started to attend the meetings, we started to open our eyes'. A further element which builds "power within" is economic independence. A member of a collective in Nyanza, Rwanda highlighted that women's increased access to resources as a result of being part of a collective had helped them to shift power, 'groups have also become formal community organisations with functional governance structures led exclusively by women and well respected by members of the community. Cooperatives act therefore as legitimate power spaces that are also contributing to changing the community views about the power that women hold.'[14]

Focus group discussion on gender and inequalities with the Remanso's Women Network, Brazil.

Solange Silva, woman farmer and president of the NGO Coexist in the Backwoods, Sertão (wearing a grass skirt) says: 'Inequality begins when we don't respect each other, especially women, when we don't have the opportunity. Everywhere we go people discriminate against us, we don't have opportunities. We are always dependent on a man. This is inequality. We are not to be stepped on, we must walk together. I know that if women go to more meetings, join groups, and discuss what we need to improve our lives, that's one way to get rights'
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

BOX 7: Women's groups and supportive allies create space for women to meet

▶ *'The meetings help because they make us realize there was much going wrong inside our homes. We go back to our families stronger to change the wrong things. We are strengthened in the forums'.* Solange Silva, woman farmer and president of the NGO Coexist in the Backwoods, Sertão.

Rural women from the semi-arid northeastern part of Brazil are impoverished as they lack access to public services, with black, poor and indigenous women experiencing considerable discrimination.

These farmers are the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night as they are balancing their unpaid care work and paid or unpaid productive work. This involves; collecting and then storing water, looking after their children and older family members - including preparing their food, as well as working on their small plots of land; producing medicinal plants for sale and use, and the care of small animals. Neither women's unpaid care nor their unpaid productive work is valued; it has instead been historically perceived as "help" rather than as an integral part of the family and national economy. Mazé Silva, woman farmer and coordinator of the Mirandiba Women's Forum says: 'Women do a lot of things at once and still are not valued. There are women who do all the services for her husband and he thinks it's her duty and treats her very badly'.

The Mirandiba Women's Forum partners with NGOs and national feminist organisations who apply feminist analysis to social inequality. Its main objectives are to:

- conduct political education on women's rights and women's empowerment;
- promote women's participation in social movements and grassroots organisations such as the women's forum;
- combat violence and discrimination against women in their private life, within their communities, and wider society; and
- encourage the generation of income and food security for women in rural areas through productive projects and partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations and foreign NGOs.

The Forum has become one of the leading spaces for women's empowerment and achieving women's rights from the perspective of agroecology and feminism, leading to changes in the lives of rural women. For example, self-organisation has enabled rural women to strengthen their role as political players. This has enabled women to better access their rights and ensure better food security, income and self-esteem. Mazé Silva again says 'in the past we did not have a large amount of women in the meetings, even because their husbands would not let them leave the house. Today, women make the decision and come.'

Analysing key targets and allies will result in better lobbying and campaign strategies to shift power

Women's understanding and analysis of power imbalances and the context in which they occur needs to be clear and strong so that they are able to effectively challenge power, gain decision making space and correct the gendered imbalance perpetuated by patriarchal systems. Two key areas of change were identified within this research; first, shifting power imbalances between men and women both within the home and in communities and second, mitigating the power of religious institutions.

Shifting power imbalances in the home

Women will have to work strategically to shift the power imbalance between women and men, as efforts are often initially met with resistance. One effective example is in Nepal, where women have been using time-use diaries to record their unpaid care work and paid work activities.[15] Starting at the local level, women have been using the time diaries to explore the gendered division of labour. The time-diary tool provides a basis for discussion between women and their husbands and children as it makes visible their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. For example, in one village in Nepal, women using time-use diaries organised a campaign called "Burn your curry". Women who participated in this campaign explained that, 'it is very difficult to make our husbands understand how much we contribute; it's taken for granted, we're not appreciated. So when cooking, we pretended we had to go and do something else, and asked for help from our husband/brother/ father. If they cook[ed] nicely, [it was because] they [had taken] part [in learning about cooking]; if they burned it, we would say that they ruined it because they didn't take much interest.' In a country where patriarchy is both legally and culturally sanctioned, it took great courage for the women of this campaign to challenge the division of labour within the home in such an innovative way.[16]

Sandhya Limbu is married with three daughters. She lives in Nepal. She goes to a local *Reflect* circle. Sandhya's husband helps her with cooking, looking after the children, washing clothes, and fetching firewood and water. She believes that the family is key to recognizing, reducing and redistributing unbalanced work at home.
PHOTO: NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPTI/ACTIONAID

Shifting power imbalances in the community

In Kupto community, Nigeria, women farmers and traders first identified the local chief as the key community power-holder as his actions hold a strong influence on cultural norms and values. The women then lobbied their chief to support their organising asks. As a result of their collective lobbying, the chief put in place a local committee that supports and oversees girls' education. The committee's primary responsibility was to reduce gender inequalities in education by ensuring that all households in the area send both their boys and girls to school. This has resulted in improved primary and secondary school enrolment, retention and completion for female children, which will position them well for further educational and economic opportunities in the future. Following on from this initial success the women further lobbied the chief to ensure that the committee oversaw women's access to and control over their economic initiatives.

Shifting the power of religious institutions

▶ *'Inequality is a fact in the Catholic and evangelical religions and there is the issue of woman's submission. We have to analyse this kind of submission, because we know that there are inequalities and we have to change our practices.'*

Solange Silva, farmer and president of the NGO Coexist in the Backwoods, Sertão, Brazil.

Religion is a central cultural and political institution in many societies, but in many cases religious practices and beliefs may perpetuate gender inequality by suppressing women's voices and denying their autonomy, blocking them from accessing their rights.

