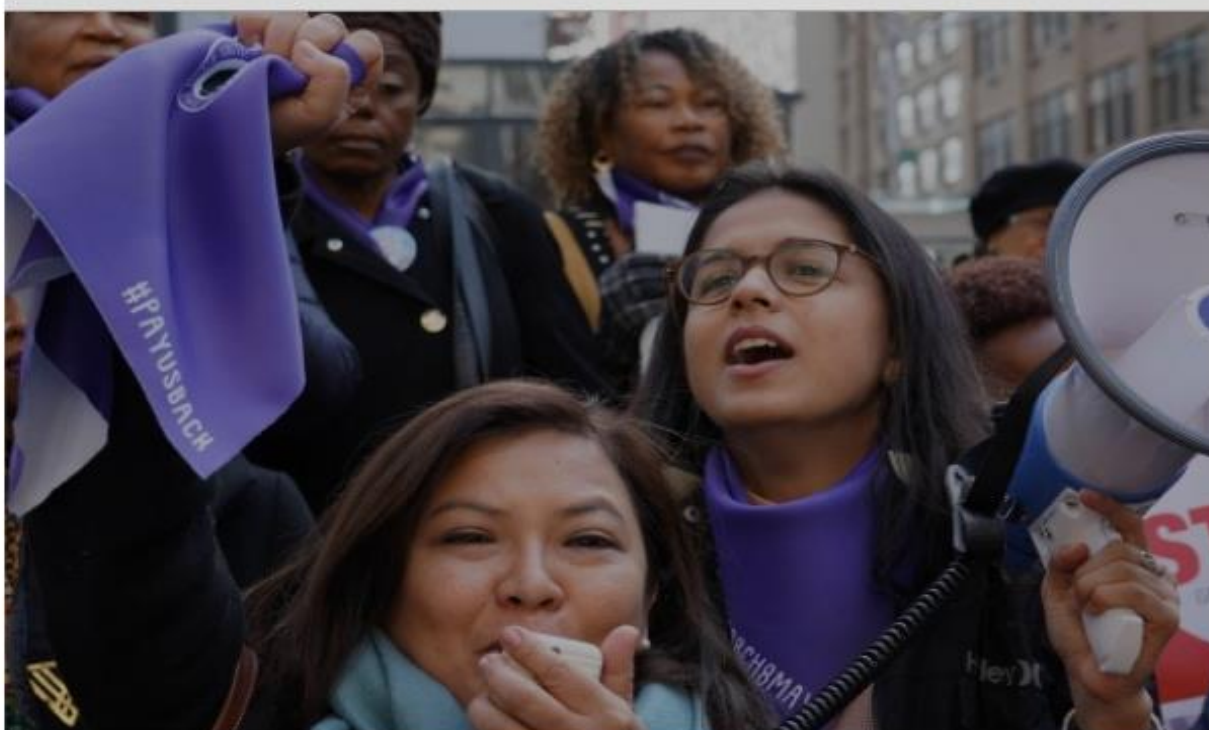


# ACTIONAID CASE STUDIES

GLIMPSES OF ACTIONAID PROGRAMMES

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GLOBAL PEOPLE POWER FORUM 2019



ACTIONAID GLOBAL CAMPAIGN  
PUBLIC EVENT AT CSW63  
PHOTO CREDIT: ANTONIA COLODRO

# Realizing Women's Potential in Rwanda



*In 2018 I was given the award for best village leader for my contributions. ... My achievements prove that a woman can do what a man does if she gets enough time and the necessary means.” Christine Mukangarambe, Mareba Village, Gisagara District*

## THE PROUDEST DAY

Mukahigiro Francise is a farmer in Gitita. One year, when she was short of money, she sold a piece of the land she owned, in order to pay for her children's school fees. But she immediately regretted the decision. She said it made her feel “poor”.

Today, however, she is happy to report that all her children are enrolled in school and proud that she is the one paying for their school fees. One of her sons has graduated. That was, she says, the proudest day of her life.

What changed things for Mukahigiro was her involvement in ActionAid's Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER).

When she joined, the POWER project provided training on techniques for Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) and a group saving scheme. Mukahigiro's husband joined a workshop for couples and 'time-diary' training.

