# actionaid

# "We know more than you think we do"

## Raising voices of marginalised communities on the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals

**2018**

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| ELBAG | Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability in Governance |
| FDG | Focus group discussion |
| FGM | Female genital mutilation |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NEET | Not in education or training |
| NGO | Non-government organisation |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UN | United Nations |
| VNR | Voluntary National Review |

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# Executive Summary

*"I would tell people in power to listen to our ideas and take us seriously! Stop ignoring us! Appreciate the young people, we know more than you think we do."* **Stella Mwangi, young activist in Nairobi**

The world's most marginalised people must participate in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process if they are not to be left behind forever. But this is not yet happening enough. This report puts the principle of participation into practice – sharing the voices of some of these people, showing that they know they are left behind and have solutions and demands – and makes some proposals on how their right to democratic participation can become a reality.

Building on existing work, ActionAid and our partners in Bangladesh, Denmark, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia undertook a research and accountability project during 2017 and 2018 to listen to the voices of marginalised communities on the implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on youth employment and decent work, and SDG 16 on accountability and participation, corruption and non-discrimination. This report shares the views of participants in focus group discussions with women, men and young people in the seven countries, as well as key informant interviews and, in some cases, community-led assessments of public services (such as citizen's report cards).

This project used a 'reflection-action' methodology, whereby people living in poverty and exclusion are facilitated to analyse their rights and the power relations they live with. Through a process of reflection, they decide on actions to make the changes they want, which often involves challenging those with more power.

## The importance of participation

The SDGs aim to leave no one behind, reaching those farthest behind first. For this to happen, people who are marginalised – including women, young people, people with disabilities and people from ethnic and religious minorities – must participate. They are best placed to know what their problems are and what might be workable solutions. Moreover, the process of participation can itself create solidarity and get people into a position where they can start to make the changes they want. Participation is fundamental to the SDGs – for example, Goal 16.7 commits states to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

Despite this, engagement of citizens in the SDGs is so far happening in only a very patchy way, and mostly not reaching the most marginalised people. Although some governments have put in place laudable initiatives to engage citizens, including involving citizens in national SDG implementation mechanisms or conducting national consultations, these do not go far enough to meet the goal of 'leaving no one behind'. Instead, citizens' voices expressed through this project highlight that marginalised groups struggle to access the public services they need, that citizens lack information on policies and budgets, and that citizens want to be more involved in SDG implementation.

*"If the authorities come and walk shoulder to shoulder, they can hear the voices of the individuals … Individuals have their own opinions, by connecting with them loopholes can be identified and solved."* **Poly Aktar, Bagerhat, Bangladesh**

## Citizens' voices

Through focus group discussions and interviews, citizens shared wide-ranging demands, reflecting the diversity of their experiences and contexts. Citizens engaged in the research called for stronger institutional responses to violence against women, and greater investment in violence prevention initiatives such as safer transport or addressing alcohol and drug abuse. They called for initiatives to

recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, and to address harmful practices. They also want to see initiatives that help to ensure more and better jobs for women and young people – including more targeted and inclusive vocational training, investment in entrepreneurs or cooperatives, and enforcement of quotas and targets in existing laws – as well as initiatives to reduce corruption and engage citizens in policymaking.

**5 GENDER EQUALITY**

*"Even though women have the same qualifications as their counterparts, often there are times when women's capabilities in different fields are underestimated and not accorded commensurate remuneration or regard. This demoralises them, and sometimes you find the women opting not to compete against men which in turn hinders optimal achievement of their dreams."* **Fiona Emali - Young woman from an informal settlement in Kenya**

*"I am delighted that women's unpaid care work has been included in the policy [on SDGs] as well as in the specific state law so that the women's contributions to unpaid care work are recorded in economic value."* **– Ms. Thanh, focus group participant, Uong Bi, Vietnam**

*"Our concern is allocation of the highest office to women that were not given priority in government. Although three were appointed, more should also occupy other sensitive positions in order to have gender balance."* **– Female focus group participant, Gudum Sayawa, Bauchi, Nigeria**

**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

*"A certificate definitely helps in getting a job, but seed funds can help us create our own opportunities"* - **Young focus group participant, Bangladesh**

*"Labour rights are not respected much because people – in as much as they know labour rights exist – don't know where to report violations to. I think the government should look into this because it's affecting the future leaders of tomorrow – the youth."* **Pauline, activist from Sesheke, Zambia**

**16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

*"Public resources, like ambulances and fire engines, should be used for their purpose."* **Focus group participant from Kilifi, Kenya**

*"It is difficult to live in an underprivileged area when people constantly tell you that people aren't successful there... Why didn't anyone speak to us, when the political process [to demolish the area where she lives] started?"* **Eden Tewolde, young woman from Tingbjerg, a 'ghetto' area of Copenhagen, Denmark**

# Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this process. In all countries, some groups are left behind. Not only are they left behind, but they know it, and moreover they have solutions and demands. But in the regular course of things, they do not get the chance to articulate these, or to be included in the decision-making process.

Where citizens are given the opportunity to participate, participation itself brings many benefits:
- It clarifies each community's proposals at a level of fine detail.
- The process of participation gives an empowering sense of agency.
- It can bring people to a position where they can hold decision-makers accountable, and provide a forum where change to cultural norms can begin.

Citizens want to contribute to their own development. However, they can only go part of the way themselves – there is a recognition of the need for government-led policies to provide public services and regulation that can only be done on a large scale for the benefit of everyone. Fundamentally, governments hold responsibility for ensuring that national development addresses the concerns and demands of marginalised groups. If democratic and participatory processes are not well set up, there is a risk. SDGs will be co-opted by those who are already powerful.

Currently, essential public services are often insufficient in developing country contexts, partly because democratic participation and accountability mechanisms need to be stronger, but also because there is not enough available finance. Furthermore, the current global trend in many areas is for increasing private provision and financing of essential services. This trend is likely to reduce rather than increase the ability of marginalised communities to hold duty-bearers to account.

PHOTO: ActionAid Vietnam

# Recommendations

·  **A primary measure of countries' progress in delivering the SDGs should be whether young people's, women's and all citizens' voices and experiences are included in planning, implementation and monitoring.** Country Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and SDG Reports should be required to include detailed information on how citizens have been engaged in implementation. Citizens' voices, especially those left behind, should be a key source of data, alongside other quantitative and qualitative sources of information.

·  **National processes to develop strategies and monitor SDG progress (for example via the VNRs) should prioritise the voices of marginalised people and people living in poverty** based on (for example) age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic status. Information on the SDGs and their implementation needs to be widely shared. Representatives of CSOs and people's movements should be part of national SDG implementation mechanisms.

·  **Governments should develop strategies to implement the recommendations of local and national citizens' groups on SDGs 5, 8 and 16** as presented in this report (and indeed, citizens' recommendations as facilitated through other processes).

·  **National governments should ensure resources and power are redistributed to local levels** – including to those in marginalised, economically disadvantaged and remote areas – and be accountable to community members at local level. Local budgets should be developed through participatory processes involving broad community representation, including marginalised groups.

·  **Governments and the international community should focus on ensuring public financing for the SDGs,** increasingly through domestic resource mobilisation (expanding tax bases in a progressive way and allocating spending to priority services), as well as through donor contributions and international action to set and enforce new tax rules.

·  **Publicly financed solutions that are publicly delivered should be the priority for SDG delivery, and mechanisms to deliver on the SDGs through private sector partnerships must ensure that the fundamental human rights of marginalised communities are central,** avoiding models that have failed to deliver for marginalised groups. Private sector initiatives to implement the SDGs should be rigorously monitored for their impacts on poor and marginalised groups.

# Introduction – the Sustainable Development Goals and democratic participation

Shadreck Sichilongo, 50 and Justina Nachalwe, 50, Zambia. PHOTO: ActionAid

*"I would tell people in power to listen to our ideas and take us seriously! Stop ignoring us! Appreciate the young people, we know more than you think we do."* **Stella Mwangi, Young activist in Nairobi**

## The Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the world agreed a roadmap for development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a long, diverse list of objectives that, it is agreed, will benefit girls and boys, women and men everywhere, to be achieved by 2030. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted by almost all governments in the world, and have widespread acceptance across the political spectrum.

The headline, the idea that unites the whole set of goals, is to leave no one behind, reaching those farthest behind first.[1]  This is laudably ambitious, and different from previous aims. The last set of global goals aimed to halve poverty. This set goes further by not only aiming to bring the benefits of development to everyone in the world – however marginalised – but also by aiming explicitly to tackle inequality. The inclusiveness of the goals is a testament to the collaborative process that led to their development, including the strong engagement of civil society and women's movements.

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[1] United Nations (2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

Achieving this means reaching groups of people who have long been ignored, and listening to their perspectives on how the goals apply to them. In other words, participation on a scale the world has never previously seen. Tackling inequality and reaching those left behind can only happen with the participation of marginalised and excluded people.

Governments are the primary duty-bearers, charged with ensuring delivery of the SDGs through sufficient resource allocation, enactment of relevant legislation and implementation of policies. As part of this, governments need to ensure that systems and processes are created to facilitate democratic participation from all stakeholders – whether women and young farmers from rural areas, garment workers in cities, or teachers and doctors across the country. *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* specifically mentions non-state actors and individuals as significant players in delivery. If effective democratic and participatory processes are not well set-up, there is a risk that the SDGs could be co-opted by those actors who are already powerful, and that the voices of marginalised communities will be absent in discussions around how countries can achieve sustainable development.

## Why this report?

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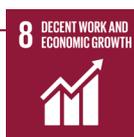
This report puts the principle of participation into practice. It highlights the thoughts and observations of a relatively small number of women and men, many of them young, living in marginalised communities in seven of the countries where ActionAid works.[2] Men and women were asked whether they felt certain SDG objectives were being progressed in practice in their local area. The key intent of this report is to share their responses so that their voices might be heard, and can contribute to the SDG processes, particularly planning, implementation and monitoring. The rich knowledge emerging from this process is but a small indicator of the kind of analysis that might be generated through a thorough consultative process.

During 2017 and 2018, ActionAid and partners undertook a multi-country pilot project to listen to and document communities' views on the implementation of the SDGs, and to investigate governments' progress in participation within their SDG work. The aim of the project was to support citizens actively to participate in holding governments to account for delivery of their SDG commitments. We also hoped to demonstrate that involving a range of participants is necessary to ensure that national SDG implementation meets the demands of marginalised groups and fulfils the requirement to 'leave no one behind'. This report will point to some of the issues that citizens encountered, as well as their 'charters of demand' and recommendations for action on three of the SDGs.