In Brazil, religion plays a large role and almost 90% of the population identify as Christian.[17] Women's sexual and reproductive rights are constantly threatened by religious conservative efforts in the

Brazilian Congress, which currently upholds one of the most restrictive legislations in the world on abortion. Progress toward greater sexual and reproductive rights for women continues to be hindered by the current government. For example, in July 2016, in meeting with 33 evangelical pastors, Brazilian President Michel Temer pledged to examine two proposals: the fight against "gender ideology", the effort to "reduce gender stereotyping in schools" and the defence of the "traditional family" consisting of a man and woman as husband and wife. Focus groups from Brazil noted that religious fundamentalists[18] - who have a strong presence in the Brazilian countryside and national legislature - have been instrumental in increasing women's inequalities in both rural and urban areas, particularly through their control over the education system, which reinforces gender stereotypes. This is due to a biased institutional ethos, which defines social roles, devalues black and indigenous cultures and, as Socorro, a woman farmer and the coordinator of the Women's Network of Remanso, Brazil noted, emphasises 'the submission of women'. Religious fundamentalisms are present in private and public spaces and at local, national and global levels. At international summits and UN agencies, the Vatican and Christian fundamentalist groups, along with conservative Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, have taken part in efforts to block progressive language that promotes gender equality.

Seeing women in power is a strong enabler and motivator for other women.

▶ *'[President Johnson Sirleaf] is a mark in the history for women to be equal to men...It means that we the woman can be anybody we want to be: we are empowered through education. We see the woman president as our hope for women to do more good things and we can do it'.*

Focus group, largely single women and widows from Mabio, Gbapolu, Liberia.

In 2015 the women of Yangayan, Liberia decided it was time to change the system of traditional

rule in which traditional chiefs are the equivalent of judges (using customary laws). The women recognised that without a female representative in the town council of elders (which includes the chiefs), women's opinions would not be heard, nor would their claims for their rights be taken seriously. The women decided to form a Mothers' Club and successfully campaigned for its former chair, Ma Zoe Taweh, who played a crucial role in the local effort to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus, to become Town Chief, after persuading the men of the council to nominate her. She is the first female town chief in both Yangayan and Gbarpolu County. Despite Ma Zoe Taweh's subsequent challenges, another woman leader, Ma Gbelley Kouh said, 'I used to think women don't have power and rights to do anything and we are subject to men, but Ma Zoe has showed us the way and I will be the next General Town chief.'

Ma Gbelley Kouh, from Liberia, and her peers celebrate the achievements of local women leaders.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Women's access to and full participation in power structures and decision making not only plays a key role in motivating local action by other women, it may also facilitate the breaking down of barriers that prevent more women from getting into power. Since higher level decision making depends on existing (male) leaders, there is little chance of women being able to participate fully in the political

processes that shape their lives. For example, in Liberia men traditionally hold positions from Town Chief all the way up the customary leadership hierarchy to Paramount Chief. Some meetings are held in sacred spaces where women cannot enter without heavy repercussions and new leaders can only be nominated by the men present: a perfect system to maintain male dominance, to ensure that women are systematically excluded from leadership, and to restrict women from participating in decision making. Ma Zoe Taweh herself was initially excluded from decision making as she could not be at the meetings. However, after months of campaigning, women's groups secured an agreement to change the customs so she could attend.

Challenges to organising and resistance to change - what are the barriers?

The progress made by women's movements in securing basic rights for women are at risk in light of overlapping global challenges: shrinking political space, rising religious and cultural fundamentalism and extreme economic inequality. In many countries, civil society no longer has space to engage, criticise and pressure governments to put gender responsive laws and policies in place and to implement them. Rising religious and cultural fundamentalisms have eroded gains that once empowered women to have control over their bodies, sexuality, mobility and labour. Global and national economic systems continue to thrive on women's unpaid care work and labour, which largely goes unrecognised. The levels of extreme economic inequality that can be seen in the world have been built on the continued exploitation of women, especially poor women, as a cheap source of productive and reproductive labour. Women in developing countries could be $9 trillion better off if their pay and access to paid work were equal to that of men.[19] Seeking redistribution of power is no easy task, as women continue to face multiple obstacles in pursuing their rights. For example;

Violence remains a huge barrier to women shifting power.

Violence, from psychological abuse to outright bodily harm is a constant threat for women and girls worldwide. In each country assessed, women described how violence is used as a method of control over their voices, bodies, mobility, labour and enjoyment of public spaces, which keeps them in subjugation to men. Alta Phareau, a farmer in Haiti, described how 'when the women start to speak about their rights, the men don't want to listen and start beating them and becoming violent'. Nantabo Sumaya, a small scale trader from Busiki Village, Namutumba district in Uganda described how 'men rape girls or their wives but they cannot report because they have no voice; when a man talks the woman isn't supposed to talk'. It is also considered culturally unacceptable for women to discuss in public issues which lead to their oppression. In one case, a woman from Busiki did report her husband to the police for physical abuse. However, whilst he was initially arrested, he was released quickly, and upon his release attacked and killed his wife in revenge. The husband is now in jail, but the case is still pending. Acts of femicide with insufficient or no legal repercussions strongly discourage women from speaking out about violent crimes against them.

In many cases, the power within legal and judiciary systems results in the outright dismissal of women's perspectives and concerns. Phareau states that if a woman is beaten and goes to report her husband to the police in Haiti, the police 'don't do anything'.

Violence, and the threat of violence, keep women from claiming their rights. Even if women find ways to overcome the invisible power that might prevent them from speaking out, the lack of legal and social support for victims of gender-based violence ensures that victims do not or cannot access justice. Injustice and inequality continues as the perpetrators of violence against women often go unseen or unpunished. Violence is entrenched in structures that perpetrate male

privilege and impunity and is manifested at all levels of society. For example, millions of young girls globally are subject to traditional cultural practices such as female genital mutilation to prepare them for marriage. The practice violates a number of

girls' and women's rights: it violates their rights to health and physical integrity; their rights educational and economic opportunities should they marry early; and their right to life should the procedure result in death.

Irene Mwanga is from Kwosir Women's Cooperative, Uganda. Irene underwent female genital cutting, she blames it on the inequality between men and women. She believes that empowering women economically strengthens their stand against Female Genital cutting. She heads Kwosir Women's Cooperative and they grow, dry and pack vegetables for the markets both in Uganda and Kenya.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Women's combination of paid work, unpaid work and/or unpaid care work restricts their time to challenge power.

▶ *'Women work a lot. Men have a comparatively better life. They wake up, relax in a tea shop, work and when there is no work they play cards. There is a lot of work at home for women. They also go out for paid work'.*

Focus group with the over-30s women's group, Anantapur, Nepal.