Before this, Mukahigiro and her husband had mixed different crops together (the 'traditional way'); as a result they were only able to feed their family. Since the workshops, they now separate crops on their plot

Addressing the unequal workload carried by women in the household is key to women's economic empowerment, in Rwanda as elsewhere in the world.

Restrictions on women's time and opportunities for education, paid work, and political participation reinforce gender inequalities. This in turn increases the risk of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and perpetuates women's limited role in political and economic decision-making. In Rwanda, Ghana and Bangladesh, ActionAid addresses these interconnected dynamics through a project called Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER). Working through established women's cooperatives in Rwanda,

POWER raises awareness about unpaid care work (UCW) and supports women and their families to redistribute this load. Equipped with an understanding of their rights and with new skills in agroecology, women have the chance to earn more, share the load of domestic and agricultural work, and take greater part in decision making at home and in the community.

– cultivating one seed type at one location, according to the soil type. Mukahigiro preserves seeds (as there is no seed bank nearby) – and gained insights from a visit to a nearby province’s seed preservation system.



Women in Rwanda working in a potato plantation field belonging to their women’s cooperative to provide income for them.  
PHOTO: MARIA KAITESI/ACTIONAID

Among other benefits, she was provided a water pump, which saves time: “Now I can collect grass for the cow, join the group meetings and government meetings.” She and her husband share household responsibilities. If she is late returning home, her husband does the washing, takes care of the children, or cooks the dinner. Women in her area have come to understand their property rights, Mukahigiro feels. If a husband wants to sell the family’s land, he must discuss it with his wife and both must agree. Overall, she can a greater role in decision making.

## TOWARDS DECISION MAKING POWER

The POWER project works through local partners to mobilise and organise rural women to know and claim their rights as farmers and carers, by:

- ❖ Addressing unpaid care work (UWC),
- ❖ Increasing productivity and access to markets through the practice of agroecology and CRSA,
- ❖ Addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a cross-cutting issue.

A five-year initiative (2016–2020), POWER has reached and supported 7,350 rural women in 245 groups in Rwanda. Key project activities:

- ❖ Training on unpaid care work, women’s rights, confidence building, leadership, financial management, and raising awareness about violence against women;
- ❖ Addressing UCW to ensure that this work is valued more highly within households and communities, and more evenly distributed within households;
- ❖ Supporting rural women to have more secure and sustainable access to markets and productive resources, in part through CRSA, to increase their income;
- ❖ Making visible the intersections between agroecology, women’s UCW, and women’s economic participation, as the basis for changing policy and practice.

For a large proportion of the Rwandan women involved in POWER, the burden of UCW has begun to shift. The most important reasons for this change, they say, are improved awareness among men and an efficient supply of clean water. To reduce the hours that women spend on UCW, POWER intervenes by, for example, establishing childcare centers and providing water tanks, tapped water and boreholes.

*“In the past if there was a ripe banana in the garden but the man was not home, the wife was not allowed to cut it without his permission. But behaviour has changed now. The wife can do that now. Men started understanding that everything belongs to both of them.”*

*Mukahigiro Francise, Gitita*

## WITNESSING CHANGE

Christine Mukangarambe – the best village leader in Mareba Village – is 52 years old, a widow and the mother of two sons and two daughters. The improved cooking stove and water pipe that she received through the initiatives of the project have contributed a great deal to her capacity to take leadership in local structures, promoting a parents’ forum, reducing school dropout and ensuring community security.

*“Since I got an improved cooking stove eight months ago, I have paid only 5,000 Rwandan francs for firewood. I have had more time to take care of my domestic animals and do farming since the burden of fetching water has come to an end. First, I got a plastic water tank for rainwater harvesting. Then my problem was completely solved since I got a clean water pipe. In the past, I had to pay around 10,000 Rwandan francs for water but now 2,000 is enough for my family water bill.”*

*Christine Mukangarambe*

## WORKING WITH GROUPS

This has been an essential component of the POWER project.

- ❖ Leveraging existing groups has contributed to the sustainability of programme activities and outcomes. Because the women’s groups were registered as cooperatives under Rwandan law, they will have access to resources and support after the POWER programme comes to an end.
- ❖ By working with existing cooperatives, POWER can allocate resources efficiently – co-op members collaborate to draw up their budgets – and to affect change in communities.



