

Action

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey and white patterned cardigan over a blue top, is focused on sewing a piece of dark purple fabric. She is using large black-handled scissors. A blue measuring tape is draped around her neck. In the background, there are shelves with various items, including a red garment hanging on a pink hanger and a red and white patterned cloth. To her right, a white vintage-style iron sits on a dark surface.

Changing the world
with **women and girls**

act:onaid

Economic justice issue

Read how Mina is
claiming her rights
and transforming her
family's future

Welcome to your Autumn 2023 issue of *Action* magazine!

When women have equal economic rights, we have a better world.

Women make incredible contributions across our economy, whether setting up their own businesses, working in agriculture, education or industry, and of course undertaking unpaid care in the home. Despite this, women are typically paid less than their male counterparts and are disproportionately affected by discrimination and exploitation in the workplace.

In this issue, we will explore why building an economy that puts women at the forefront is crucial to achieving gender equality. You will hear, for instance, from Mina in Nepal, whose sewing business is transforming her family and community's future. With the current cost of living crisis, the aftereffects of the pandemic and climate change creating their own barrage of social justice issues, supporting women as they assert their economic rights has never been more important.

I am also proud to share with you an update from north-west Syria. Thanks to wonderful supporters like yourself, we continue to stand in solidarity with families affected by this year's devastating earthquake. I hope the stories you read from Syria inspire you as much as they do me. The courage and resilience of our partners there and the women and girls they support is incredible.

Thank you, from all of us at ActionAid, for your continued support and for helping to change the world with women and girls.

Dr Halima Begum
CEO, ActionAid UK

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supportercontact@actionaid.org • 01460 238 000 • www.actionaid.org.uk

Front cover: Read on pages 14-15 how Mina is sewing a brighter future for her family.
Credit: Angela Shrestha





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Read on pages 4-5 how Rima and her team are supporting mothers dealing with the devastating consequences of the Turkey-Syria earthquake.



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Rima speaks to a group of expectant mothers about how best to care for themselves and their children.

An update from North-west Syria

Early in the morning on 6 February, southern and central Turkey were rocked by one of the strongest earthquakes to ever strike the country. The devastation caused in both Turkey and North-west Syria was truly horrific and further compounded an already dire humanitarian crisis. Families displaced by years of conflict in Syria lost everything once more.

By funding Syrian-led organisations, ActionAid's response has been community-led and highly effective, reaching 104,778 people through search and rescue operations, food, shelter, clean water and sanitation and mental and physical healthcare.

Despite having been deeply and personally affected by the earthquakes themselves, our partner organisations

and volunteers have led a remarkable, courageous response under incredibly challenging circumstances.

With a growing healthcare crisis in the region, women and young people - often most at risk in times of emergency - have been at the forefront of the response.

Thanks to generous donations from supporters like you, ActionAid is funding a hospital run by our partner Violet, supporting communities living in 58 temporary camps, most of whom are women and children. The hospital provides much-needed medical services, including reproductive health, prenatal and antenatal care and services related to children and motherhood.

More than 5,000 women and girls displaced by the earthquakes have

already received urgent medical care from a dedicated team of nurses, midwives and doctors.

Rima is a Reproductive Health Awareness Worker at the hospital. When the earthquake struck, she did not know what was happening and thought there may have been a bombing. She told us:

“The earthquake was like what we experienced during the bombings. The things that happened to us and the displacement...I felt that the world would crush us.”

Now, Rima works with expectant mothers from pregnancy to postnatal care, supporting and advising them how to best look after themselves and their infants. She provides advice on breastfeeding, infant nutrition and vaccinations and encourages women to attend appointments and check for breast cancer.

Rima strives to educate women to make decisions about their care. She told us:

“I am very satisfied with this work because I’m sharing knowledge with other women. I do not act superior to patients – I make sure that they know we are equals.”