ActionAid analysed the total amount of both paid and unpaid work undertaken by women and men and found that globally, a young woman entering the job market today can expect to work for the

equivalent of an average of four years more than her male peers over her lifetime, as she is balancing both paid and unpaid care work.[20] This amounts to the equivalent of an extra one month's work for every woman, every year of a woman's life, and means women have little time to participate in women's groups, decision-making structures outside the house or leisure time.[21]

Lack of responsible and consistent state & public policy environment

Power imbalances are perpetuated in society because there is poor public institutional willingness to create and implement policies and mechanisms

that address discrimination and exclusion. Traditional systems of power exclude women, resulting in the continual creation of gender-blind policies that do not recognise or respond to women's contexts and needs. Women therefore continue to face inequality in accessing economic resources such as land, decent work, and credit across many regions throughout the world.

Lack of implementation

Even in regions where policies are in place, they may not be implemented, particularly where corruption is rife and goes unchecked. Yolette Etienne from ActionAid Haiti explains how 'in a weak society where the social structure isn't very strong money speaks louder than the law. For example, that a man can pay for a lawyer or pay off a family when a girl is raped, is a way of showing the gap between the legal framework and reality'.[22] ActionAid research in *Not Ready, Still Waiting* examined the extent to which countries are "policy ready" to achieve sustainable development goals around inequality, and analysed the blockages at the national level which prevent the establishment of laws and policies that would reduce inequalities from being put in place.[23] South Africa is, on paper, the most policy ready of the countries ActionAid studied to address gender inequality, with 90% of key policies in place.[24] However, the lived reality of women is different; they continue to experience inequality on multiple levels. A recent survey showed that 52% of women in Gauteng, the most populous province in South Africa, had experienced sexual violence. And yet, continued attempts to hold the government to account for escalating violence by LBTI women are deflected by the government, which simply references the country's "most progressive" constitution.[25]

Activists march through the streets demanding equality and an end to homophobia and prejudice during the annual Soweto Pride, South Africa.
PHOTO: KATHERINE ROBINSON/ACTIONAID

Implementation of gender budgeting, in which government budgets are analysed and evaluated for their differential impact on women, men, boys and girls, is particularly weak and limited to isolated cases across countries.[26] For example, Justine Nabwiire, the coordinator of the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), stated how 'the community [local government] office can divert gender-related funds to use it for something else that comes up.' Evidence from Nepal indicates that budget set aside for women is being diverted to infrastructure projects.[27] Whilst these public funds are intended to be spent in ways that specifically support women, they are being reallocated to general projects. Gender budgets need to be prioritised and spent appropriately, as recommended within the SDG guidelines and accompanying indicators,[28] rather than sidelined, to facilitate gender responsive policy making and implementation.

Policy inconsistency

Inconsistencies between human rights commitments enshrined in international and national laws and government economic policies can act as a barrier to reducing inequalities. For example, even in countries where the right to free public education and health care are enshrined in the national constitution, they may be undermined by a policy which results in the commercialisation of these previously public institutions. In March 2016, the Liberian government entered into a partnership with Bridge International Academies, a private US-based company, which outlined a pilot program

that would be initially rolled out to 50 primary schools, with phase two of the program involving a mass roll out to potentially all of Liberia's primary schools over a five year period.[29] The scheme has since been subjected to harsh criticism, including from UN's Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh. This move to privatise education by the Liberian government undermines the rights to education that are enshrined in the national constitution.[30]

Other barriers to implementation include conflicting parties' political will, such as in Brazil, where hard-fought gains around social policy were lost when the President Michel Temer's government came into power through the heavily-disputed impeachment of the elected president.[31] Mazé, a woman farmer and coordinator of the Mirandiba Women's Forum, Brazil commented that 'the Temer government pretends that women are nothing, farmers and indigenous people are nothing. It reduced all our power; we do not recognize it as a government that contributes'.[32] Even though the Temer government has only officially been working since September 2016, Temer has orchestrated several actions that are an affront to the rights of Brazilian women. His cabinet, for the first time since the 1970s, has no female or indigenous representation, and is made up only of white men. In addition, using cost cutting as an argument, Temer abolished the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights.[33] This is remarkable in a hugely ethnically diverse country with over 107 million women, and which up until recently had a female president.

4. Change policies to support women to shift power

Whilst women who are dealing with inequalities are often excluded from policy discussions, they have clear ideas about the policies that will make a difference in their lives and reduce inequality. Linking this local analysis along with national and global analysis of drivers of inequality, as explored in the *Price of Privilege* and *Not Ready, Still Waiting*, gives a holistic overview of potential responses.[34]

4.1 Implement existing gender responsive policies

In September 2016, ActionAid published *Not Ready, Still Waiting*, which analysed the readiness of 14 selected countries to meet their commitments on inequality made as part of the Sustainable Development Goals approved in 2015. Of the ten developing countries we examined, only Brazil, Nepal and South Africa had over 65% of the policies in place required to achieve SDG 5 and SDG 10 by 2030.[35] Having adequate policies in place is the first step to changing visible power, ensuring that the basis of gender equality is recognized in national law along with measures to reach it. It is clear that some countries must step up efforts in this regard. This report highlights how even countries with good policies in place have much further to go. Where laws and policies have been put in place they are often uncoordinated, inadequately enforced, not implemented or under-resourced. Across the women's groups ActionAid spoke to, the common policy alternative was to publicly fund and implement gender responsive public service.[36]

BOX 8: Gender Responsive Public Services

Gender responsive public service (GRPS) policies take into account and address the practical and strategic needs and priorities of women and men. Gender responsive services are not about ensuring that women and men have the same access to, use and control over public services. A GRPS approach asks whether the planning, delivery, access and use of public services empowers people to challenge forms of gender inequalities and unequal power relations, while improving women's control over resources, public services, mobility, and ability to participate in local organising and decision making. So, amongst other things, a GRPS might ensure that local health care centres, women's shelters and water provision are available and accessible to women to meet their practical needs. In addition, to meet women's strategic needs, women would play an active role in decision making around implementation, and ensure there would be access to justice and legal recourse should their rights be violated.