## STRATEGY IN ACTION

Systemic change is necessary if women are to enjoy human rights, economic justice, and freedom from violence. This includes recognising, reducing, and redistributing the unpaid care work that women generally shoulder. ActionAid covers these strategic goals on International Platform 1: addressing the structural causes of VAWG and securing economic justice for women.

POWER engages women through already

established collectives. This is critical for making change at the level of invisible power because strong norms frame gender divisions of labour as 'natural' or 'cultural'. Together, women can come to question these norms and, with their partners, begin to share responsibilities.

Women comment on improvements to their immediate practical situations: water, income, school fees, firewood. Important as these are, they are even more significant as the building blocks of greater agency and participation.

### References

Website: <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/>

A video shown on Rwandan television:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCFEy2rGQm0>

### © ActionAid 2019

This case study was written by James Butare and Anatole Uwiragiye of ActionAid and edited by Annie Holmes. It draws on a report on the POWER project in Rwanda by Ashley Hollister, Ann Sutherland, Iddrisu Yahaya, and Sarang Mangi.

### Acknowledgements.

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# Campaign for Tax Justice in Bangladesh



*“We pay rent and we pay for electricity and water. We pay VAT for cosmetics, toiletries, medicine and medical tests. VAT is imposed on electronic money transfers and even when we use mobile phones. We vote during elections, and yet we have limited access to basic public services.”*

*Fatema Akter, resident of Korail slum in Dhaka, giving testimony at the first Citizens’ Tax Tribunal.*

Through indirect taxation, especially value added tax (VAT), ordinary citizens carry much of the burden of paying for public services in Bangladesh. Other potential sources of revenue – corporate tax and property tax, for example – are inadequately regulated or compromised by tax treaties and avoidance. A strategic ActionAid campaign informs and educates communities about tax – who pays and what for – empowering them to organise and make demands for changes to the country’s flawed and ineffectual tax system.

Engaging with multiple levels and classes of people, the community-led campaign has built awareness, momentum and expertise, culminating in the first Citizens’ Tax Tribunal in 2018. This platform combined citizen testimony with policy analysis and media coverage to press for alternative, equitable ways to generate domestic revenue from taxation and to allocate it to urgently needed public services.

## WHO PAYS FOR PUBLIC SERVICES?

In Bangladesh, as in most developing countries, taxation is a critical internal source of revenue to cover public services for citizens. Value added tax (VAT) contributes the most, accounting for around 35% of total internal revenue in recent years<sup>1</sup>, even though government systems are, to date, struggling to collect the tax from most VAT-registered businesses<sup>2</sup>. A form of indirect tax, VAT is only one source of revenue through taxation. Other sources are:

- ❖ Personal income tax, for those earning above a certain level
- ❖ Corporate tax, on the profit that companies make
- ❖ Property tax, on the value of privately owned property

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2019/06/15/nbr-still-not-ready-to-collect-vat-throughfdfs>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/224147/Shopkeepers-avoid-ECR-to-evade-VAT>



The Citizens' Tax Tribunal, 2018/ActionAid Bangladesh Communications Unit

Everyone pays VAT on purchases and services – it is a burden borne by all. But corporate tax remains an untapped resource. Evidence suggests that large corporations can avoid paying taxes through tax treaties that allow them to register profits in another country, supposedly to avoid paying double tax. Research, both international and national, shows that countries lose revenue from tax treaties, from weak legislation that allows illicit financial flows, and from misuse of tax incentives.

This situation means that the Bangladeshi economy is dependent on VAT and on the tax paid by salaried workers and small and medium companies. This intensifies inequality. The current tax system ensures freedom for corporations and saddles the mass of ordinary people with the tax bill.

## **MOBILISING FOR TAX JUSTICE**

ActionAid Bangladesh has been campaigning actively at national and local levels for tax justice since 2014, demanding progressive tax policies to reduce the burden on the poor and marginalized. To do this, the campaign proposes that the government reduce dependency on VAT and explore the potential of corporate and property tax to expand the revenue base.

From the beginning, an important element of mobilising has involved an extensive conscientisation process. The campaign ran capacity development efforts – awareness sessions and training on tax

budgets and organizing for tax justice – for staff of ActionAid’s Local Rights Programme (LRP), young people and grassroots leaders.