**The SDGs focused on in this report**

| | |
|---|---|
| **5 GENDER EQUALITY** | SDG 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls |
| **8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH** | SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
| **16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS** | SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels |

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[2] These three goals, and the targets selected within them, were selected collaboratively by ActionAid teams in the participating countries based on ActionAid's priority areas of work within those countries, as well as the priorities of ActionAid's partners and allies in the participating countries.

Focus group discussion on the SDGs, Satkhira, Bangladesh
PHOTO: Raima Khatun/ActionAid

# What are the benefits of democratic participation?

Development is more successful when the people it affects actively participate in the outcomes. Lack of participation can lead to discrimination, because the rights of marginalised groups may be ignored. Democratic participation in the development agenda hinges on the premise that those men and women most affected by a problem are best placed to know what their problems are, what should be prioritised in addressing them, and what would be workable solutions. This means putting the most vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups at the centre of the process. These may include women, young people, people with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, people who are marginalised due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, sex workers, refugee and migrant people, widows, people living with HIV, and people living in remote or economically disadvantaged areas. It is important to take an intersectional approach – within marginalised communities, there will be those who experience further marginalisation due to their intersecting identities.

While results from participation may at times during the process appear elusive, when they arrive they will be long-lasting and firm, because they have strong foundations. But participation is often sidelined, partly because it can be a complicated process, and partly because the voices of the marginalised may often, unsurprisingly, challenge the interests of the already-powerful.

ActionAid has based much of its work on participatory processes for several decades, seeking to end poverty and exclusion through democratic participation that allows people to recognise and claim their rights. It has focused particularly on young people and women. It uses a core *reflection-action* process[3] that facilitates people living in poverty and exclusion to analyse their rights and the power relations they live with. Through a process of reflection, they decide on actions to make the changes they want, which often involves challenging those with more power. The process of taking action can be empowering in itself, as it is a reminder of people's agency.

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[3] See: ActionAid (2012) People's Action in Practice

# The SDGs and participation

Participation is a key aspect of the SDGs: SDG 5 and SDG 16 in particular have participation at their centre. For example, Goal 16.7 commits states to, "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels". Moreover, the SDGs were drawn up in a participatory way, at least in comparison with the MDGs, which are said to have been devised in a basement of the New York UN building by a very small group of people.[4]

This reflects strong civil society mobilisation around the drafting of the SDGs: for example, women's rights organisations were extremely effective in building coalitions and alliances across different interest groups to put gender equality at the centre of the new Agenda 2030. Such participatory processes and strategic alliances are also needed to ensure effective implementation, follow-up and review. But the main reason participation is intrinsic is that the SDGs are less likely to be achieved without it.

Several examples of attempts to engage citizens and civil society[5] in SDG implementation and monitoring at national level are emerging. According to a civil society-led review of recent Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports,[6] Malaysia has formalised the participation of non-state actors, including CSOs, in the governance of their SDG process, which has already led to greater self-organisation by the CSOs. Indonesia has a set of principles for inclusive, transparent engagement with non-state actors, including sharing schedules with stakeholders, documenting and publicising the process, and using simple language to ensure accessibility. The Netherlands has an SDG charter that includes a wide range of stakeholders; over 100 organisations have signed up to commitments to contribute. Bangladesh and Vietnam's governments have held consultations with MPs and civil society on localising the SDG process. Kenya has developed a national SDG roadmap in consultation with local government, civil society and development partners. In Nigeria a VNR working group was established, including members from civil society. The Danish government invited MPs and other stakeholders to participate in the Danish delegation at the High Level Political Forum (the periodic global meeting on the SDGs).[7]

However, there is a very long way to go. By 2017, 42 countries had submitted official VNR reports on their SDG progress.[8] Of these 42, only 15 had civil society formally involved in their governance arrangements (with 12 more intending to do so) – and this may be high-level civil society rather than people's movements comprising the most marginalised. All of the countries refer to the importance of civil society in SDG implementation, and 25 of them provide information about specific contributions – but most of these are in terms of project implementation, rather than ensuring the voices of the people who might be left behind are heard.[9] Moreover, while the VNR reports outlined above have showcased the inclusion of civil society, these reports do not specify whether civil society inclusion extends to people's movements or community-based organisations, or is limited to engagement with formal NGOs at national level.

The majority of the VNRs noted which groups are most likely to be left behind in their context – often pointing to women, children and young people, people with disabilities and elderly people. However only 14 of them got serious by pointing to the (poor) availability of the disaggregated data required to measure progress on this.

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[4] ActionAid (2012) People's Action in practice  http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/1._peoples_action_in_practice_final_20_07_2012.pdf
[5] M Tran "Mark Malloch-Brown: Developing the MDGs was a bit like nuclear fusion" The Guardian, 16 November 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/nov/16/mark-malloch-brown-mdgs-nuclear?intcmp=239
[6] ActionAid (2012) People's action in practice
[7] In this report, we use the term 'citizens' and 'civil society' broadly. We use the term 'citizens' to encompass those who hold rights as members of a state – and in doing so, do not exclude those living in a state without formal citizenship; and 'civil society' to encompass the broad range of actors representing the views of citizens – whether formal NGOs or Civil Society Organisations, people's movements, community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, labour unions and others.
[8] Canadian Council for International Co-operation and international CSO consortium (2017) Progressing national SDGs implementation: an independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN in 2017 https://www.iisd.org/library/progressing-national-sdgs-implementation-independent-assessment-voluntary-national-review
[9] Canadian Council for International Co-operation and international CSO consortium (2017) Progressing national SDGs implementation: an independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN in 2017

Of the seven countries in the ActionAid study, four published a VNR in 2016 or 2017: Bangladesh, Denmark, Kenya and Nigeria. Vietnam will publish its VNR in 2018. A comparison of the 2016 and 2017 VNRs is below. It shows that the idea of broad democratic participation in the SDGs is widely accepted, but there are only patchy initiatives to put it into practice.

| | Does the VNR mention whether civil society is involved in SDG governance? | How much does the VNR discuss leaving no one behind? | Stakeholder engagement in VNR report process | Does the VNR highlight partnership with CSOs to implement the SDGs? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bangladesh** | No mention of non-state actors in the SDG Implementation and Monitoring Committee. | Mentions who is at risk, specific initiatives and need for better data. | Shared draft VNR report with stakeholders for comment. | Highlights consultation with 'different stakeholders' in SDG implementation. |
| **Denmark** | Non-state actors not formally involved – they participate in a parliamentary network. | No mention of who is at risk, specific initiatives or need for better data. | Meeting of stakeholders before VNR key messages drafted. | CSO partnerships mentioned. |
| **Kenya** | CSOs represented on Interagency Committee on the SDGs. | Chapter on 'leaving no one behind' identifies groups at risk and specific initiatives. | Non-state actors consulted during process of VNR report. | CSOs provided financial and technical support during VNR process. |
| **Nigeria** | CSO advisory group liaises with presidential office on SDGs, which has objectives on CSO involvement. | Identifies groups at risk and specific initiatives. | Non-state actors engaged in consultation on VNR report, and report has CSO validation annex. | Activities by CSOs mentioned in VNR. CSO Advisory Group on SDGs endorsed the VNR, but also said efforts to engage CSOs need to be strengthened. |

*Information sourced from: Kindornay, S. Progressing national SDGs implementation: an independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN in 2017. Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Ottawa, 2018.*

Another civil society group, Women Thrive, has recently conducted a survey of grassroots women's groups' participation in the SDGs. Over 100 groups were surveyed, across five continents. They found that these groups were knowledgeable about the SDGs, and many were already advocating for their implementation, both individually and within national coalitions. However, they were not being included in SDG-related decision-making at national level, and they did not feel the needs and priorities of women and girls were being reflected in SDG implementation.[10]

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[10] Canadian Council for International Co-operation and international CSO consortium (2017) Progressing national SDGs implementation: an independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN in 2017

The inclusion of marginalised people in participatory processes is challenging. However, people's movements (including feminist movements) – partnering with other civil society actors – provide a good opportunity to vastly increase current participation.[11]

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### Key lessons for citizens' participation in the SDGs

From ActionAid's extensive work on participation, and the views on participation expressed by community members in this research, we have attempted to derive some key lessons to guide efforts to engage citizens in the SDGs. These apply to all actors – including governments, NGOs and UN agencies. We hope to work with these stakeholders and communities themselves to strengthen these and test them in practice.

Efforts to engage citizens in the SDGs should:

1. *Build understanding*: accessible information on the SDGs, how they are being implemented, and how citizens can participate should be shared widely, including with marginalised groups.
2. *Be initiated early*: citizens should be engaged in SDG implementation and monitoring as early as possible, not left to comment after decisions have been made.
3. *Prioritise marginalised groups*: marginalised communities face barriers to engaging with consultation or implementation processes – their participation must therefore be deliberately sought as a priority.
4. *Be transparent*: information on who is being consulted, on what, and why, should be publicly and freely available to all – for example, through websites and dissemination through local governments.
5. *Engage with diverse movements*: participation of diverse groups based on age, gender, location, sexuality etc should be facilitated, as well as engagement with a diverse range of civil society actors, including people's movements and not only established formal NGOs.
6. *Respect citizens' agency, capability and knowledge*: citizens are taking their own actions to implement the SDGs and have their own solutions – efforts to engage citizens in the SDGs should respect their agency and be open to implementing their solutions.

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## Financing and democratic participation

ActionAid considers that the heart of democratic participation involves a relationship between citizens and states, with states holding primary responsibility for delivery of the SDGs, including to marginalised groups. Public finance is a key mechanism to ensure that the SDGs are delivered equitably. However, instead we see an emphasis on private sector implementation of SDGs,[12] alongside a shift towards increased inequality and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. If the SDGs are implemented not by the state and not via public financing, but rather through privatised services and private finance, this threatens the delivery of services to the poorest, who by definition are unable to pay, and compromises democratic accountability as corporations are accountable to shareholders, not citizens.

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[11] Canadian Council for International Co-operation and international CSO consortium (2017) Progressing national SDGs implementation: an independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the UN in 2017

[12] Women Thrive (2018) 2018 National SDG scorecard – global report, https://womenthrive.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018-National-SDG-Scorecard-Report.pdf

## CASE STUDY - THE VOICE OF
## A YOUNG SDG ACTIVIST

Harry Simuntala, 21 year-old activist from Muchinga Province, Zambia. Photo: Shaducl Lubunda/ActionAid

Harry Simuntala is 21 years old, and from Muchinga Province in Zambia. He is from a low-income family. Despite his family's very limited financial means, his late father worked as an agent of change in his community. Following in his father's footsteps, Harry is passionate about enabling the voiceless to have a voice, and doing something to better the lives of the poorest and most marginalised communities. He draws his inspiration from his father, as well as from young women and men across the globe who have been able to transform dreams into practical realities.