A set of gender responsive policies includes:

a. Policies to support women's economic empowerment

In order to shift power, women must have the potential to engage in and control the profits from income-generating activities. In order to facilitate this, women should have:

i) Access to low cost finance or agricultural inputs for income generation
Women farmers in the rural focus groups in Haiti and Uganda noted the impact that access to inputs, whether agricultural extension, low cost finance, seeds or other inputs, has on their economic autonomy. Increasing women's economic autonomy reduces their dependence on more powerful actors, such as their husbands, and

allows them to farm more sustainably. Women with their own income streams have been able to invest their money. In Kapchorwa, two women's groups, in Kwosir and Kapteret organised themselves into cooperatives and saved and bought land that they now own and use for vegetable production. Beyond production, the women add value to their produce through processing, have established markets where the sell their produce and have started a savings and credit arrangement that they use to borrow and invest in areas of their interest. Their increased economic autonomy, coupled with training that facilitated understanding of their human rights and governance structures, has led to these women using their knowledge to transform their societies. For example, one Ugandan farmer,

Zuraika, has engaged with her family to ensure she has fair allocation of family land. Currently, rural women rarely receive any attention in agricultural policies, programmes and budget allocations. Women own only 1% of the land in Africa, receive only 7% of extension services and 1% of all agricultural credit.[37] When women have more information on the types and terms of credit, are supported to approach banks and facilities who operate in a language they understand, or start credit and savings groups, they develop economic independence and are better able to access their full rights. It is important that access to finance is not based on collateral and does not have high interest rates as it will exclude poor women farmers.[38]

Grace Munere, Kapchorwa district, eastern Uganda is a role model in Tuban parish. Following organising with a Women's Rights in Agriculture Project (WORIA), she has been more heavily involved in farming. Her backyard garden at home is lush with vegetables such as spinach, carrots, onions and nakatti and it is through selling these that she has earns an income. Her relationship with her family has changed as she no longer stays at home, but is socially and economically active.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

ii) Access and control over land

Women, *quilombolas* (individuals descended from escaped African slaves) and indigenous people in Brazil noted in the two focus groups that they felt excluded as a result of unequal land distribution

and a lack of understanding of how people use land differently. The structural causes of inequality are rooted in a market-led, patriarchal system and in Brazil this is manifested in who has access to and control over natural resources, which are the

means of production. In Brazil, there is unequal land distribution based on factors of class, race, ethnicity and gender. Poor black and indigenous women do not have sufficient land for their families' needs, which is a denial of their rights.

Women struggle to access and control any land, whether large tracts of farmland or small parcels for growing subsistence crops. In Nepal and Uganda there is no law to allow a wife to inherit when the husband dies without a will.[39] In the other countries assessed, families ignore inheritance

laws with impunity. Men and women both have rights to land, and these rights must be respected if gender inequalities are to be reduced. Control over land gives women control over other aspects of their lives.

Women require government policies and laws that protect and promote women's land rights and prevent discrimination. This involves access to and control over land, the ability to farm in a sustainable way, and the maintenance of traditional systems of communal tenure.[40]

Supporters celebrate the return of women climbers from the summit of Kilimanjaro
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

BOX 9: Kilimanjaro Initiative

Over four hundred women farmers from across Africa participated in the October 2016 rural women's Mass Assembly that was the pinnacle of the #Women2Kilimanjaro initiative. The event saw women farmers from 22 countries travel to Arusha, Tanzania, including two women who cycled from Uganda. Twenty-nine of the women climbed Mount Kilimanjaro as a powerful symbol of their tenacious struggle to secure women's land rights. The women deliberated and consolidated a joint charter of demands for realisation of their land rights, focusing on land policies, land investments, and social and cultural practices that deny women their land rights. This charter was presented to the AUC Chairperson at the Assembly. The event gave momentum to women's land issues and lobbying and advocacy continues at national level. For example, in November 2016 farmers from Liberia presented the charter to their government. The Liberia land rights policy has been stalled in the Liberian legislature since 2014 and it is hoped that ongoing mobilisations will see it passed and implemented.[41]

iii) Access to decent work and a minimum wage

On construction projects in Nepal, women will haul the bricks and sand to the men, who then build walls with the bricks. The men's work in this scenario is considered more skilled and so the men get paid 300-500 rupees ($2.8 – $4.7) more per day. In agriculture, women will plant and men will plough. Planting – like brick hauling – is incredibly hard work. However, men are paid 1,000 rupees ($9) per day whilst the women are paid only 600-700 rupees ($5.6 – $6.5).[42] In neither Brazil nor Nigeria is there a law which says women should have equal pay for work of equal value, though it exists in the other study countries.[43] ActionAid has calculated that gender inequality in labour markets costs women in poor countries $9 trillion each year.[44] This huge inequality exists because women get paid less than men – known as the gender pay gap – and do not enjoy the same rates of employment – the gender employment gap.[45] The vast majority of working women in developing countries rely on precarious, underpaid and often unsafe work in the informal sector; the result is that gender inequality in society is reproduced in the workplace.[46]

For women who are in an employer/employee relationship in the formal sector, minimum wages are an important provision to respond to inequality in the workplace. Whilst this still excludes women who are self-employed as, say market traders, and women who work on their family farms, a minimum wage is a first step to address both the gender pay gap and also the inequality between the rich and the poor.[47] ActionAid has long argued for a common minimum wage, providing women with enough to live on.[48] More women than men work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs, often subject to poor working conditions and increased risk of harassment or violence. To protect vulnerable women workers and their families against poorly paid work, a minimum wage is standard labour practice. Nepal has an established minimum wage, previously 6000 rupees per month [$55], which was increased in February 2016 to 7000 rupees [$63] each month.[49] Although this minimum wage applies to both informal and formal sectors, only the formal sector complies with laws on the minimum wage as there is no record or way of monitoring whether wages are received in the informal sector. The participation of women workers in the informal sector is much larger than their male counterparts, meaning they are less likely to earn a living wage.

a. Women's full and equal participation in decision making

▶ *'What is truly inspirational is to see despite the current situation, women's dream, desire, and vision for a future is one where women can take down barriers and participate fully in society…They express clearly that they want to see more women becoming judges, lawyers, parliamentarians (no women in the current Parliament), president, and bureaucrats. In a nutshell, they want to see more women in the decision-making spaces'.[50]*

Joseph Alliance, ActionAid Haiti.

▶ *'There are no women in parliament or in the strong influential positions; all decision-making spaces are held by men'.*

Carole St Naël, Pouly, Haiti. Carole is using the money she made from growing peanuts to retrain as a nursery teacher.