In 2016 and 2017, building on the work at the grassroots level, the campaign expanded to national-level efforts to create demand for progressive tax policies. A brainstorming session held in 2018:

- ❖ Deliberated on the issue of property tax as a means to redistribute resources,
- ❖ Identified administrative and operational challenges to implementing property tax,
- ❖ Proposed a working group to take the issue further.

Also in 2017, ActionAid Bangladesh, together with the Economic Reporters’ Forum (ERF), launched a media fellowship

awarded to five journalists working in English, Bangla and electronic media. In 2018, ahead of national elections, a further eight journalists were awarded fellowships, with the specific aim of generating discussion on issues including:

- ❖ The burden of indirect taxes,
- ❖ Corporate tax avoidance,
- ❖ The legal framework for tax collection,
- ❖ Commitments to tax justice (or lack of such commitments) in the election manifestos of major political parties.

Media fellows produced at least fifteen media reports – in leading English and Bangla dailies and news channels – over the two-month fellowship period in 2018.

## CITIZENS’ TAX TRIBUNAL

Bangladesh’s tax law provides access to justice for personal taxpayers: the Taxes Appellate Tribunal (TAT). But most people who contribute significantly through indirect tax, particularly VAT, do not earn

Campaign timeline	
2014–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Grounding the campaign within local rights programmes</li> <li>❖ Engaging local communities around issues of tax justice</li> <li>❖ Conscientization and capacity development</li> <li>❖ Mobilizing people and demands</li> <li>❖ Linking the campaign to demands for quality public service</li> </ul>
2016-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Building on grassroots mobilization</li> <li>❖ Mobilizing groups across socio-economic classes</li> <li>❖ Creating national-level demand for progressive tax policies</li> </ul>
2018-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Brainstorming with experts (business, civil society, academia)</li> <li>❖ The first Citizens’ Tax Tribunal</li> </ul>



enough to pay personal income tax, so it is difficult for them to express their grievances this way. Given this systemic problem, the idea of a Citizens' Tax Tribunal evolved as an alternative space to share stories from the ground, generate a debate on the implications of tax on common people, and draw the attention of policymakers.

In November 2018, the Citizens' Tax Tribunal succeeded in bringing together around 400 people from across Bangladesh society to demand progressive taxation. The tribunal was divided into two hearings, both broadcast live on Facebook to about 6,000 viewers. The first hearing focused on the impact of indirect tax/ VAT on workers, students, slum dwellers, and city dwellers. The second hearing addressed the impact of corporate tax avoidance on local government finances and on basic public services.

Four groups of people attended and contributed:

1. people giving testimonies, including slum-dwellers, students and micro-entrepreneurs;
2. amicus curiae (or "friend of the court"), providing information, expertise and insights on the key issues;
3. participants representing government, corporates, academia, civil society organizations, the media, and both urban and rural areas;
4. a jury panel who analysed the discussions and demands of the other three groups and made recommendations to policymakers and duty bearers.

The tribunal was a platform for stakeholders to express their grievances about the burden of VAT and corporate tax avoidance. It provided a space for ordinary citizens to testify about the impact of inadequate tax collection and tax policies by the state of Bangladesh, and the behaviour of multinationals.



Citizens' Tax Tribunal, Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban, Dhaka University, 20 November 2018. Credit: ActionAid Bangladesh Communications Unit

*“Why do I have out-of-pocket expenditure for these services when they are constitutionally recognized as basic need? Why is rent increased every year without any justification? If the government doesn’t take any step to correct these, then why should I pay tax?”*

*Fazlur Rahman, resident of Dhaka city*

## STRATEGY IN ACTION

Now that Bangladesh has achieved the status of a middle-income country and is striving to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, mobilising resources internally is an integral aspect of fiscal policy. To organise for tax justice (ActionAid International Platform 2), the Bangladesh campaign builds power from below and seeks to link social justice efforts. In particular, it addresses the shrinking fiscal space and lays the building blocks for increased and sustainable revenue from tax that promotes greater equality.

Much of the work focuses on building collective power by mobilising communities to raise critical questions about tax – how it is collected, from whom and for what purposes. Training to deepen understanding of the connections between tax and public services empowered young people and LRP staff to take action and make demands. These strategies are pushing for accountability by visible power (the state) and invisible power (corporations), and those who embody both, such as business owners who are also elected representatives.