He is an activist in Muchinga Province, where with colleagues he established a district youth hub, and led teams of young people to hold government accountable through community scorecards and budget monitoring and accountability (these activities gave them information about young people's views of the SDGs), and he now also chairs a Zambian young people's activist network (known as 'Activista'). Some of the members of the group were selected to participate in a district forum on SDGs held by the government in 2016.

Harry came to know about the SDGs through, "online platforms such as Facebook, and also through local forums". He is keen to have a say in how they are implemented in his community because "*I am a young person who is the future of my great nation Zambia. It is also my right to have a say.*"

Harry's community wants to see stronger laws and institutions for women's rights, an education sector that focuses on skills development, and accountability for leaders that violate their powers.

Harry says, "*these issues affect me personally as they are interlinked and they are contributing factors to poverty. I am a youth who champions these causes, and I want to shout out that there is no provision of security to young people who wish to challenge the status quo in their communities, and in the country.*"

# Approach and Methodology

The project at the core of this report built on ActionAid's existing work in Bangladesh, Denmark, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia.

In designing the pilot, countries focused on three of the SDGs – SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on youth employment and decent work, and SDG 16 on accountability and participation, corruption and non-discrimination. These three SDGs were selected as they coincide with some of ActionAid's priority areas within the participating countries, as well as ActionAid's global strategic focus on women's rights, citizen participation and economic justice. ActionAid staff from the participating countries agreed on specific targets to focus on under these goals for the accountability project and research. We acknowledge the unavoidable dissonance between arguing for democratic participation in implementation, while pre-selecting the three SDGs for discussion. Now that the pilot has concluded, we hope that ActionAid and communities can repeat this process from the beginning, with communities taking the lead in prioritising focus goals.

The participatory reflection-action process followed six steps:

**Why?**
Challenge international SDG processes and influence global agendas

**06**
Connection with international level advocacy

**Working with**
UN agencies, international NGOs and CSOs

**01**
Policy and country context analysis

**Working with**
Marginalised communities NGOs, CSOs and social movements

**Why?**
Understand how the SDGs are being implemented at national and local level and what progress has been reported

**Why?**
Connect communities to national level to influence national policies, strategies and budget allocation

**05**
Creating spaces for dialogue and advocate for action at national level

**Working with**
National government agencies, UN agencies

**Six steps for SDG accountability**

**02**
Building partnerships

**Working with**
Community-based organisations and people's movements, local authorities

**Why?**
Connect with other actors working on grassroots human rights issues for joint work

**Why?**
Strengthen community voices by connecting to national movements and strategic actors

**04**
Building a larger alliance to advocate for the demands

**Working with**
National CSOs, NGOs and social movements, sub-national authorities

**03**
Community knowledge building and empowerment (including convening community discussions on the SDGs)

**Working with**
Community-based organisations and people's movements, local authorities

**Why?**
Connect with other actors working on grassroots human rights issues for joint work

The process of building community awareness and knowledge around the SDGs, and documenting community voices, was done in different ways in different communities, according to what would be most effective and useful in each context. Furthermore, this eclectic approach meant that rather than being formulated as a new project (which can stretch capacity), this work was integrated as much as possible with existing development work. A range of methods was used. For example:

- **Focus group discussions** so that the communities could reflect on existing policies relating to the SDGs: whether they were working, and gaps. Groups then debated and reached agreement on a citizens' charter of demands. The groups varied in composition – they had between 10 and 30 participants, and some represented the whole community while others were made up of particular groups, for example women, young people or an ethnic minority. Some of the discussions were extended into **longer workshops**, for example for two days.
- Assessments of the public services in the area ('**report cards**') or surveys to assess their views on an issue.
- **Key informant interviews**, for example from service providers or key community stakeholders.
- Collection of **in-depth stories** and examples from community members.
- The discussions were sometimes a part of a **bigger empowerment project**. For example, communities in Vietnam discussed the implementation of SDG Goal 5 in the context of a larger two-year research, advocacy and behaviour-change program on unpaid care work.

The research work was seen as an ongoing process whereby poor and marginalised communities could become more able to hold institutions accountable and claim their rights. Young people and women were, in general, the main participants.

## Who took part in the six-step programme in each country?

Below is a description of the communities that took part, providing some context for reading the experiences and demands of the communities in the latter part of this report.



Nilphamari

Satkhira  Bagerhat  Chittagong

### BANGLADESH

- Bagerhat, an agriculture-based economy. Two mixed-gender focus group discussions, one with professionals of all ages and one with young people. Roughly 15 participants in each group, who were primarily from the peri-urban areas of Bagerhat.
- Chittagong, an industrial urban area, particularly strong in garment manufacturing. Two focus group discussions of around 19 participants each. One was a women-only group, the other comprised a majority of women from the urban areas in Chittagong.
- Nilphamari, an agriculture-based economy. Two focus group discussions with 25 participants in each, mixed-gender from remote rural areas of the district.
- Satkhira, where there is brick kiln work. One focus group discussion with the Munda community (an ethnic minority), with 15 participants, majority women, and one from the general community, with 15 people, slightly more men than women, from remote rural areas.

## DENMARK

- Focus groups of a total of 30 young people, from three underprivileged areas of the capital city Copenhagen: Tingbjerg, Nørrebro and Bispebjerg. Twice as many women as men were involved. All three areas are urban, and all have a large proportion of social housing; Tingbjerg consists mainly of blocks of flats. All three are areas that are generally marginalised, although Nørrebro is a large part of 'inner' Copenhagen and certain areas of Nørrebro are more marginalised than others.
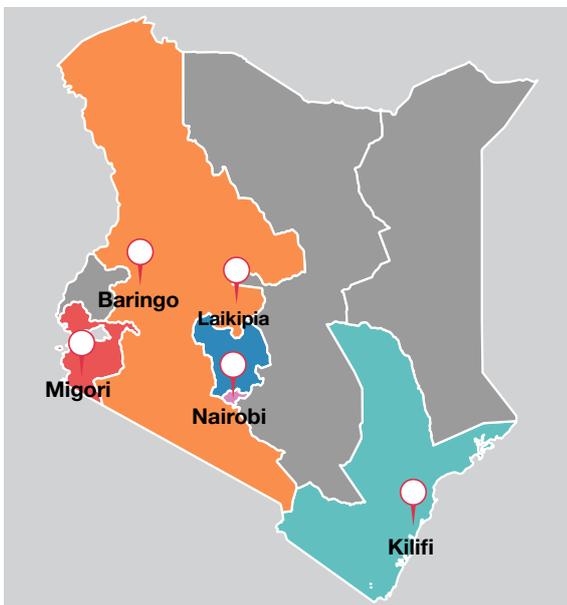
## KENYA

- Baringo county: 125 young women and men from five wards in this rural area in the former Rift Valley Province.
- Kilifi county: 277 men and women, about half of whom were under 35, from four sub-counties in this rural area in the former Coast Province.
- Migori county: 1,249 men and women (including 276 young people and 10 persons with disabilities) in two sub-counties of this rural area in the former Nyanza province.
- Nairobi: 150 young people of mixed gender, including university students, with a deliberate focus on young people drawn from informal settlements in the capital city.
- Laikipia county: 100 young people (30% women) as well as 35 older men and women from this peri-urban area in the former Rift Valley Province.

## TANZANIA

Citizens were from Chamwino district, a rural area in the central zone of Tanzania, near Dodoma.

A two-day community empowerment workshop was held, including women, men and young people. The majority were smallholder women farmers.
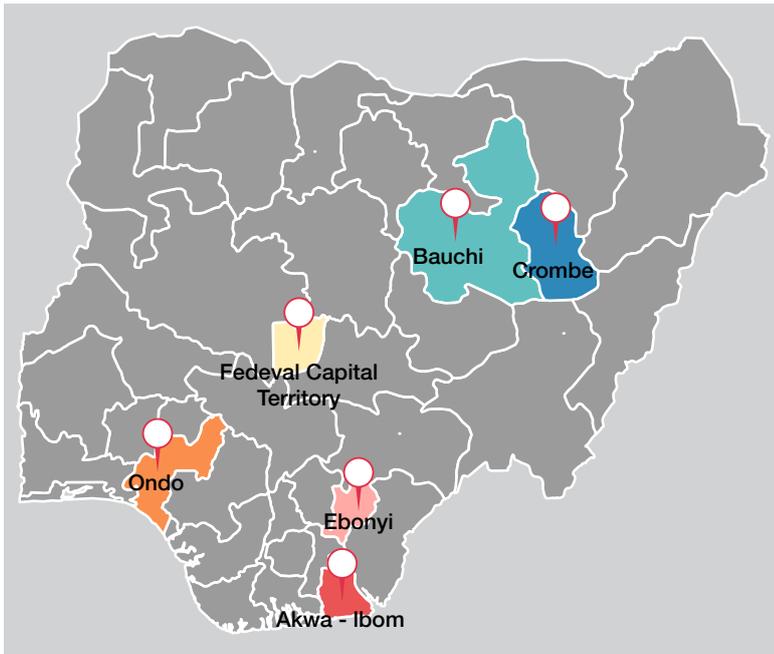
## NIGERIA[13]

Unless otherwise stated, all discussions were with women (that in Gombe also included some people with disabilities) – about 1,000 in total, a third of them young.

- Akwa-Ibom State – 240 low-income women from six communities in two local government areas. Although Akwa-Ibom is one of the highest oil and gas producing states in south Nigeria, women in our sample were generally living in poverty and exclusion.
- Federal Capital Territory – 50 low-income women of Gwabgyi extraction based in rural communities in the north-central zone.

- Bauchi – 88 women and 16 men in three low-income rural local government areas. Bauchi is located in north east Nigeria close to the Boko Haram insurgency.
- Ondo – 175 low-income women in three rural communities.
- Ebonyi – 443 low-income women in seven rural local areas.
- Gombe – 110 low-income women (including women with disabilities) from 15 communities.