Safaa lives in a refugee camp near to the hospital because her home was destroyed in the war. Without a

© Sonya Ali Maara/ActionAid



Safaa and her family are pleased now an ActionAid-funded hospital is open nearby.

hospital nearby, it used to be difficult for Safaa and her family to access the healthcare they needed. As a mum of three, Safaa explains the difference the new hospital has made:

“They give us medicines and everything we need. You feel that you are at home, not in a hospital. They talk to us nicely.”

When her oldest son needed an operation, the family felt welcomed at the hospital and relieved to be able to access the treatment needed. Rima and the team have also been able to provide support for Safaa’s eight-month-old son, Hudhayfa. Safaa told us:

“Thanks to those who contributed to this hospital, and God bless them.”

You can read more about the ActionAid’s response to the earthquakes here: [actionaid.org/EarthquakeUpdate](https://www.actionaid.org/EarthquakeUpdate)



Platforms of precarity: Women's economic rights and the gig economy

With more and more of our lives taking place online, it's no surprise that many people are engaging with remote work opportunities. Within this context, the gig economy, where online platforms connect workers with one-off pieces of work, has been growing fast.

Alongside a wider decline in worker's rights and a further deterioration of women's precarious working conditions, women's livelihoods continue to be disproportionately affected by the climate and cost of living crises.

Our most recent report, developed as part of our Value Women's Work project, presents findings about what the gig economy means for women's right to decent work. Discrimination rooted in patriarchy, race, class, age, geographical location, caste, ethnicity and migrant status overlap to prevent women and girls from accessing digital technologies. This creates a digital divide that excludes women from potential work opportunities.

International bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women's Expert Group have highlighted the need to remove structural barriers:

“It is not a matter of ‘fitting’ women into the current and future world of work, but rather shaping the world of work in a manner that is gender-transformative, benefitting both women and men.”

While location-based platforms are creating new opportunities for some women, others continue to struggle with low and unpredictable pay, long hours, exposure to violence, harassment and lack of corporate accountability.

Faith Lumonya, the Economic Justice and Climate Action Lead at Akina Mama wa Afrika, a Pan-African feminist leadership development organisation, has pointed out how the flexibility advertised as part of gig economy work opportunities goes out of the window because the earnings

system does not consider women’s unpaid care and domestic work. This means women must work long hours to make enough money.

Despite governments committing to global standards that should cover all workers, legal frameworks generally remain weak and poorly implemented, with a lack of clarity on how they extend to gig workers.

Within this challenging context, workers are bravely engaging in collective activism and devising new strategies to challenge harmful practices and defend their rights.

The digital platform economy must be developed and managed in ways that advance and protect the rights of women workers facing intersecting forms of discrimination.



Registration of workers by the first domestic workers' trade union in West Bengal, India.

Celebrating our fundraisers

Every year hundreds of people fundraise for ActionAid in a range of brilliant ways. From skydives to swimathons, bike rides to bake sales – they've done it all! We want to say thank you for all your efforts and share just a few stories from some of our fantastic fundraisers...

Well done, Tak!

Tak ran the Manchester Marathon for ActionAid and speaking about why he chose to support our charity, he revealed it was a cause close to his heart.

“I grew up in Zimbabwe and I resonate with ActionAid because I see my sisters in the women and girls you work with. I never took for granted how much my sisters did to help our family while also supporting themselves, and I admire them to this day. I wanted to raise awareness and thank you for the opportunity to run the Manchester Marathon.”

Tak



© Manchester Marathon



Congratulations, Aneka and Jay!

Thank you to Aneka and Jay, who chose to switch gifts for donations at their wedding.

“It was a pleasure to donate a percentage of our wedding gifts to ActionAid because Aneka’s late grandma was hugely passionate about the rights and wellbeing of women, and this is a charity we feel she would have felt compelled to support. We also felt that whilst celebrating our own happy occasion, our wedding was an opportunity to support others”.

Aneka and Jay

Thank you, Claire!

Claire ran a half marathon every weekend in March 2023, fundraising in loving memory of her sister, Helen.