Going forward, ActionAid Bangladesh will work with and support local communities – particularly youth and women – to organize a second Citizens’ Tax Tribunal in 2019. At the same time, it will expand engagement with other civil society actors around collective struggle for alternative means to generate increased revenue.

### References

The tribunal was extensively covered in print and electronic media, and can be viewed in full in these video clips:

<https://www.facebook.com/actionaidbangladesh/videos/1165235113653233/>

<https://www.facebook.com/actionaidbangladesh/videos/518405201969632/>

### © ActionAid 2019

This case study was written by Nuzhat Jabin and Annie Holmes.

### Acknowledgements.

Strategic partners for the Tribunal: DBM, SPED, Nari Moitree, NDBUS, SRS. Overall campaign partners: SPED, DBM, AVAS, Nari Moitree, NDBUS, SHARP, BNKS, USS, PUAMDO, BACE, Bhumija, Dalit, BDO

# Communities Audit Mining Companies in South Africa

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*“A social audit provides a way to build effective and meaningful public participation in poor and working-class communities, ... a means for the community to engage with the governance processes that affect their lives.” Social Audit Network*



ActionAid South Africa Natural Resource team with Mining Affected Communities United in Action- Macua. and WAMUA  
PHOTO: Mbuso Ngubane/ACTIONAID

## **CORPORATIONS MAKE PROMISES**

Before it can operate in an area, a mining company must agree Social and Labour Plans (SLPs) with communities. Only then can the company acquire a licence and the right to mine.

The engine of the country's economy for more than a century, the mining industry affects everyone in South Africa. But those whose lives are most directly impacted suffer the negative effects of mining and lack a voice in decision-making.

The People's Mining Charter of 2016 demands that communities have a share of mining profits, together with consultation on licensing corporate mining rights, but ActionAid South Africa's participatory research shows that little has changed.

A Social Audit process has raised community awareness of mandated rights and benefits, identified gaps between promises and delivery, drawn media attention, and fueled organising efforts and demands for accountability.

The confirmed right holder must submit annual reports to the Department of Mineral Resources to show that it is complying with its SLP and that at least 1% of the wealth generated from mineral extraction is going towards community development. The SLPs are intended to be the mechanism to ensure that this happens.

Mining has formed the backbone of South Africa's economy from colonialism through apartheid and on to the present day. Mining has a huge impact on people's lives – economically, socially, traditionally, politically, culturally, and environmentally – but communities have not had a voice in the decisions that affect the land where

they earn their livelihoods and where their ancestors are buried. It is still government and corporations that call the shots, with some input from traditional leaders.

Mining companies hire big PR firms to write glossy reports to show that they have given back to communities but the reality on the ground is very different for communities affected by mining – they are, in general, worse off.

- ❖ The government's Mining Charter does not define "community" clearly, so the term is applied in different ways. The mine may be "compensating" a huge area, including people who are far from the mine, with the result that those near the mine get very little.
- ❖ Government regulations stipulate that there must be a "consultation" with communities but give no format. In many cases, companies engage with traditional leaders, who may give consent without involving communities.
- ❖ Companies announce that they will contribute to communities, for instance through bursaries and employment creation. But information is hidden from communities. People do not know about these opportunities so they cannot claim them.

What can be done to ensure genuine consultation and delivery of mandated benefits?

## SOCIAL AUDITS REVEAL THE FACTS



Tendele Mine dumps by Machibini Village, KwaZulu-Natal.  
PHOTO: Sifiso Dladla/ActionAid South Africa

ActionAid South Africa has used the methodology of Social Audits to compare what mining corporations have committed to on paper in the SLPs, with what is happening on the ground.<sup>ii</sup> In many areas of South African life, this approach has become popular as a way to raise issues of power, gender, and class. In 1994, South Africans put their trust in the first democratically elected government and communities that had been organised in resistance to apartheid demobilised. The Social Audit has become a vehicle for remobilising twenty years later.

*“It’s like writing down a list, giving child money to go to the shop, when the child comes back you check the receipt against what they brought back.”*

A metaphor for the social audit: checking the mining company’s promised commitments against actual delivery.