In each of the areas a stakeholder forum was held to create awareness on the SDG in question, and these stakeholders themselves facilitated the community mobilisation in which women and young people participated.
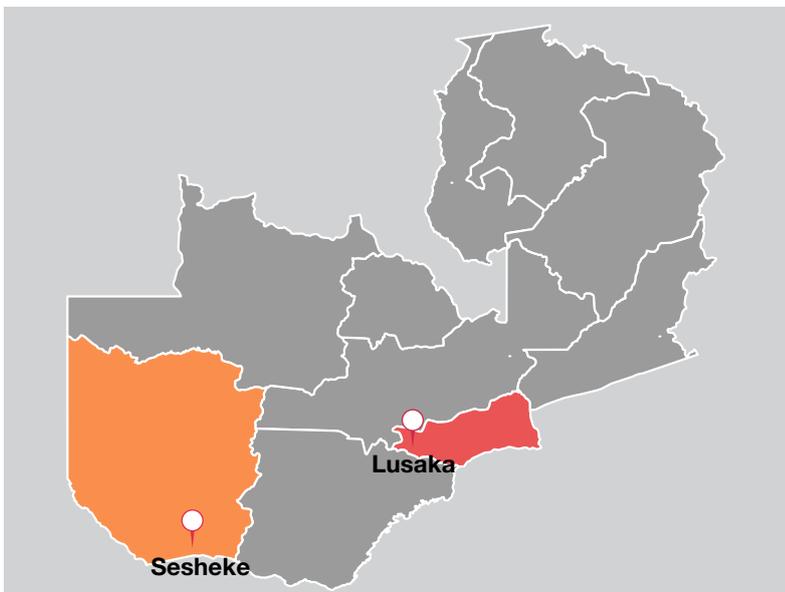


## ZAMBIA

- Sesheke Civil Society Organizations' Alliance Network held a focus group discussion with 20 participants. Sesheke is on the Zambia - Namibia border, and has high levels of poverty as it is constantly hit with droughts.
- Lusaka – at the first civil youth society-led National Youth Conference that attracted over 300 young people, sessions on the SDGs were conducted.

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[13] It must be mentioned that the Nigerian groups all discussed the federal restructuring of Nigeria. This is not included in this analysis, because it is a national issue that does not immediately relate to the SDGs and because groups from different areas had differing opinions. However, it is worth noting that all the groups wanted it to happen (if it happened) peacefully, and two felt restructuring would reduce the marginalisation of the Igbo people.
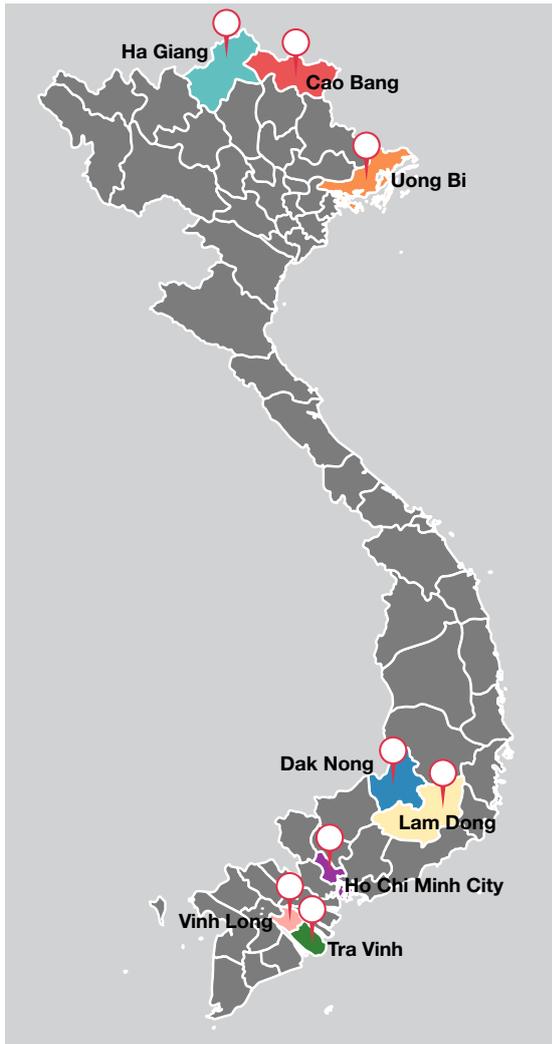
## VIETNAM

Focus group discussions were held with groups of between eight and 30 women and men in eight project sites. In most cases, groups of women and men were separate, but in a small number of cases the discussions were held in mixed groups. More than 80% of participants were over the age of 30. Discussions were held in:

- Thong Nong, Cao Bang and Quan Ba, Ha Giang: remote, mountainous districts among the poorest in Vietnam. All participants in this area were ethnic minorities, primarily Nung, Dao, H'Mong and Tay.
- Krong No, Dak Nong and Lam Ha, Lam Dong: rural highlands districts known for agricultural production, including coffee. Thirty to 40 per cent of participants in these districts were ethnic minorities, including M'Nong, Dao and Tay.
- Vung Liem, Vinh Long, a poor district known for fish farming and fruit cultivation.
- Uong Bi, Quang Ninh and Tra Vinh City, Tra Vinh: both Tra Vinh and Uong Bi are provincial cities that have experienced increases in industrialisation and rural-urban migration. In Tra Vinh, nearly half the participants were from the Khmer ethnic minority.
- Binh Tan district, Ho Chi Minh City: the largest city in Vietnam, located in the south of the country.

## Structure of the report

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Each of the following three chapters is structured around one of the focus SDGs. Each SDG chapter is divided into sections on the focus SDG targets (chosen similarly to the SDGs themselves). To situate our sample groups' voices, we first give some brief analysis, drawn from some of the many sources of official data, of the status of some key indicators in the seven countries. We have looked at recognised global indices and datasets where these are available for the specific SDG targets,  as this data provides a grounding that is comparable across countries. We have supplemented this with some analysis from ActionAid and other secondary sources to provide further context to the community voices.

Each section then presents the voices of the participating citizens on this issue. In most cases, citizens' voices are divided into their experiences, and their demands for change. Wherever possible, parallels between different countries and areas are drawn out. Then, before the report concludes, there are is a section on the SDG process itself.

## Gaps and opportunities

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In the process of undertaking the accountability project and preparing this report, we identified a number of gaps and opportunities for further work around participation and the SDGs.

Women participants in the focus gruop in Gudum Sawaya
Local Government Area, Bauchi, Nigeria
PHOTO: Yakuba Yan Bawa/ActionAid

Firstly, our research primarily focused on conversations with marginalised groups within the seven countries – that is, the samples were deliberately not nationally representative. This has allowed for the voices of the most marginalised to be heard in this report, for future research. However, ActionAid also advocates for universal social protection and broad-based coverage of social policies. For future research, it could be beneficial to also collect views from a more nationally representative sample, as well as targeted views from marginalised groups, to identify what nationwide policy approaches are needed, and what additional measures should be undertaken to 'leave no one behind'.

Another key opportunity in conducting further work around participation would be to broaden the demographic focus of the research. The current research had a specific focus on women and youth, acknowledging young people as a marginalised group in national development, and also reflecting ActionAid's programmatic focus on youth accountability in several of the participating countries. However, older people are also a marginalised group, and a group that is under-represented in SDG reporting (for example, the Multiple-Indicator Cluster Surveys only interview women and men up to the age of 49)[14].

As noted above, ActionAid's research on education, water and sanitation and other infrastructure has identified that privatisation and the rise of public-private partnerships pose risks to the delivery of quality public services for marginalised communities. In our conversations with communities, this same theme of poor service delivery for the most marginalised emerged again and again. At the same time, discussions on implementation of the SDGs regularly emphasise the role of the private sector in delivering the goals and the need for private sector partnerships. Although privatisation was not the focus of our conversations with communities, ActionAid perceives a risk here, and we have noted this in our recommendations. It would be fruitful for future community-led research to focus more specifically on whether the private sector's delivery of SDGs (for example, around health, education or water and sanitation) is benefiting the most marginalised.

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[14] See UNICEF, Multiple indicator cluster surveys, http://mics.unicef.org/ (accessed 6 June 2018)

# Gender equality – citizens' voices

## Violence against women

## Setting the context

Violence against women is highly prevalent the world over. Globally, it is estimated that 35% – just over a third – of women and girls have experienced physical or sexual violence at some time in their lives, most of this by intimate partners.[15] Across the countries that looked at SDG 5 (Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia), the measure for which data is most consistently collected, which also gives a snapshot of the current picture, is the proportion of women who have survived intimate partner violence in the last 12 months. In Bangladesh, Kenya and Zambia around one in four women has survived violence in the last year, and closer to one in three in Tanzania. In Nigeria and Vietnam it is still too high, at around one in 10.[16]

Women endure violence in every society around the world simply because they are female. Socially ascribed gender roles play out to enable this injustice to continue. This influences, and is in turn influenced by, the social, political, cultural and economic spheres. Around the world, state responses to violence against women and girls are inadequate. While most countries have mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, funding for these services is vastly inadequate given the severity of the problem.[17] The UN review of implementation of SDG Goal 5 for the 2017 High Level Political Forum noted the lack of resources for implementing gender equality plans, including inadequate funds for provision of social protection, services and infrastructure, as a significant challenge across all countries.[18] The feedback from citizens engaged in ActionAid's project echoes these concerns.

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[15] World Health Organization (WHO). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. WHO, Geneva, 2013, at p 2. See: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85241/WHO_RHR_HRP_13.06_eng.pdf?sequence=1

[16] UN Women, Global database on violence against women, http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en (accessed 6 June 2018)

[17] WHO. Global status report on violence prevention 2014. WHO, Geneva, 2014, at p 27. See: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Reports/UNDP-GVA-violence-2014.pdf.

[18] ECESA Plus (UN Coalition led by UN Women, UNFPA and UNESCO) 2017 HLPF thematic review of SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/14383SDG5 format-revOD.pdf (accessed 28 May 2018).

PHOTO: ActionAid Tanzania

## Violence against women – citizens' demands

In **Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya**, women interviewed wanted more attention to enforcement of existing laws against violence against women from officials and police, feeling that corrupt practice impedes justice as files and exhibits 'disappear' ("*they get bribed and forget about the issue*"). The groups agreed that women rather than men should staff desks for reporting of rape and domestic violence. They also wanted the Protection against Violence Act regulations to be properly implemented. "*It's sad that when you go to report a rape case at our police stations, the policemen harass you and as victim you get more embarrassed and ashamed. Yet the law as it is creates room for our protection. The Kenyan government should review the implementation,*" **said Stella Nderitu of Emerging Leaders' Foundation.**

In **Satkhira,** a district located in the south west of **Bangladesh,** where the main employment is in brick kilns, the key problem enabling violent incidents is that there are no street lights, which makes it dangerous for women to travel after dark and restricts them from seeking employment opportunities. The young women participants wanted to change this. In **Chittagong, Bangladesh** (where the garment factories are), women's movement becomes restricted in the afternoon due to the presence of a drug-selling market in the community. Drug addiction and abuse has become a security concern for women and young people – it is leading to many instances of sexual harassment and violence. Study participants wanted more attention to be paid to solving this problem, and also more attention paid to ensuring roads and workplaces are violence-free, with better transport facilities to workplaces in remote locations.

In **Chamwino, Tanzania,** the (mixed-gender) community wanted the outlawing of alcohol production from agricultural crops – because drinking of alcohol often leads to male violence.

In **Akwa-Ibom, Nigeria,** participating women demanded that hate speech be discouraged, with sanctions on offenders. Another Nigerian women's group, in **Federal Capital Territory,** wanted security for rural communities against theft and conflict.