“ActionAid is a wonderful charity to raise money for, and I know my sister, Helen, would be glad to know that money raised in her memory is going towards helping women and girls that need it most. ActionAid really supports you as a fundraiser and have been incredibly kind, thoughtful and supportive both during and after the fundraising process.”

Claire



If you're feeling inspired to fundraise for ActionAid, check out how you can get involved at www.actionaid.org.uk/events

Asking Parliamentarians to support a fair and feminist economy

As the impact of the cost-of-living crisis deepens for women and girls around the world, ActionAid met with Parliamentarians in both Westminster and Holyrood in June to talk about the need for a major shift in our current economic approach, putting the rights of women and girls at the centre.

At Westminster, we teamed up with our friends at the Women's Budget Group UK to tell MPs why it's time for a feminist wellbeing economy.

This approach focuses on moving away from the relentless pursuit

of economic growth as an end in itself, privatisation of public services and corporate profit and towards an economic system that centres wellbeing, human rights and the planet. A vital part of this shift is recognising, reducing and redistributing women and girls' unpaid care work.

The Parliamentary events were a chance for ActionAid UK and our colleagues at ActionAid Malawi to share our latest research on this topic.

At Westminster, Chris Law MP chaired this important meeting, with contributions from Janet Daby MP,



ActionAid staff attended the Scottish Parliament to discuss a fairer, feminist economy.

feminist political economist Fatimah Kelleher, our colleague from ActionAid Malawi, Tusayiwe Sikwese, and Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director of Women's Budget Group UK.

Tusayiwe explained that the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis have exposed how the current economic model is failing women and girls in Malawi. As a result of tax injustice and Malawi's global debt burden, government investment in Malawi's public services has been wholly inadequate – at the expense of women and girls.

In the face of these challenges, young women in Malawi are building an exciting movement – demanding a different economic approach from their government that recognises their unpaid care work and puts wellbeing at the heart of the economy.

In Scotland, we worked with our friends at the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland and other partners to speak to MSPs about how they could support a fairer, feminist economy at an event hosted by Maggie Chapman MSP and Emma Harper MSP at Holyrood.

Jessica Mandanda from the Feminist Macro-economic Alliance Malawi highlighted how the care work of women and girls is disregarded by the current economic approach. She also pointed to the significant role



ActionAid and MPs discuss solutions to improve the economy for women and girls.

of international financial institutions and how their policy advice was leading to austerity measures that are harming Malawi's public services and increasing women's unpaid care work.

The clear message from both events was that supporting the shift to a feminist wellbeing economy is vital if we are to achieve gender equality.

Both the UK and Scottish Governments have important roles to play in making this new economy a reality by supporting and promoting investments in high-quality public services and taking measures to tackle Malawi's global debt burden and



Young Urban Women (YUW) Lerato, a member of YUW Blantyre.

Standing up for inclusive public services

Why Gender-Responsive Public Services are critical in advancing women's rights

As well as asking Parliamentarians in Westminster and Holyrood to support the shift towards a more feminist economy that prioritises the wellbeing of humans and the environment, our colleagues in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa are using the Young Urban Women programme to increase political education and large-scale mobilisation to call for gender equity.

The program also calls for political leaders and International Financial

Institutions (IFIs) to move towards feminist alternative economic models and their collective efforts are helping shift unjust power imbalances.

ActionAid has recently co-created the Gender-Responsive Public Services explainer, which includes a mixture of factual examples and statistics with real stories to powerfully illustrate how the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other IFI policies impact access to quality public services for women.

These examples highlight the impacts

of austerity measures on women's access to water, education, transport, gender-based violence services and public health services. The explainer will be used as a key tool for young urban women in their awareness-raising and advocacy efforts at country, regional and global level.

Chikumbutso Ngosi, the International Project Manager, has highlighted the importance of the explainer to deepen the knowledge of young women learning about their country's politics and their rights around access to Gender-Responsive Public Services.

Access to Gender-Responsive Public Services is key for women and girls' wellbeing. This has been shown to be especially significant following reversals to gender equality gains caused by the pandemic as women lost livelihoods, took on

increased unpaid care burdens and endured intensified levels of gender-based violence. Surges in food and energy costs, devastating impacts of climate change and a debt and austerity crisis are further exacerbating the difficulties faced by women.