Rosette Thelusma, from the Central Plateau region in Haiti. Thelusma is one of 61000 members of MPP, the Peasants' Movement of Papaye, one of ActionAid's local partners and a grassroots organisation with a mission to support the rural poor. Thelusma no longer has access to land as she cannot afford to rent. Her main source of income is from selling solar energy to recharge mobile phones. She also works as a local midwife.
PHOTO: DANIELLE PECK/ACTIONAID

ActionAid's research found that women were inspired by the presence of other women in power. Sadly, women are often missing from positions of power, and women's organisations testify to having their views ignored or silenced as a result. As a practical measure, Asmita, a women's publishing house in Nepal, gives women adult literacy training to further build their political power. Beyond the local, Asmita campaigns for political parties to give training to those candidates who have not yet participated in the political process, rather than dismiss candidates from marginalised areas as incapable or under-qualified.[51] However, at a systems level, women and women's groups must be better represented, where women's views are not only considered in the consultative process, but women themselves hold decision-making positions to transform the political agenda.

There are some initiatives on their way to achieving this. Many of the countries in our study have policies to ensure women's greater participation in politics. For example, Brazil and Haiti have a 30% quota for women in political parties,[52] and in Uganda, 1.5 points are added on top of women's exam grades to counteract the historical disadvantage women have faced in education and to support increased university admissions for women.[53] Quotas have their downsides, but – if implemented - are a visible step in decreasing institutional sexism.

b. Action against violence against women – women's access to justice

Violence, from psychological abuse used to attack self-confidence to outright bodily harm, was brought up repeatedly during discussions with women. In each country, women described how violence is used to control them - their voices, bodies, mobility, labour and enjoyment of public spaces – and how it keeps them in subjugation to men.

Yet women's ability to take action against this violence is often greatly restricted. Women in Busiki, Uganda, commented on corruption within the police system, failures in record-keeping and in following up cases and poor enforcement of laws. In Haiti, participants in the women's focus group talked about how disadvantaged they are in comparison to men in terms of access to justice. Even when they have been victims of violence, it is difficult to report crimes to the police and access justice as they don't have sufficient money to bribe those officials. Across the study countries, even though some women's organisations have been providing support to women and girls that have been affected by violence, more efforts are needed to put an end to the corruption within the justice system itself and to make it more responsive to women's conditions or situations.

Women gathered in front of the legislative assembly in Rio de Janiero, Brazil, asking for an end to violence against women.
PHOTO: FABRIZIA GRANATIERI/ACTIONAID

Violence against women is a global challenge affecting over one in three women over their lifetimes.[54] Violence impacts on every area of a woman's life: it impacts on her potential to work outside the home, on her confidence and sense of self-worth and on her physical and mental health.[55] Violence undermines all women's rights and as such should be a key part of all interventions concerning women. For example, violence restricts girls' rights to education; of the 150 million girls experiencing sexual assault each year many of those experience it on the way to and from or within schools.[56] Actions to prevent and combat violence must therefore be part of all planning, including education planning.[57] The roots of violence are in women's inequality, and violence also exacerbates women's inequality; in fact, the more equal a country is, the less likely there is to be gender based violence.[58] At a national level, governments should take measures to implement SDG 5 on women's equality- one goal of which is to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres - and fund national implementation plans which are cross cutting.[59] The implementation of effective laws and policies is a key component; whilst in the sample countries there is some existing legislation - for example, outlawing rape in marriage and domestic violence legislation - significant violations persist.[60] Better implementation of existing laws can include providing local support for women's shelters and enabling better access to justice.

4.2 Gender responsive public services

a. Women's education

The women we spoke with emphasized the potential for education to transform society and culture.[61] Education has the potential to be 'the most powerful equalising force in society… schools have the potential to play a transformative role, challenging the injustices and inequalities within society rather than replicating them'.[62] In this context, it is shocking that of our study countries, only Brazil and South Africa meet the minimum required spending of 4-6% of GDP on education, as affirmed by the Incheon declaration 2015.[63] Lack of sufficient funding can result in governments outsourcing education to private contractors and state schools charging for uniform and lunches. Even low fees can impede girls' educational opportunities and exacerbate existing gender disparities in education. When parents can no longer afford school fees and are forced to choose between their daughters' and sons' education, girls are generally the first to be pulled out of school. Bena Arapta, the District Officer of Kwosir, Uganda notes that it is 'especially the girls from poor families because they suffer early marriages, as parents lack the finances to support them and so will only keep them in school to S4 level [equivalent of 16 years old] as they feel it is a sufficient level of education [for girls] and do not want to contribute to school fees for longer'. Girls living in rural areas or girls with disabilities face additional layers of discrimination that prevent them from attaining educational opportunities.

Key to sustaining an effective education system that reduces gender discrimination and inequality is ensuring that decision-makers hear the voices of students, teachers and parents, including those from the most excluded sections of society. This requires involving these groups in all levels of policy making. In Uganda, in response to high levels of gender-based violence in schools, children asked for a system of accountability boxes in schools that would only be opened confidentially by a trusted member of the school governing body. This effective initiative has led to an increase in the reporting of violations, particularly of violence against girls in schools, which is a critical first step towards effective reform.[64] In Nepal, citizen's reports on education provided an evidence base for some parties' manifestos within the constituent assembly.[65]

b. Early childhood care and education

The presence of young children dramatically reduces caregivers' capacity to engage in politics, community work, leisure activities or further income generation. Women in study sites in Nepal work

on average 11 hours a day compared to men's 8 hours, with women spending on average 218 minutes a day on unpaid work compared to men's 198 minutes a day, 75% of which is unpaid care work.[66] There is evidence to suggest that early childhood education is an effective way to prepare children for schooling and may lead to better educational outcomes.[67] Policy makers focused on long-term and sustained development goals see education as an investment since it results in greater economic opportunities for women, which contributes to overall GDP. There is another view to the instrumentalist one: preschool child care

can allow women to actively participate in their communities aside from their GDP contributions, whilst child care centres provide forms of employment.[68] Amongst sample countries, there is government funding for early childcare education in Brazil, Liberia, Nigeria and South Africa, but the coverage of these policies is limited.[69] Women's groups in Sangharsanagar, Nepal are campaigning for the implementation of early childhood education policies and for the government to take over payment of coordinator wages of their community child care centre, which caters for 31 children.