# Unpaid care work

## Setting the context

Unpaid care work includes all activities that go towards caring for a household, such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water and firewood, or caring for the ill, elderly and children, when these activities are done by family members for no pay. Unpaid care work also includes voluntary community work.[19] In most societies, these tasks are seen as women's work. Despite the central role this work plays in the household and the economy, it is generally not reflected in national economic analyses or statistics. In a self-reinforcing cycle, women's unpaid care burden limits their opportunities to participate in economic and political life, in turn limiting their power within the economy and the household, which in turn reinforces social norms and employment practices that allocate invisible household tasks to women.

International information on unpaid care work is found in national time-use surveys, which not all countries conduct. Bangladesh and Tanzania have done these, although Tanzania's was done as far back as 2006. However, these surveys both showed women doing much more unpaid care work than men. In Tanzania women did nearly three and a half times as much unpaid care work as men, and in Bangladesh two and a half times as much.[20] Research for ActionAid in 2013 revealed that women do more unpaid care work than men in Nigeria and Kenya: about double the amount in Kenya, and about a quarter more in Nigeria.[21] And further ActionAid research in 2016 showed that in Vietnam women spend about 1.7 times as long as men on unpaid care work.[22]

## Citizens' experience

Kenyan groups from **Laikipia and Nairobi** had in-depth discussions on gender equality. Women and men in the groups said that women and girls in their context '*don't really know about gender equality*' – and, for example, have no idea about the concept of unpaid care work. Culturally, it is believed that a woman cannot have some careers and the suitable place for her is at home and in the kitchen. Sometimes religious practices are at the root of this narrative – religion is important in Kenyan society, and some religious figures say that women cannot lead. The Laikipia and Nairobi groups generally felt that social expectations were the root cause of women's inequality.

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[19] ActionAid. Making care visible: women's unpaid care work in Nepal, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. ActionAid, Johannesburg, 2013 at pp 5, 8. See: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/making_care_visible.pdf.

[20] UN Women. Progress of the world's women. UN Women, 2016. See: http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/

[21] ActionAid. Making care visible: women's unpaid care work in Nepal, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. ActionAid, Johannesburg, 2013 at p 18. See: www.actionaid.org/unpaidcarework

[22] ActionAid Vietnam. Unpaid care work: make a house become a home. ActionAid, Hanoi, 2016 at p 8. See: http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/publications/policy-brief-making-houses-homes-unpaid-carework-project

Communities interviewed in **Vietnam** also commented on the pervasiveness of social norms that allocate the burden of unpaid care to women and limit their participation in paid work and civic life. One female participant from **Ho Chi Minh City** summed up the prevailing view as: *"Generally, housework is considered an obligation by women. They accept and see housework as joy, showing their gratitude to their families."*

## Citizens' demands

*"I am delighted that women's unpaid care work has been included in the policy [on SDGs] as well as in the specific state law, so that the women's contributions to unpaid care work are recorded in economic value."* – female focus group participant, Uong Bi, Vietnam

In **Vietnam,** six communities discussed unpaid care and domestic work, as part of a larger project to enable communities to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. The project was an ongoing reflection-action process whereby participants were encouraged to interrogate their practices, the reasons behind them, and what they could change to shift power. In some of the communities, there had been activities such as training for men on childcare and for women on employment-related skills, theatrical activities to raise awareness, or community activities such as cooking contests for men and sport competitions for women. Women and men had also kept time diaries to document their time spent on paid work, unpaid care and domestic work, rest and leisure.

Those participating in Vietnam wanted a range of measures on unpaid care work. Some wanted more training and awareness-raising activities. Others wanted public services, such as childcare for under-twos, a nursing home for elderly people, a health centre nearer the community, and better water and electricity infrastructure, to save them daily time gathering these essential items. Specific requests included science training for women, a free (community) washing machine, water tanks for poor households, play facilities and extracurricular activities for children, activities such as exercise clubs for women, and support for co-operatives. One Central Highlands community requested vocational training specifically for ethnic minority women, recognising that this group was being 'left behind'.

The community from **Chamwino, Tanzania,** wanted the government to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work, for women to be incentivised to develop economically, for example with skills for modern farming, and for social protection to cover rural areas (and include incentives for saving).

For the participants from **Sesheke, Zambia,** social protection was also important: they said that sustainable social protection (cash transfers) should be a government priority. This group was also the only one to mention maternity protection in its demands on decent work.

Citizens from **Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya,** wanted more recognition of unpaid care and domestic work through the enactment of policies that create a balance between women, girls and men. This relates to a concern that a woman's contribution of unpaid care work is not taken into account, for example when wealth is distributed when a marriage dissolves. They also wanted childcare centres to be included in the Employment Act.

*"Every woman is a working woman; women who may not be formally employed are working and often without recognition or visibility. We must value this contribution especially towards the sustainability of our homes."* **Young woman, focus group participant in Nairobi, Kenya.**

Vuong Thi Sung, 22, and her husband Duong Van Pa, 23, sharing house-work after participating in ActionAid's unpaid care work research.
PHOTO: Hoang Thi Phuong/ActionAid Vietnam

## Participation works: unpaid care and domestic work in Vietnam

ActionAid Vietnam's programme on unpaid care work supported communities to keep time diaries in bursts over 18 months – an intensive form of participation – as part of an ongoing reflection-action process whereby participants were encouraged to interrogate their practices, the reasons behind them, and what they could change to shift power. By the end of this, women were doing almost an hour less unpaid care work a week, and more paid work. Men were also doing less unpaid care work, although with a smaller reduction than women.

In mountainous, remote areas fuel (wood) and water collection still take a lot of time – up to two hours a day. Over the course of the study men in Tra Vinh province started doing more of this work, and women less. In Ha Giang province, both men and women reduced time spent collecting water because water infrastructure was completed.

Mr Duong Minh Tuan, a member of the H'Mong ethnic minority in Thong Nong District, commented that participation in the study changed his views on unpaid care work: "*I realised that housework isn't just women's responsibility, it should be shared among men and the family as well*". Mr Tuan now helps his wife with cooking, cleaning, washing dishes and looking after their one-year-old daughter.

As well as changing individual behaviour, the unpaid care work programme also supported citizens from the eight communities to meet with their local authorities to share their recommendations for reducing and redistributing unpaid care work. As a result, two districts (Krong No and Lam Ha in the Central Highlands) developed concrete action plans for addressing some of the community's recommendations, while Tra Vinh provincial authority committed to developing action plans for SDG implementation – noting that the relevant department would consult stakeholders to develop action plans for implementing Target 5.4 on unpaid care work.

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# Eliminating harmful practices

## Setting the context

Harmful practices for women for which information is available include child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is a traditional practice that is deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures. Although illegal in many countries, often the law is not well understood or enforced, allowing the practice to continue. FGM can result in severe medical complications, increased risk of maternal and infant mortality, and sometimes death. It is also an extreme violation of a girl or woman's right to bodily integrity. Although rates of FGM have declined, it is estimated that at least 200 million girls alive today have undergone FGM.[23] Data on FGM is available from Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania. In each of these countries, between 10 and 20% of women have undergone it. Data is not available for the other countries.[24]

Child marriage is measured as the proportion of 20-24 year olds who were first married or in union before the age of 18. Child marriage interrupts a girl's education, development and career prospects and represents a violation of her right to consent. It is still very prevalent, with over 750 million women and girls alive today married before their 18th birthday.[25] In Bangladesh, 59% of women were married as children, in Nigeria 44%, in Tanzania and Zambia just under a third. The figure goes below a quarter in Kenya, and is around one in 10 in Vietnam.[26]

## Eliminating harmful practices – citizens' demands



Monir Hossain
PHOTO: Swarna Moye Sarker/ ActionAid Bangladesh

*"Child marriage is a big problem in our society… our society is man-dominated, and men get more freedom compared to women… but child marriage affects both boys and girls. Some parents don't think about child marriage, how it will affect the future.*

*I heard from some of my friends, that permission for marriage of a 12-year-old girl was to be given. We decided to get her parents to understand that it would be harmful for her. We went, and the parents agreed to stop the marriage."* ***Monir Hossain, 16 years old, Chittagong, Bangladesh***

In **Nigeria**, a demand from the majority of women across the six areas studied was to eliminate harmful practices, to promote gender parity.

The groups in **Sesheke, Zambia,** suggested that an effective justice system is operationalised at all levels to promote women's rights. If this was gender responsive, it would reduce harmful practices.

The community from **Chamwino, Tanzania,** wanted the law allowing child marriage to be changed, and also to include punishment for offenders.

This was echoed in **Bangladesh,** where in **Chittagong** the group suggested that child marriage played a significant role in reducing women's access to paid employment opportunities.

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[24] UN Women, Global database on violence against women.
[25] ECESA Plus (UN Coalition led by UN Women, UNFPA and UNESCO) (2017) 2017 HLPF thematic review of SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, at p 2, citing UNICEF data.
[26] UN Women, Global database on violence against women.

**Participation works: reduction in child marriage in Zambia**

Zambia has a high rate of child marriage, and it has become a vital topic of discussion in the country, making it more visible to people who were previously unaware of its existence. Although there are laws in place to prevent it, these have rarely been implemented in practice. Child marriage is associated with high levels of poverty, and therefore seen as a rural phenomenon in Zambia – although there are also some reports of cases in urban areas.

The Zambian campaign to end child marriage was launched in 2013, spearheaded by the government Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, in close collaboration with other ministries, UN organisations and CSOs. It has involved parents, traditional leaders and women's groups.

There has been a reduction in the number of child marriages reported across the country, from 60% in 2013 to 45% in 2017, and girls who were married off by their parents are being sent back to school. More people in communities are becoming aware of the negative impact of child marriages among girls, on both their economic and other rights.

# Women's employment, economic position and participation

## Setting the context

The world over, women get a poor deal in the working world. Women are more likely to be unemployed, or in precarious work, than men. Women earn less than men for work of equal value. And women are poorly represented in public and corporate economic decision-making.[27]

In all five of the countries with data, women's participation in the labour force (including formal and informal employment) is lower than men's. In Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia the picture is very similar: around 70% of women participate (in Tanzania, slightly higher at 74%) compared with around 80% of men. In Nigeria, the overall rate is lower for both sexes – 52% for women as compared with 59% for men. And in Bangladesh, women's participation, at 36%, is very much lower than men's 81%.[28]

While in some cases men's and women's labour force participation rates are not far apart, the low proportion of women in management positions highlights women's lower economic and employment status and opportunities. Data on this is available for four of the countries looking at SDG 5. In Nigeria only around a third of people in management positions are women, in Tanzania and Vietnam around a quarter, and in Bangladesh around a tenth.[29]

Moreover, women face challenges accessing decent work (work that delivers a fair wage, safe conditions, prospects for promotion, reasonable hours and does not infringe human dignity). Economic growth in many cases does not lead to significant job creation, or creates low-paid, insecure manufacturing jobs for women.[30]  In most regions, women are overrepresented in vulnerable employment (self-employed or working in a family business) – for example, 75% of women who work in sub-Saharan Africa are in informal sector jobs.[31]  ActionAid research has also demonstrated an association between violence against

[27] UN Women and International Labour Organization (ILO). Decent work and women's economic empowerment: good policy and practice. UN Women, New York, 2012 at p 3. See: http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/8/decent-work-and-women-s-economic-empowerment-good-policy-and-practice#view.