Pamela Kuwali, Country Director for ActionAid Malawi, stated,

“Austerity measures by IFIs compromise quality of public services in health and education. Failure to invest in health care makes women play unpaid care work role[s] with girls dropping out of school to take up the role”.

The explainer also includes possible actions that can be taken to address the current challenges, in order to protect and advance the rights of women and girls and hold states accountable in this regard.

It is available for anyone who is interested in and committed to making public services work for women and girls, including women's rights organisations, social justice activists, movements and policy makers. activists, movements and policy makers.

As feminist movements and their allies in wider civil society have long called for, to achieve gender equality, women and girls need quality Gender-Responsive Public Services to protect and advance their rights.



Members of Young Urban Women's movement in Mchinji, Malawi working together to advance women's economic justice and feminist macro-economic alternatives.

Putting a pin in inequality

How Mina turned her hobby into a new future for her family

Mina always knew she loved sewing and knitting but never thought it could be more than just a hobby.

Growing up in Nepal, she got married and became a mother at a young age, which meant she never got to finish her education. As a result, her career opportunities became very limited and Mina had to rely on her husband for the family income.

“I had low confidence and did not want to talk to anyone as I saw everyone getting their degrees and opting out for better employment,” she told us.

“I wanted to study but due to my earlier life choices, [I] couldn’t do so.”

Despite having important roles in the workplace and the home, women are much less likely to be in positions of power where decisions are made. For example, women and girls will typically take charge of care work at home, like Mina, but the right of spending their earnings or making critical decisions about their family's livelihood lies in the hands of men.

This is where the ActionAid-supported **ReFLECT** circle comes in, a community group supporting women and girls to learn more about their rights, gender-based violence and how to turn their skills into income.

With business skills training and the right equipment, Mina has been able to set up a thriving tailoring business.

© Angela Shrestha



Mina's business success has meant she is now able to provide her daughter with everything she needs to get a good education.

When Mina decided to join **ReFLECT** to connect with other women in her community, she found her love for sewing and knitting could be taken to the next level, opening a world of opportunities.

"I began to take part in the different workshops on offer, such as learning about my rights, my daughter's right to an education, reading, writing and numeracy," she explained.

"When a three-month business skills training scheme was offered, I jumped at the opportunity."

Mina added, "In addition to the business skills training, I was also provided with a sewing machine which helped me establish my own tailoring shop."

As a result of everything she learned at the **ReFLECT** circle, Mina not only set up her own source of income, but was elected as a ward member in the local-level elections. She now aspires to use her knowledge and independence to help other women in the community.

Most importantly, as a result of her new business, Mina has been able to send her daughter to school.

"I want my daughter to finish her education and be successful in the future - that is why I don't want to compromise in anything related to her studies," Mina said.

"I am very much thankful for this partnership with ActionAid; I've finally started to believe in myself. Nothing is impossible."

Leaving a gift to the future

How you can support women and girls tackling the climate crisis, through a gift in your Will.

Loveness Chiwaya,
Director of Chigwirizano
Women's Movement
and ActionAid partner.

Women and girls living in the world's poorest countries are among the least responsible for the changing climate - yet they feel the impact the most.

When Cyclone Freddy hit Malawi in March 2023, over 500,000 people were left without access to basic human needs.

Loveness Chiwaya, Director of Chigwirizano Women's Movement, an ActionAid partner, recalled what it was like to see her community in this way and how it has impacted their future.

She told us, "Cyclone Freddy has affected this area in that we now

lack food, clean water, and even a hospital...this disaster has affected us since it has taken a lot of lives."



The effects of climate change are causing devastation across the world.

Extreme patterns of weather, as a result of climate change, are unfortunately becoming more common and women and girls are the most vulnerable to its devastating impacts, as they are less likely to be in positions of power.