From November 2016, ActionAid South Africa worked with MACUA (Mining Affected Communities United in Action) and Women Affected by Mining United in Action (WAMUA) to engage with mining-affected communities. Core groups within each community gathered data. Overall, the baseline survey covered ten mines extracting a range of minerals: gold, coal, platinum and chrome. Between 2017 and 2018, audit teams interviewed close to 800 households, finding that:

- ❖ 44% said their main sources of income were state social grants, not mining employment. Few had ever been employed by the mines.
- ❖ 91% do not know what an SLP is.
- ❖ 95% have never seen the SLP and were not involved in developing it.
- ❖ 85% do not know of the existence of a structure that liaises between the mine and community.

Movements push for community interests. In the past, it was labour that was organised but WAMUA and WACUA are community-organised. Through the Social Audit process, and with the involvement of former workers, they have strengthened the capacity of mining communities to mobilise and become active and astute citizens.

“Women reported that it was an alternative to the patriarchal way of resistance – not a male-centred, violent process but, instead, empowering and safe for them.”

ActionAid South Africa’s Social Audits have generated backlash and challenges as well as positive impact. In the Northern Cape province, companies threatened legal action, while members of the Xolobeni community in the Eastern Cape have been

killed. Ground-breaking constitutional rulings on the cases of Xolobeni and of Malendu in KwaZulu-Natal established the right of communities to be involved in negotiations before, during and after mines are established. In addition, the media gave high-profile coverage to the Alternative Mining Indaba in January 2019. However, the state is not acting on these rights and demands. The government’s desire to encourage foreign investment seems to take priority.

The movement by and for mining-affected communities continues to grow, building connections and alliances across the country, the continent, and the world. Within ActionAid itself, AA South Africa is



MACUA and WAMUA members with project partners, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, meeting traditional leaders in Sekhukhune, Limpopo. Credit: ActionAid South Africa

## Social Audit process

### Phase 1: Prepare and plan

Work with informal and formal structures in the community.

Organise and train community participants.

Source relevant documents.

### Phase 2: Collect and analyse data

Meet with a participant group and establish a mandate.

Train the core group to develop questionnaires for the audit.

Develop and test the questionnaire, gather evidence, capture community

experiences and testimony for public hearings.

Agree main findings and compile the evidence.

### Phase 3: Publicise findings

Prepare for and hold public hearings.

Reflect and follow up.

working with AA Netherlands, as the Netherlands buys South African coal, and with AA Australia. Climate justice offers an important strategic basis for coordination, for example with the African Environmental Working Group.

“The methodology is one strategy for holding mining companies accountable – it opens up for further advocacy strategies to be implemented. It does not end there.”

## STRATEGY IN ACTION

The government (visible power) together with both national and international mining corporations (hidden power) have, controlled South Africa’s rich mining industry since its early days. Tensions are evident at the level of visible power: in its post-apartheid legislation, the government has committed to improving citizen rights and benefits, but in practice often colludes with corporate interests and fails to regulate industry. In many consultation processes, traditional leaders (hidden power), supposedly representing the voice of “community”, are in cahoots with mining companies.

To strengthen resilient livelihoods and secure climate justice (ActionAid International Platform 3), the Social Audit process serves to build power from below, link social justice efforts and build collective power. Specifically, the approach is proving effective in helping to empower communities with representation and voice to influence decision-making on mineral resources, while also allying with progressive organisations in investor countries. Women in mining affected communities endorse the methodology as inclusive. Further opportunities for this work lie at the intersection of resource management, defence of the commons and climate justice.

## References

ActionAid report: Mining in South Africa 2018: Whose Benefit and Whose Burden?

<https://www.osf.org.za/social-audit-network-launches-documentary-historysocial-auditing-south-africa/>

<http://altminingindaba.co.za/>

## © ActionAid 2019

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The photographs were taken Sifiso Dladla for ActionAid South Africa.

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## A Platform for Women to Take Action in Gaza

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“

*“We are not prophets; we are just delivering a message based on the voices of our people. We are all under the same umbrella.”*

*Rasha, member of a Protection and Response Committee*

In the ongoing emergency conditions of life in Gaza, organising from within communities provides the most effective foundation for a measure of protection. In neighbourhoods of the city of Rafah, women-led protection and response committees are identifying and addressing local priorities, such as electrification for vulnerable households, ‘safe stations’ for women at bus shelters, and hotlines for those experiencing gender-based violence.

Supporting these committees and the women of the area in general are community-based organisations that provide legal and psychosocial services and business training and grants, combining to strengthen the voice, agency, and resilience of women and their communities.