Krishna Kumari Tharu was formerly a Kamaiya bonded labourer and became an agricultural and construction labourer (carrying building materials). She says that although it was initially challenging, as her children cried a lot, it is now easy to look after them. She observes that the child care centre frees up women to participate in paid employment and village committees/decision making. The centre is currently under-funded. The community is negotiating with the government to take over payment of coordinator wages.
PHOTO: RUTH KELLY/ACTIONAID

c. Social protection policies

▶ *'Public policies, such as Bolsa Família, contribute to end difficulties because, with them, women can have direct access to the money. There are still those men who stay outside the bank, waiting to get the money from the woman, but most of the time, these policies reduce the inequalities that women suffer'.*

Mazé Silva, farmer and coordinator of the Mirandiba Women's Forum.

Access to cash transfer programs and the implementation of inclusive policies have been crucial for women in transforming their realities and reducing gender inequalities. Brazilian government programs such as the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), Bolsa Família (a family allowance), Minha Casa, Minha Vida (for affordable housing), racial quota policies for university admission and support for people living with disabilities are examples of public policies that have an impact on the political and economic empowerment of women. With these policies, many women accessed funds for the first time.

▶ *'Some public policies contribute greatly to women's empowerment. We say 'I will get my money'. Minha Casa Minha Vida, for instance, is in the woman's name and gives us a very great power'*

Mazé Silva, farmer and coordinator of the Mirandiba Women's Forum.

Only two of the countries in this study, Brazil and South Africa, have comprehensive social protection legislation,[70] yet even their policy efforts are insufficient. In Brazil, social protection policies are being drastically cut back by the new conservative regime. Social policies are often the last to be implemented and, in times of austerity, are usually the first to be dropped since their constituency is not a powerful one. When social protection policies are lacking, the impact disproportionately falls on women who pick up most of the work that the state is accountable for, on top of their paid work. It is the women who face intersecting forms of disadvantage and who are most impacted by lack of social support. For example, in Nigeria, the government has passed a national bill on disability but it lacks effective implementation, particularly in rural areas. This results in very few children with disabilities being integrated into mainstream schools, and given that care work falls disproportionately on women, this means that women have little option but to stay at home to support their children. Women who themselves have disabilities are marginalised as there are no efforts to ensure people with disabilities are able to acces employment.[71]

Prioritising the effective implementation of the above policies requires recognising women's inequality and providing the appropriate financing to ensure these inequalities are reduced. According to the OECD, only 30% of bilateral aid is responsive to women's needs and interests (2012-2013).[72]

5. Support local women's movements

▶ *'What women need is to be provided with the support and the tools to break the cycle of inequality.'*
Facilitator, ActionAid Haiti.

▶ *'Public policies do not necessarily lead to the dismantling of oppressive gender relations, such as the sexual division of labour. When there have been some changes in this direction, they were directly linked to women's political organisation and linked to power struggles led by women's movements and associations working from a feminist perspective.'[73]*

Long-lasting change requires shifting invisible forms of power. This is a long and non-linear process, and whilst at a certain point, top down policy change helps, change can also be achieved by creating space for women's organising. The movement to fight the invisible power which maintains women's inequality through social and cultural norms builds from the bottom up. Change for poor women starts with their actions to claim their rights at a family and community level. When women organise with others, their ability to shift power is stronger, as organising has the intrinsic benefit of increasing their motivation and self-esteem, and working together gives women a stronger, unified voice, greater visibility, and greater power to affect change. Power is required to hold governments and others in power to account and to begin to shift cultural norms and behaviours. Transformative change will come when grassroots campaigns led by women come together and form a critical mass. Energy is created when grassroots campaigns work with progressive social movements and women's rights organisations at a national level, where they exist.[74]

The need to support women's organising is even more pressing given that the national space for

activities is becoming increasingly restricted. For example, in Brazil the impeachment of the Brazilian president in 2016 weakened the voice of civil society by giving more power and influence to conservative parties and sectors than progressive ones. The term "BBB Benches" (bible, beef and bullet benches) refers to the strong representation in parliament of evangelical churches, cattle/agribusiness and ex-military leaders. As conservative parties have increased in political representation, cutbacks in family farming, education, health and social production policies have been substantial and immediate.[75]

What does it mean to support women's organising?

▶ *'There have not been any major changes on gender equality and women's rights historically that didn't have organised women's groups pushing for them'*
Lydia Alpízar Durán, AWID's executive director.[76]

a. Space for organising

A positive political environment for organising
Reduce policies which place restrictions on organising and ensure that civil society organisations retain the right to protest and participate in decision making at local, national and global levels. In 2015, in 85% of the 109 countries where civil society liberties were violated, the government restricted the right to join groups and to organise, including the blocking of trade unions.[77] In over 60% of the 109 countries, governments denied citizens the right to peaceful protest.[78] In Brazil, the government had violated the basic rights of journalists, protesters and civil society activists. Forty nine environmental activists were killed (45 of them in the Amazon region) and a potential new law against terrorism was introduced which was criticised by the UN

for being too extreme and restricting civil society space.[79] In Uganda, a NGO bill passed in December 2015 has set up excessive controls for civil society organisations, and gives power to the government to restrict their activities if they do not act in the "public interest".[80] Across countries studied by Civil Rights Watch, police and armed militias use physical and psychological violence against human rights defenders, particularly those campaigning against land grabs.[81] The private sector also uses violent or intimidating tactics. For example, an academic from Canada was arrested in 2016 as he researched the value of Bridge International Academies (a public/private partnership often criticized for providing inadequate education) in Uganda.[82]

Support women's leadership

Take proactive measures to support women's leadership, including in emergencies and humanitarian response. Recognise and understand the value of women's contributions (rather than ignoring or silencing women's voices). This requires ensuring that women's groups are part of consultation processes, including on economic issues and in humanitarian disasters. One barrier to women's political leadership from marginalised groups is that it is expensive to register to stand for office. For example, in Uganda it costs over $1000 a month to mobilise to become an MP.[83] This excludes many people who have experiences of inequality and are working to reverse it.