[28] ILO Database (ILOSTAT), Employment to population ratio, 2017, see: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 16 May 2018)

[29] ILO Database (ILOSTAT), Female share of employment in managerial positions, 2013-2017, see: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 16 May 2018)

[30] ActionAid. What a way to make a living: using industrial policy to create more and better jobs. ActionAid, London, 2015. See: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/aa_what_a_way_to_make_a_living_final_low_res.pdf

[31] UN Women and ILO. Decent work and women's economic empowerment: good policy and practice, at p 7; and ActionAid. Double jeopardy: violence against women and economic inequality. ActionAid, Johannesburg, 2017. See: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaid_double_jeopardy_decent_work_violence_against_women.pdf

women and women's economic exploitation.[32] For example, countries where more women are self-employed or in vulnerable forms of work are, on average, associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence. Similarly, in countries where more women are agricultural holders (that is, have decision-making power and control over resources) rather than agricultural workers, rates of intimate partner violence are lower.[33]

## Citizens' experience

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"*The women are not able [to take leadership roles], due to culture or traditional norms that [posit] they are not supposed to be the leaders,*" **Francis Liswaniso, Seseke, Zambia**

"*Even though women have the same qualifications as their counterparts, often there are times when women's capabilities in different fields are underestimated and not accorded commensurate remuneration or regard. This demoralises them, and sometimes you find the women opting not to compete against men which in turn hinders optimal achievement of their dreams.*" **Fiona Emali – young woman from informal settlement in Kenya**

Many young participants from **Chittagong, Bangladesh** where many women are employed in ready-made garment factories, think that, for them, being employed does help women combat gender-based violence. Participants from Chittagong also believed that decent work is seen as increasing women's ability to participate in decision-making, both in the family and in the wider community and society. Conversely, in **Nilphamari, Bangladesh,** women do not have equal access to local level decision-making. Any decision-making benefit may depend on the nature of the work. Participants from **Satkhira, Bangladesh,** (where the work is in brick kilns) said that their work has not boosted their decision-making power in this way, because the work is not 'decent' and is not regarded as such. It was also said that women rarely work in the brick kilns: job opportunities are limited in general, and of those that are available, women rarely participate.

Although employment opportunities are in general much lower for women than for men in Bangladesh, it was interesting that some of the young women taking part in the focus groups had a different experience, feeling that they did have equal opportunity. One of the focus groups in Bangladesh made an unsurprising link between women's employment and unpaid care work: in general, they said, women's responsibility for unpaid care work limits their access to paid employment. Women's employment is not yet always encouraged at family level.

## Citizens' demands

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In **Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya,** women and men wanted strict implementation of gender equality-related laws and policies, such as the constitutional guarantee prescribing that at least a third of the elective and appointive positions within public institutions should be occupied by women. They also wanted gender policies within universities and institutions of higher learning.

In **Seseke, Zambia,** participants in focus groups thought that women's economic rights should be prioritised.

The Tanzanian participants from **Chamwino** had several wide-ranging demands relating to women's economic positions more broadly: punishment for men who abandon their families causing economic hardship, enactment of women's inheritance rights, and opportunities to learn budgeting skills.

Nigerian women's economic demands, from across the different areas, were: support for women's co-operatives, economic rights programmes for women (giving self-esteem and financial independence), poverty eradication programmes for women, better infrastructure, and educational opportunities (including literacy) for women. Nigerian women participants (from nearly

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[32] ActionAid. Double jeopardy: violence against women and economic inequality.
[33] Ibid, at p 14 – countries compared were all low-income countries.

all the different areas) also wanted a requirement for 35% of representatives in all government processes to be women (already in the National Gender Policy) to go in the constitution, and be implemented, and better public awareness of gender legislation. Nigerian women also wanted a range of ways for women's voices to be better heard, for example better representation of women in leadership, advocacy opportunities for women, for their regional leaders to support women in politics, better girls' education (leading to girls' eventual political participation), and for it to be made more attractive for women to participate.

## The impact of public finance – investment in childcare in Vietnam

Although the differential is less than in many other countries, women shoulder the majority of unpaid care and domestic work in Vietnam. This often leads to them taking closer-to-home, less secure paid work than men, and also to lower political participation, as their 'sphere' is perceived as the home, while men occupy public space.[34]

Somewhat unusually, Vietnam has a political target on the gender gap in unpaid care work: to reduce the housework gap between women and men by half by 2015 and by 1.5 times by 2020.[35]

Vietnamese childcare coverage for older children is very good – with 98% of five-year-old children enrolled in kindergarten, and more women in paid work than in many countries.[36] Fifty nine per cent of Vietnamese childcare was private in 2002 but by 2016 only 16%, as there was considerable public investment in childcare (for example, 1.3 billion USD in 2013).[37] It is worth noting that this investment in the care economy also creates jobs for women; almost all childcare workers are women.

[34] UN Women. Discussion paper – unpaid care and domestic work: issues and suggestions for Viet Nam. UN Women, Hanoi, 2016 at p. 7.
[35] Government of Vietnam. National strategy for gender equality 2011-2020. Decision No. 2351/QD-TTg of 2011.
[36] Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, Pre-school statistics for 2017-18. See: https://moet.gov.vn/thong-ke/Pages/thong-ke-giao-duc-mam-non.aspx (accessed 12 June 2018).
[37] Ibid; MOET. Vietnam national education for all 2015 review. MOET and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Hanoi, 2015; See: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002327/232770e.pdf; UNESCO. Education financing in Vietnam: 2009-2013. UNESCO, Hanoi, 2014. See: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/vietnam-nea-report.pdf

# Youth employment and decent work – citizens' voices

## Youth employment

### Setting the context

Youth unemployment affects young people from all walks of life – from informal street sellers to recently graduated university students – and represents a massive social injustice. Youth unemployment is an everyday reality for more than 71 million young men and women around the world,[38]  impacting on health, education, family, environment, resilience and quality of life. It has ramifications not just for the young men and women directly affected, but also for the families they support, and in the long term their community and national development.

Data on youth employment is available for four of the countries that looked at SDG 8: Bangladesh, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia (although for the latter three countries it dates back to 2012 or 2013). The youth unemployment rate is around 15% in Zambia, 13% in Bangladesh, 10% in Nigeria and 6% in Tanzania. In each of the countries the unemployment rate for young women is slightly higher than it is for young men.[39]

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is higher for young women than young men in all the countries. In Bangladesh, it is much higher: 10% of young men are NEET and 45% of young women. In Tanzania it is quite a bit higher, with 23% of young men and 41% of young women being NEET. The figure is closer in the other countries. In Nigeria 18% of young men and 34% of young women, and in Zambia 21% of young men and 30% of young women are NEET.[40]

The above figures illustrate the scale of unemployment, but do not take account of the quality of jobs. Young people around the world struggle to access decent work. According to the International Labour Organization, nearly 17% of working youth live below the extreme poverty threshold of US$1.90 per day, and the labour market is moving towards less secure forms of work, such as contract-free employment. Young people are twice as likely as adults to be in temporary employment.[41]  The phenomenon of 'jobless growth' exacerbates young people's limited options and offers few prospects that continued economic growth will bring the change in opportunities that young people are calling for. Citizens in ActionAid's focus groups highlighted the frustration that young people experience – and the need for changes in the broader economy to facilitate this, rather than band-aid solutions.

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[38] ILO. Global employment trends for youth 2017. ILO, Geneva, 2017, at p. 2. See:   http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_598675.pdf

[39] ILO Database (ILOSTAT), Unemployment by sex and age, 2013-2017, see: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 16 May 2018)

[40] ILO Database (ILOSTAT), Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training, 2013-2017. See: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 16 May 2018)

[41] ILO. Global employment trends for youth 2017 at p 2.

# Youth employment – citizens' experience

"**Y**ou can just imagine a bunch of old people sitting in a room going 'hmmmmmm what can the youth of today offer in employment, they lack experience they have no obligations so why should we give them the first consideration for employment!' Of course they get it totally wrong. They should just ask us and give us those employment opportunities and assess." **Marylize Buibwa, Kenyan focus group participant**

"A certificate definitely helps in getting a job, but seed funds can help us create our own opportunities," **Focus group participant, Bangladesh**

Overall the **Bangladesh** focus groups found that access to employment for young people was very variable, with far more opportunities – unsurprisingly – in urban than in rural areas. Nevertheless, government training opportunities for young people are available in all the areas (although the citizens' demands show that the quantity and quality of this is variable). However, young participants from Bagerhat and Satkhira also brought forward instances where jobs and training-related information are scarce, with no job information centre and information rarely reaching remote areas.

In **Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya,** the focus groups said that most young people prefer the idea of a white collar job, and believe that to get one (or to be employed at all) you need to be a graduate. This means that those who don't make it to university or college often give up hope and give up trying, and instead 'engage in undesirable practices'. Employment is a major concern for young people in Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya. They are frustrated both by the lack of jobs and by inequitable access to the jobs available.

Life is not always easy for those Kenyans who do get degrees, either – jobs are not necessarily available that use the knowledge and skills acquired in degrees, and the work people do is usually paid less than those skilled jobs would be. One Kenyan participant said, "You might train as a nuclear scientist and work as something else".

Young people's skills do not match job market needs, and many are underemployed or unemployed. Furthermore, information about employment opportunities can be scarce, and there is nepotism and corruption in the allocation of jobs. Many of the participants felt that only the corrupt or well-connected

have any chance of accessing decent work. Policies to improve youth employment were not consulted on and do not work well. Gender, tribe and physical ability are further key determinants of whether young people are likely to find work. Those on the wrong side of these divide have even worse career prospects than young people do as a whole.

"*I have worked really hard to get good grades in school and I am a well-read, smart girl. It's incredibly demoralising that some people who are related to some politicians or civil servants and have barely finished school are probably going to steal my dream job, and I will not get the chance to even face the interviewing panel as the decision has already been made.*" 20 year old, Kenyan focus group participant.