As Loveness explains, “Climate change has affected us as women and girls in this area...we were encouraging each other that a woman should be able to stand on her own, farming and growing different types of crops every year. Now...this disaster has affected our country and has destroyed our area.”

Women and girls are the key to effective climate change solutions, already having a strong body of knowledge that can be used in climate change mitigation and disaster reduction. However, they need support.

A gift in your Will is a powerful way to support women and girls using their expertise to create a resilient and sustainable future and tackle the inequalities they face as a result of climate change.

Leaving a gift in your Will could support women and girls to lead their communities through times of crisis and beyond to build a safer and more sustainable future for everyone.

By partnering with the National Free Wills Network, ActionAid is offering the opportunity to write or update your Will for free.

To learn more please visit **actionaid.org.uk/legacies** or use the QR code here:



Loveness assessing the damage and supporting with rebuilding following Cyclone Freddy in Malawi.

Farming for change

How a women's group is transforming the lives of families in Bangladesh, one duck at a time.

All over the world, people have been feeling the effects of the climate crisis and Kharunti's family is no different.

"My husband was a farmer, but the changes to the weather patterns had started to affect the crops and his earnings were never enough," she told us.

Things were already difficult for the family, but when Kharunti's husband passed away, she found herself alone with six children to care for and no income. She explained, "After he passed away, my only asset was the house we lived in, and we struggled to survive. I had no option but to take

my children out of school to reduce the financial burden on the family and to try and put food on the table each day."

Sadly, Kharunti is not alone in this.

New research from ActionAid shows that the world is facing an unprecedented cost of living crisis, and communities in the across the world are dealing with the consequences. It also shows that women and girls, in particular, are facing the brunt of it all with skyrocketing food, fuel and fertiliser prices.

It is so important that women and girls have access to resources that help them improve their farming techniques,



© Mong Hai Ching

Following the poultry-rearing training, Kharunti is earning 500 BDT (£4.07) for each duck sold, generating a much-needed income for her family.



Kharunti (centre) is a mother of six. Her business rearing ducks means that her children can now attend school.

learn more about maximising their families incomes and alternative ways to earn a living, which is exactly why the Women's Reflection Action Circle in Bangladesh was set up.

"I was initially invited to join the Women's Reflection Action Circle, where I received strength from the other women in the group," Kharunti said.

"Along with 29 other women, I received training on how to rear poultry and how to keep them safe and healthy. This included vaccinations, feeding, housing and the nursing process. I decided to rear ducks as the return was higher than chickens."

After learning she could afford to take out a small loan, Kharunti was able to purchase 12 baby ducks and secure housing for them. Within a year, she

sold 17 ducks and repaid her loan, earning 500 Bangladeshi Taka (around £4.07) for each duck.

The opportunity to take control of her income has made a world of difference for Kharunti and her family and she has not looked back.

"I am very thankful to ActionAid because the training they provided has changed the course of my future and my family's too," she said.

"I want to make sure my children are educated, especially my daughters so that they can be enlightened and not suffer the same problems in life like me."

Kharunti added, "Thanks to my income, all my children are enrolled in school again."



A great way for you to get active and raise vital funds for ActionAid

This October, put your fitness to the test and take part in The 137 Challenge. Complete 137 sit-ups, squats or step-ups per day for one month and fundraise to help end violence against women and girls.

Why 137?

One in three women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime, and 137 women are killed every day by a partner or family member.

But across the world, women and girls are claiming their rights and challenging the systems and beliefs that make violence acceptable.

ActionAid is supporting women and girls as they work to prevent and respond to violence in their communities. Your support could help fund women's groups leading the change by training parents, teachers, local police and legal advisors to recognise the signs of violence and report it.

Meet Helen, pictured below, who has previously taken part in the challenge with her family. Helen said, "We loved it! I felt myself getting stronger each day and am proud to support women and girls".

A huge thank you to everyone who has taken part in the challenge before. We'd love you to join us again to make 2023 bigger and better than ever before!

Sign up now –
actionaid.org.uk/challenge



Choose your challenge this October and help women and girls across the world transform their families' futures.