Johanne Moïse lives in Jacquet, Haiti. She a leader in her community, having gone through training to support her to respond to emergencies and disasters.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

BOX 10: Women leaders in emergencies and humanitarian response

When women are part of decision making around a humanitarian response, there is potential for them to shift power imbalances within their homes and communities. The uncertainty caused by crisis can allow women to step into leadership roles they may not previously have taken, and can result in women shaping the post-response society in a more equitable way. It allows response teams to better identify and address the gender inequality and women's rights issues that can be exacerbated during an emergency. More importantly, women's leadership transforms the way societies view women over the longer term, leading to structural shifts in gender equality post-disaster.

'My name is Johanne Moïse, I live in Jacquet, Haiti and I'm 28 years old. I have two children: a 7-year-old boy and a 20-month old little girl. The women's leadership training helped me learn a lot of things… it was empowering in the sense that it helped me embrace my womanhood and the ability that it provided to be a leader in my community. I don't have to wait for a man or for a superior of mine to say "Johanne, let's go!", I can take the reins all on my own. The training helped me know how to manage an emergency situation…During Hurricane Matthew I monitored the situation, I went to the shelters beforehand, I helped out as much as I could. [Following the Hurricane] I am …helping community committees select participants [for support] in the most transparent way…so that the help that we are providing can reach the people who are truly the most vulnerable. For instance, in my community women heads of household are the most vulnerable, along with pregnant women, and elderly disabled women. One of our leading principles is a 'women lead emergency response'. Even just looking at Hurricane Matthew we notice that women indeed need to be at the forefront of the movement because not only are they often the most vulnerable [and understand others needs] but also they are capable of being leaders … the aftermath of the storm allowed them to be leaders in their communities, and that is evolution in and of itself.'

Consider how to financially support women's organisations.

Recognise that some of women's demands may require funding and that achieving this will require careful consideration so as not to first, create power disparities within and between different women's groups and second, supplant organising and activism with financial considerations. For example, use the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a benchmark by governments during the project approval process,[84] and include the voices of women's rights organisations in project design and monitoring. Overall, bilateral aid funding to women's rights organisations has fallen by over half since 2011.[85] However, within this, only a tiny amount of money goes to genuinely local women's rights groups.[86] Much of the limited funding tends to be channelled to larger organisations and to groups at the national/global level, in part as a result of them being equipped with specific fundraising expertise.[87] We need to ensure that smaller organisations and grassroots women's groups are equally financially supported.[88]

b. Recognise the risks

Organising around women's rights carries risk. Women's Human Rights Defenders are experiencing increased threats and are more at risk of gender based violence as they go about their work both because of the issues they are working on and because they are women.[89] Gender based violence such as rape, threats and harassments could be compounded if women are organising around issues that carry additional social stigma, such as LGBT issues or HIV/AIDS.[90] The context for women activists is further restricted by the increasing prevalence and power of fundamentalist ideologies, which leads to opponents and, too often, governments scaling back human rights based on religion, culture, tradition or nationalism and condoning violence as a way of control. Fundamentalisms reproduce and exacerbate inequalities; and women, ethnic or religious minorities and people with different sexual identities are most at risk.[91] Governments must hold perpetrators to account and use the UN Resolution on women human rights defenders for guidance on how to do so.[92]

c. Make connections

▶ *'One person can't have impact. AFUP doesn't have enough power so we integrate with other women's platforms in the region and integrate with other networks so we can really have a bigger influence acting with the authorities.'*
Jacqueline Morette, farmer, Haiti.

Civil society has a role to play in scaling up the impacts of women's local initiatives and actions. NGOs are well positioned to be brokers, making 'meaningful connections around the question of system change between movements and networks at multi geographical levels, including global'.[93] By connecting local women's groups with national social movements and ensuring women's voices remain significant in the social movement space, local organising has the potential for broader transformative social change. When

making linkages amongst groups it is important to acknowledge that not all women's organisations will be working to advance progressive political values. As the ActionAid facilitator in Haiti warned, 'strengthen [only those] women's organisations with proven track records of empowering women or mobilizing on women's rights issues'. In both Brazil and Haiti, some women's organisations have been set up as shells, purely for electoral purposes but with no substantive work on addressing inequality.

Women's groups, youth activists and ActionAid supporters organise a candlelight vigil in one of Monrovia, Liberia's darkest parks as part of ActionAid's Safe Cities campaign.
PHOTO: RUTH MCDOWELL/ACTIONAID

6. Summary of our recommendations

Women envision an alternative world where policies are publicly funded and gender-responsive and where collective organising at a local level and women's opinions are valued by policy makers. This report has analysed the challenges and opportunities women face as they try to shift power within their households, in their communities and, at times, nationally or globally, and articulates the kind of gender-responsive laws and policies that women say can impact the structural causes of inequalities facing them. These, combined with the implementation of policies based on analysis of how to reduce structural issues which perpetuate inequality at national and global levels, as outlined in ActionAid's reports *The Price of Privilege and Not Ready Still Waiting*, are a positive first move.[94] However, well-implemented policies are only the first step to transformative change. This report also considered the "invisible" barriers to shifting power - traditional beliefs and practices, and social and cultural norms that exclude women and girls from enjoying their full social, political, economic and environmental rights. Shifting these barriers requires people power as well as policies.

The sustained actions of women's grassroots organisations, movements and civil society can challenge the structural causes of gender inequality and place women's rights at the centre of progressive policies. To support this, local and national governments, donors, NGOs, religious institutions and media should:

1. Resource and implement gender responsive public policies and services

Recognise the intersectionality of women's experiences of inequality. Respond by publicly funding and implementing gender responsive policies that address these multiple forms of marginalisation, and policies that shift visible power and support women's economic empowerment.

Local and national governments should:
- Prioritise gender budgeting as recommended within the SDG guidelines and accompanying indicators.
- Implement land policies to support women's economic empowerment. This means ensuring women's access and control over land, the ability to farm in a sustainable way, and for traditional systems of communal tenure to be upheld.
- Give gender-targeted support to ensure women farmers can access agricultural resources. Give information on the types and terms of credit and ensure facilities are provided in a language that women understand. Make sure access to finance is not based on collateral and does not have high interest rates as this will exclude poor women farmers.
- Implement decent work policies, equal pay for equal work and a minimum wage.
- Implement systems and policies to ensure women are in decision-making positions and able to make tangible change, including in emergencies and humanitarian response.
- Take action to stop violence against women and to facilitate access to justice. Implement SDG 5 on women's equality and fund national implementation plans which are cross cutting, have clear time bound objectives and fully accountable processes that enhance women's participation. Ensure strong legislative frameworks and laws that guarantee the investigation and prosecution of all forms of violence against women and girls. Local government should provide women's shelters and ensure better access to justice.
- Publicly fund transformative public education in which children, parents and teachers are key players with roles in decision making within their local schools. Avoid the lure of private provision of services, which undermines constitutional rights and perpetuates systems of inequality.