## Citizens' demands
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Young citizens from all the regions of **Bangladesh,** as well as those in **Nairobi and Laikipia in Kenya,** wanted more access to technical and vocational training. Participants in Bangladesh focus groups said that opportunities exist but are insufficient, and information does not reach marginalised groups such as ethnic minority communities, nor people in remote areas (this was pointed out in Satkhira and Nilphamari). Kenyan participants wanted the education system to focus more on practical and business skills, and less on academic degrees. They then wanted training to be followed by loans, so they could set up in business, as well as (in Kenya) better access to markets, better information about job opportunities, and a more participatory approach to policymaking, with young people represented in the formulation of the policies that affect them.

The communities from both these countries also recognised the need for wider government action to ensure that there is sufficient work of good quality. Some Kenyan participants proposed a focus on technology transfer into Kenya, generating more highly skilled and higher-paying jobs. And in **Chittagong, Bangladesh,** in particular, it was recognised that industrialisation had created increased opportunities for employment. Participants from **Nilphamari, Bangladesh,** wanted better professional development opportunities.

Beyond this, Bangladeshi participants focused on ethnic minorities. They want courses to include more people with disabilities. Participants in Satkhira believed that their ethnic minority status (the indigenous Munda community) led to them being excluded from government services – very few of them had access to government training. They also wanted teachers to be better trained in inclusion of people with disabilities.

Some of the Kenyan participants' further demands related to transparency and accountability. They wanted implementation of existing policies and accountability of implementers, sanctions on leaders who break the rules, and transparency in resource allocation, distribution and in job selection. They also had some

interesting specific ideas: more mentoring programmes and investment in agribusiness. They felt the latter would help young people pursue opportunities in this, rather than feeling they have to move to the cities to look for good jobs.

Nigerian women from **Ebonyi** also wanted better employment opportunities for young people. Participants from **Chamwino, Tanzania,** wanted more training in entrepreneurial skills for young people, and for the government to prioritise entrepreneurship skills in the education system, preparing young people for self employment. And they wanted loans for young people and women, to facilitate self employment. Finally they wanted the government to alter the structure of the economy – encouraging industrial development which, they said, would have the knock-on effect of benefiting farmers by expanding the domestic market for crops. It would also create more jobs.

## The impact of public finance – youth employment in Bangladesh

There are government services to promote youth employment and innovation in Bangladesh. For example, the Youth Development Centre goes door-to-door to engage young women, and provides training in areas such as poultry, tailoring, fish cultivation, repairing electrical machinery, beauty care and computing. There are distance learning courses available, and training is publicised in the media. Other training is provided by the Department for Youth, for example on computing, farming, mechanics and tailoring. The government Access to Information project has prioritised young people's skills development and employment since 2016, by creating a coordination mechanism that brings together ministries and government departments with civil society and the private sector.

In the 2017-18 budget, the top priority spending area identified by the Ministry of Youth and Sports for the ministry's projected expenditure budget of BDT13.87 billion (US$163.94 million) was training for unemployed young people, provision of loans and employment creation.[42]

Since 2009, nearly two million young people have been trained by the Ministry of Youth, and half a million of them had the opportunity to become self-employed.[43]

However, only 0.3% of the overall government budget is allocated to the Ministry for Youth and Sports,[44] and during 2016/17 the allocation per young person was just US$0.7, which is clearly insufficient to reach everyone who could benefit. More finance is needed.

# Decent work

## Setting the context

Decent work requires that people have adequate earnings and reasonable hours, as well as security in the workplace, social protection for workers and their families, and prospects for personal development. Decent work also requires that workers can organise and participate in decisions that affect their lives, and that there are equal opportunities and equal treatment for all.[45] As reflected in citizens' demands below, decent work is under threat.

[42] Government of Bangladesh, Budget 2017-18; chapter 13, Ministry of Youth and Sports; http://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/3ef1111d_f0d6_41ea_aca9_6afb61228825/G-2_03_36_Youth_English.pdf (accessed 12 June 2018)
[43] Centre for Research and Information (CRI). Bangladesh: Youth development. CRI, Dhaka, 2017, at p 12. See: http://cri.org.bd/publication/bangladesh-youth-development/#p=12
[44] Karim, E. Prioritising health care and sports for the youth, The Daily Star. 23 June 2017. See: https://www.thedailystar.net/change-makers/prioritising-health-care-and-sports-the-youth-1424185 (accessed 12 June 2018)
[45] ILO. Toolkit for mainstreaming employment and decent work, ILO, Geneva, 2007.  See: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/publication/wcms_172609.pdf

In 2017, a staggering 1.4 billion people worldwide were estimated to be in vulnerable forms of employment (self-employed or employed in the informal economy), with global rates of vulnerable employment set to increase.[46] At the same time, the pace of working poverty reduction is slowing.[47] Around the world a complex network of factors, including macroeconomic policies that threaten the tax base available for social protection and increase economic inequality, and industrial policies that favour low-paid jobs and undermine protections for workers – particularly workers with disabilities – are contributing to conditions that maintain the proportions of people who are working and also poor.

Across the countries that measured SDG 8, very high proportions of people are 'working poor' (earning less than $3.10 per day) in many of the countries: around two thirds, or slightly more, in Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Bangladesh. The proportion is lower in Kenya, at just over a quarter, and lowest in Vietnam, at 8%.[48] Hours are also unreasonably long for many. Excessive working time is internationally defined as working over 48 hours per week. This is the case for around 60% of Bangladeshi and Tanzanian workers, and around 30% of Kenyan, Nigerian and Vietnamese ones. Working hours are not measured in Zambia.[49]

## Citizens' demands

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*"Labour rights are not respected much because people – in as much as they know labour rights exist – don't know where to report violations to. I think the government should look into this because it's affecting the future leaders of tomorrow – youth."* **Pauline, 19, activist from Sesheke, Zambia**

Wages were said to be too low in **Chittagong and Satkhira, Bangladesh.** The groups from **Nairobi and Laikipia, Kenya**, also said that some jobs have ridiculously low pay. The citizens from **Sesheke, Zambia**, wanted a decent income too, and jobs to pay at least the minimum wage.

Focus groups also looked at several aspects of the working environment. In some cases, the working environment was wholly inadequate, with basic facilities such as water and sanitation not available – for example, at the brick kilns in **Satkhira, Bangladesh**. One group said that most workplaces are not adapted to support people with disabilities, and wanted this to change.

Not only young people, but workers of all ages wanted more learning opportunities at their workplaces to facilitate professional growth.

It was noted in **Chittagong** that the presence of labour unions and human rights associations had made workers' negotiations more visible and successful. The **Zambian** participants also mentioned unions, but in a less positive way: they wanted to improve union leaders' knowledge of laws that protect workers from victimisation. They also wanted the creation of decent jobs with social security, occupational health and safety, maternity protection and paid leave.

Citizens from **Chamwino, Tanzania**, focused on a group at risk of being left behind – people with disabilities. They wanted the law on disabilities – which requires 10% of all employees to be people with disabilities – to be implemented.

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[46] ILO. World employment and social outlook – trends 2018. ILO, Geneva, 2018, at p 1. See: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_615594.pdf
[47] Ibid
[48] ILOSTAT. Employment by Economic Class, 2017: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat  (accessed 18 May 2018)
[49] ILOSTAT. Hours of work: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 18 May 2018). All figures from between 2013 and 2017, apart from Kenya which is from 1999.

# Accountability, participation and corruption – citizens' voices

This section focuses on marginalised communities' experiences and demands in the area of accountability, participation and non-discrimination, focused on SDG 16.

## What is SDG 16?

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

ActionAid has focused in particular on the following targets:

16.5    Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
16.6    Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
16.7    Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, measured by the proportion of positions in public institutions held by age, sex, disability and population group, and the proportion of these groups who believe decision-making is responsive.

## Accountability and participation

### Setting the context

The state's accountability to its citizens is a key pillar of democratic governance, intended to ensure that society attends to the rights of all citizens, and that leaders use their power responsibly and for the greater good. This requires systems that impose restraints on power and encourage government officials to act in the public's best interests, including the rule of law. It also requires that citizens have access to information about the activities of governments, and have mechanisms to communicate with decision-makers and participate in decisions that affect them. Civil society is a key 'institution' through which citizens are able to hold governments to account – however, space for civil society to organise, protest and speak out is often restricted.

Government transparency is measured by an international NGO, the International Budget Partnership, which does a detailed biennial survey of countries' budget and spending information, for which a higher score indicates greater openness, leading to an index score of up to 100. Kenya scored in the 40s,  indicating that limited information is available; Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia all scored below 20, indicating scant or no information.[51] Denmark does not take part. ActionAid's work on Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability in Governance (ELBAG) has found that engaging communities living in poverty in the process of developing local budgets can reduce corruption and result in pro-poor spending.[52]

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[50] According to the CIVICUS State of civil society report, 109 countries around the world have closed, repressed or obstructed civic space. Civicus, State of civil society report 2018, https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-overview_top-ten-trends.pdf (accessed 6 June 2018).
[51] International Budget Partnership . The open budget survey: open budget index rankings, 2017 https://www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/open-budget-index-rankings/ (accessed 12 June 2018)
[52] ActionAid. ELBAG training handbook. ActionAid, available at: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/elbag_training_manual.pdf

Several of the countries are part of the intergovernmental Open Government Partnership, a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and strengthen governance. Members are Denmark, Kenya and Nigeria.[53]

## Citizens' experience

"*Public resources, like ambulances and fire engines, should be used for their purpose.*" **Kenyan focus group participant from Kilifi**

Young participants from Nilphamari, Bangladesh, commented that government services do not equally benefit ethnic minorities. They also said that government services do not always maintain the expected level of transparency.

People in Baringo, Kenya, did a 'report card' on the way the budget is spent in their area, providing a snapshot of a community's experience of accountability and transparency. Although they were not satisfied with the process for getting on the health management committee, 72% were highly satisfied with the actual healthcare: it is "affordable, accessible, acceptable and safe". However, with respect to the school, 100% of respondents were dissatisfied with the amount of budget spent – because the resulting classroom that had been built was not big enough, so was not used. The community was not consulted on this spending.


Community discussion on SDG 16 in Migori county, Kenya.
PHOTO: Vincent Mwita Ogolla/Activista Kenya

However, they are pleased education is happening at all and that fees are affordable. They believed the market shaders that had been bought were way too expensive. And with respect to a much-needed community cattle dip: the money was all spent, the budget was deemed adequate, but the cattle dip was only half completed. There was no community involvement in planning it.

In Denmark, early in 2018, the government floated the possibility of a suite of new measures aimed at areas of social housing in cities, known in Denmark as 'ghettos'; areas where housing costs are relatively low and many poor people live. The 'Ghetto Plan' sets a goal of 'no ghettoes by 2030'. Some of the measures – such as a focus on schools – have been seen as positive. But one proposal is not only against the spirit of SDG 16, it seems to actively contravene it. This proposal is that punishment for criminal offenders in the 'ghetto' areas should be enhanced – in other words, that punishment for the same crime will be greater if it happens in ghetto areas.