### SABIR RETURNS TO GAZA

Sabir was married and living in Egypt when both her parents were killed in the 2014 Gaza–Israeli conflict. At the age of 24, she found herself responsible for her seven younger brothers and sisters. She needed to go home. Her husband refused to go with her and so they divorced and Sabir returned on her own to Rafah, in the south of the narrow Palestinian territory of Gaza, bounded by Israel and Egypt.

With the economy decimated by the Israeli blockade, sanctions, and attacks, unemployment here is close to 50% and options for someone like Sabir are severely limited. In Rafah, however, she learned about a women-led organisation, the Wafaq Society for Women and Child Care, that provides psychosocial and legal support to women and girls. She was able to talk to a psychologist there.

*“I told her my problems, that I lost my parents and needed an income. They provided psychological support for me. I asked the psychologists to provide some help establishing and running my own small business. After that I and five other girls were chosen. My situation is better, I am taking training courses in things related to hairdressing, fashion, and make-up.” Sabir*



Wefaq supports women in many different ways, providing referrals to legal and other services for those who experience gender-based violence; linking women – Sabir for example – to training and opportunities to secure their livelihoods; and helping to develop committees of women to drive community-based change.

## WOMEN LEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PROTECTION

In the past, Rasha Hassoon says, when people asked her for advice, she did not have a clue where to send them. Since she joined the Protection and Response Committee, however, she is able to provide support and information during emergencies, often referring people to psychosocial support and legal and social services, directly or through a hotline.

These days, Rasha is well known in her community, working with other committee members and volunteers to address important issues. Rasha's committee and others in Gaza have small budgets with which they can support community initiatives that will increase safety and dignity for everyone, such as restoring electricity to people's homes.

*“There was an initiative which targeted 30 families who did not have electricity in their homes. The most vulnerable were chosen – such as widows, divorced women, and the unemployed – and their homes were lit.”*

Her committee has also advocated successfully for safe, well-lit bus stops that double as places to rest during long commutes. Because of limited transportation and very few cars, women have to walk to get downtown. Shelters were erected in the street so anyone who is tired can sit down and have a break. Before this, women would have to sit in the street, which left them vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence. The Safe Stations have helped a lot to combat this. The hotline numbers are displayed on the walls of the Safe Stations to enable women to get assistance from different agencies and this has helped to raise their awareness. Many areas still lack these stations, but, Rasha says, “we are aiming to have more in the future.”

Committees, like the one Rasha belongs to, give women a platform on which to engage with authorities.

*“Previously, neighbourhood committees did not include any women – only men. The Protection and Response Committee gave us the chance to have a voice inside our communities.”*

Rasha Hassoon

When deciding on priorities, the committee does its best to consider the needs of the entire community. “All committee members live in the Al-Shoka area. This provides the background for us to know the needs of the community – the needs of children, violated women and poor people.”



Rasha Hossain (right) with another community mobiliser, Emam, of the Protection and Response Committee. Credit: Claire Grant / ActionAid

## SABIR OPENS HER OWN SALON



Sabir in her shop in Gaza. Credit: Claire Grant / ActionAid

Some women who have received services from Wefaq – including Sabir – are selected for training and business grants from another ActionAid partner, the Ma’an Development Centre. Now 29 years old, Sabir is training to be a beautician and hairdresser and has her own salon. She attends classes in the morning and has clients in the afternoon.

*“I took a training course on how to start a new business. I am so happy to have this chance. My situation is so much better now that I have an income and I’m doing good business.” Sabir*

## STRATEGY IN ACTION

In this context of conflict and occupation, ActionAid's core approach is to strengthen women's leadership, protection, and resilience, particularly through women-led community-based protection mechanisms. In Gaza, this takes the form of protection and response committees, like the one Rasha belongs to, that are creating space and opportunity for women to make decisions in their communities and are driving change and shifting traditional power dynamics.

The work in Palestine falls under ActionAid International Platform 4: driving women-led emergency preparedness, response and prevention. Partnering with groups such as Wefaq and the Ma'an Development Centre that support individual women and groups to build resilience and take on decision-making, ActionAid focuses on rights, resilience, and redistribution – gathering evidence from below, amplifying community voices, and supporting collective organising.

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The photographs were taken by Claire Grant for ActionAid.

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