- Implement policies on early childhood care and education; these will not only give the child the most equitable start in life, but also reduce women's unpaid care work. Implement comprehensive social protection legislation which will recognise and redistribute women's unpaid care work.
- Restrict the influence that religious and cultural fundamentalists have on policy making.
- Ensure policies include women with multiple social-identity markers such as LGBT women, women of different ethnicities, caste or class, women with disabilities or the young or the elderly.

Governments and donors should:
- Maintain national autonomy on decision making on national policies including financing and mobilise funds from domestic resources rather than seeking private financing for public services, which would undermine constitutional rights.

Civil society and NGOs should:
- Hold governments accountable to redistributive national plans with policies that support the accomplishment of the SDGs. Such policies would aim to: recognise, redistribute and reduce women's unpaid care work; improve opportunities for decent work and wages for women and young people; stop violence against women and girls; improve women's mobility; enhance women's capacity to organise and participate in decision making; improve women's access to education and health; and expand women's access to and control over natural and economic resources.

2. Support women's organising

All parts of society need to create space for women's organising and respect the role it plays in building a more equal society. Existing and new women's groups and movements must be able to work for their economic autonomy; to support each other to shift power at home and in their

communities; and to hold local and national governments accountable for implementing gender responsive policies.

Local and national government should:
- Give women space to organise by reducing restrictions on civil society & ensuring civil society organisations, including women's groups, participate in decision making.
- Take proactive measures to support women's leadership, including in emergencies and humanitarian response, and recognise and understand the value of women's contributions.
- Enhance women's right to participate in decision making through reducing restrictions and costs of standing for political office.
- Hold perpetrators to account and use the UN resolution on women human rights defenders for guidance on how to do so.

Governments and donors should:
- Recognise that some of women's demands may require funding. Use the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a benchmark by governments during the project approval process and include the voices of women's rights organisations in project design and monitoring.
- Ensure that smaller organisations and grassroots women's groups are equally supported through funding and opportunities.

Civil society and NGOs should:
- Support existing organisations to further build women's power within, power with and autonomy. Link up women's local organising with national women's movements who share political ideals and goals, for greater impact in change processes.
- Ensure that women's voices have priority. NGOs' role is to facilitate rather than speak for women.
- Recognise the risk that women face in organising and support their acts of resistance.

Methodology overview

The methodology used for this research involved focus group discussions and semi structured interviews in two communities in each of the seven countries; Brazil, Haiti, Liberia, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. In Nigeria and Uganda, there were also discussions with men, and in South Africa only interviews were conducted. Facilitators followed a set of collectively compiled guidelines. We wanted to be open to women's perspectives of how inequality impacts on them and their community, rather than structuring discussions around one area, for example experiences of inequality in agriculture or in education. Therefore, our methodology rather than a subject area was common across countries.

Each focus group began with an analysis of inequalities from the women's perspective. The facilitators used several participatory exercises to explore how inequalities at home and in the community had changed over time and who held

power. Facilitators then used a semi-structured interview format to lead group discussions. Participants shared stories of how they faced different inequalities in their daily lives and how they have planned to address those inequalities.

A more formal interview was carried out with community leaders, who were selected by community leaders and ActionAid partner organisations.

As the research was limited to two study sites in each country, and most women had participated in ActionAid programmes, there is a bias in terms of data collection. For example, participants may have intentionally or unintentionally responded on areas related to their previous engagements with ActionAid. We are clear that any learnings we draw from this research is particular to the examples given and contexts explored.

A list of communities is below:

Country	Focus group discussion
Brazil	- Remanso, near São Francisco, Bahia State - Mirandiba and Carnaubeira da Penha, near São Francisco, Bahia State
Haiti	- Lascahobas, Central Plateau region, - Papaye, Central Plateau region
Nepal	- Sangharshanagar, Bardiya district - Premnagar, Bardiya district - Anantapur, Bardiya district - Jogipur (a non programme area), Bardiya district
Nigeria	- Kupto, Funadakayi local government area, Gombe state - Shela, Billiri Local Government Area, Gombe State - Gombe Municipal Area, Gombe State - Lakenturum, Gombe State
Liberia	- Yangayan, Gbapolu County - Mabio, Gbapolu County
Uganda	- Kwosir sub county, Kapchorwa District - Busiki sub country, Namutumba District

For further information see: www.actionaid.org/publications/shifting-power

Endnotes

1. This reinforces evidence from ActionAid's previous studies. For example, ActionAid (2015) *Promises to Keep*. Available at: https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/promises_to_keep_-_using_the_sustainable_development_goals_to_stand_with_fearless_women_to_end_violence.pdf.

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20. ActionAid (2016) *Not Ready, Still Waiting* Pg. 3. This figure looks at total additional hours that women work compared to men on average globally, taking account of both paid and unpaid work. Unpaid work includes unpaid care but also additional activities, such as working in family enterprises and volunteering. Analysis undertaken by Economists Without Borders for ActionAid UK. See section 2 of Annex for basic methodology and key caveats. More details available at: www.actionaid.org/inequality.

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39. World Bank, (2016) *Women, Business and the Law*. See: http://wbl.worldbank.org/~/media/WBG/WBL/Documents/Reports/2016/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2016.pdf.

40. ActionAid, 2011, *What Women Farmers Need* Pg.9.

41. See *https://www.womentokilimanjaro.org/* and twitter account https://twitter.com/Women2Kili for more details.

42. ActionAid UK interview with ActionAid Nepal. July 2016.

43. World Bank, 2016 *Women, Business and the Law*. See: http://wbl.worldbank.org/~/media/WBG/WBL/Documents/Reports/2016/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2016.pdf.

44. ActionAid (2015) *Close the gap: the cost of inequality in women's work*, London: ActionAid. Available at: https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens_rights_on-line_version_2.1.pdf.

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