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[54] DR TV, Debatten: farvel til ghettoen? 1 March 2018, https://www.dr.dk/tv/se/debatten/debatten-dr2/debatten-2018-03-01#!/52:54

The Ghetto Plan has been proposed without consultation with social housing residents, the people who will actually be affected by these changes supposedly for their benefit. Young people's response to this is: "*Is it really true that you can develop a policy in today's Denmark without having a dialogue and including the people affected by the policy? We ask you to remember that it is the homes of people that the initiative concerns. The people in these areas have been dehumanised…for us these places are first and foremost the places where we took our first steps, grew up, played games for the first time, and where we live.*"

Eden Tewolde, a young resident of Tingbjerg, was interviewed on Danish TV.  In addition to the above, she said, "*There are problems in the area. But there are also many positive things happening. It is difficult to live in an underprivileged area when people constantly tell you that people aren't successful there... Why didn't anyone speak to us, when the political process started? In the 24 years that I have lived in Tingbjerg I have never had the impression that politicians and government wanted to collaborate with local citizens... the proposal is an initiative that is creating fear.*"

## Citizens' demands

Kenyan citizens from the five counties, **Baringo, Kilifi, Laikipia, Migori and Nairobi**, developed citizens' charters of demand on broader issues of accountability and transparency.

These fell into several categories. First was a demand for more public participation – the enactment or implementation of a local public participation act, the inclusion of young people, people with disabilities and women (and their views being taken seriously), and ensuring representation of all groups in public positions. This latter point included a demand for the implementation of the Kenyan two-thirds gender rule.

Second were some demands around access to information. There is a law on access to information and the demand was to implement it. People wanted more imaginative and broader ways of publicising public opportunities, from notices on religious buildings to use of social media to engage young people. And they wanted local information centres in every village, public transparency boards, and better outreach to remote communities. Plans and budgets should be made public and reported on periodically.

The third area was allocation of funds – mostly from Baringo. People wanted educational bursaries to be allocated more systematically, and a mechanism to monitor this, with more public notice of the availability of bursaries and wider publicity of places on the committees governing their allocation. Engagement in budgeting also came up, with citizens from Baringo noting that there is currently no inclusivity in decision-making on the budget, and participants from Migori commenting on the need to release much more information on the budget and its expenditure each year.

The community in **Chamwino, Tanzania**, wanted timely disbursal of government funds according to the budget. They also wanted more profiling of citizens' participation in development projects – particularly of women and young people – in order to ensure the right projects, which the community needs, are implemented.

Young citizens of the **Danish** 'ghettos' want to be consulted on any proposals affecting their areas, including opportunities to propose positive alternative plans to improve the areas, such as meeting places for young people and more green space. They also suggest reducing 'ghettoisation' with offers of housing for residents of underprivileged areas in "areas with a high representation of 'ethnic Danes'".

**Participation works – new young campaigners in Denmark**

The positive impact of the Danish young people's campaign is already visible, with some of the young people and the whole group enormously empowered by their opportunity to speak on national TV. Under consideration are a protest on the day (if it comes) that the plan is voted on in parliament, local events in the various social housing areas, and an online petition.

# Corruption and bribery

## Setting the context
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The NGO Transparency International surveys countries annually to create the international Corruption Perceptions Index. A higher score means less perception of corruption, and Denmark scored very highly at 88. Tanzania and Zambia were in the middle, scoring in the 30s, and Kenya and Nigeria just slightly lower, scoring in the high 20s.[55] As well as representing an impediment to accountability,  democratic governance and social equality, corruption has been linked to lower development outcomes. Transparency International has found a strong positive correlation between lower rates of corruption and better outcomes on education, health and water and sanitation.[56]

## Citizens' experience
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The reported incidence of bribery in Kenya was high in all three communities, notably 74% in Baringo according to a survey of the participating citizens. This was mostly to the police, but also to health officials (to get treatment faster and cheaper drugs), national government officials (to get land registry and transfer and birth certificates), Kenya Revenue Authority (to get vehicle transfer documents and passports), school officials (to get school places and contracts) and county officials (to get jobs and business permits). Migori noted that 'the majority' pay bribes, and that these can be food rather than money.

## Citizens' demands
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On bribery and corruption, citizens' demands from **Baringo, Kilifi and Migori, Kenya**, and **Akwa-Ibom, Nigeria**, were simple and uncompromising: to investigate and prosecute officials for corrupt practices, to recover and return the proceeds of corruption, and to have stronger anti-corruption agencies and policies, including at country level, with reporting on their implementation.

In addition, some of the Nigerian groups had demands relating to elections. Women from Akwa-Ibom State want to discourage 'God-fatherism', where a powerful individual uses resources and access to the state apparatus to influence the election outcome. Women from Ebonyi state wanted an end to 'imposition of candidates on women', where men or communities task women with voting for particular candidates.

A priority for citizens of **Chamwino, Tanzania**, was that the police should stop revealing information on who has reported criminals, and that those police officers who did so should be heavily punished.

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[55] Transparency International. Corruption perceptions index 2017.  https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017 (accessed 13 June 2018)

[56] Transparency International, The anti-corruption catalyst: realising the MDGs by 2015. Transparency International, Berlin, 2010, at p 2. See: https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/the_anti_corruption_catalyst_realising_the_mdgs_by_2015.

# The SDG process – citizens' voices

*"The government signed the SDGs in 2015, but then most of them are not followed. As community activators we should do much to see these things being followed because our communities are blank – they are not aware of things that were agreed in the SDGs. So it's up to us who have the knowledge, at least, to sensitise the community so they can hold government responsible".* **Chairperson of Seseke Civil Society Platform, Zambia**

*"Leaders should not sit around in offices, they should visit the grassroots and collect first hand data,"* – **Kenyan focus group participant**

*"If the authorities come and walk shoulder to shoulder, they can hear the voices of the individuals… Individuals have their own opinions, by connecting with them loopholes can be identified and solved,"* **Poly Aktar, Bagerhat, Bangladesh**

While we focused the majority of this work on the experience of policies related to SDGs 5, 8 and 16, some of the countries also looked at the whole of the process of the SDGs in their country, asking their focus groups whether they felt consulted and the nature of the consultation.

## Citizens' experience

In Nigeria, where the participants were all women, they said that there had been no significant inclusion of women's rights and gender equality groups in the SDG process, and that not much is being done to localise the SDGs – that is, increase awareness of them at local level. There are no initiatives to ensure the SDG indicators correspond to local level plans developed by local people. Also, they suggested that it is hard to get statistics at sub-national level, there is low knowledge of SDGs in regional and local government, and CSOs are not much engaged by the national SDG secretariat.

In the **Kenyan communities**, in general it was evident that the majority of the communities and especially young people had little or no knowledge of the government's commitments under the SDGs, and how this has an impact on their day-to-day lives in terms of improving their livelihoods. In one Kenyan community (Kilifi), the SDGs on food security, health, education and roads/infrastructure were somewhat known. Gender equality (SDG 5) and participation (SDG 16) were hardly known at all (0.7% and 6% respectively of those participating in the survey in Kilifi).

In **Vietnam**, the government has issued a detailed National Action Plan to implement the SDGs, however local level knowledge of the plan and its mechanisms for implementation was patchy. In Tra Vinh, the provincial authority was aware of the National Action Plan and had already issued its own Provincial Action Plan.[57] However, at district and sub-district (commune) level in all eight project sites, authorities and citizens were less clear on what Vietnam's SDG commitments were and how they were to be implemented.


PHOTO: ActionAid Bangladesh

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[57] Decision No. 1333/QD-UBND, 26 July 2017

# Citizens' demands

**Kenyan citizens** (from **Kilifi**) wanted a range of measures to improve public engagement with the SDG process. They wanted more effort put into public awareness. They wanted to be able to monitor development with progress reports by government on development (which is required by law). They wanted more engagement with local government staff, facilitated by local administrators having training on the SDGs, and also specific programmes to bring them together with government officers, and a budget for this. Finally, and simply, they wanted community views to be taken seriously.

**Nigerian** women had similar demands, with more of an emphasis on the regional dimensions (perhaps unsurprisingly in a country where the differences between regions is currently in the political spotlight). They wanted the SDGs cascaded to local level. They also put an emphasis on effective data, including using technology to equip local groups to collect it.

**Zambian** citizens from **Sesheke** wanted the public, civil servants and elected leaders to have greater awareness of the SDGs, and capacity-building on them for government workers such as District Commissioners. Participants in the Lusaka national youth conference, in Zambia, commented that governments and NGOs need to have open conversations on plans. When documents are created, they said, vast amounts of sensitisation must be done, especially at local level, to engage and involve people. Work must be done to unpack this information, and localise and disseminate it, so that a clear understanding is there.

Finally, some of the **Nigerian** groups, which discussed demands across all the three SDGs (and beyond), also came up with some demands that are best described as rather than relating to the three SDGs ActionAid has prioritised, relating to the principle of 'leave no one behind' in general. These were:

- the inclusion of rural women in government programmes (Federal Capital Territory)
- a safe environment for people with disabilities (Ebonyi)
- all regions to be better represented in national government (Gombe)
- equal distribution of resources to the different ethnic groups in the country (Bauchi and Ondo)

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**Participation works – more participation in the SDGs in Nigeria**

As a result of the ActionAid project featured in this report, there is an increase in the amount and level of strategic partnership between CSOs and government in relation to the SDGs. For example, as a result of CSO demands, the SDG coordination office is now running a nationwide public awareness programme entitled Agenda 2030.

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**Participation works – advocacy leadership by ethnic minorities in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's Firestarter initiative has been supporting young people and involving community based organisations since 2015, in three divisions (out of seven) in the country. A fourth division will be included as of 2018. The overall aim of the initiative is to enable young people to advocate for work opportunities, particularly young women living outside the capital.

Since 2015 over 4,200 young women and men have advocated for skills training and development. Many of these were from ethnic minority communities, and these young people were from a doubly marginalised group, as young people are themselves a marginalised section of the population.

Zeinab, 10, smiling at her home in the village where she lives, Zanzibar.
PHOTO: Rachel Palmer/ActionAid

# Conclusions and recommendations

"*The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any,*" Alice Walker, writer, poet and activist

This report has provided snapshots of the voices of some women, girls, men and boys from poor and marginalised communities where ActionAid works in seven countries. We have heard a little of their experiences, and the demands that this experience generates. It is challenging to extrapolate from a small sample, and yet there are some lessons that can be drawn.

**In all countries, some groups are left behind**, including remote, rural and economically disadvantaged communities, young people, ethnic and religious minorities, and people with disability, with women particularly disadvantaged. Not only are they left behind, but they know it, and moreover, they have solutions and demands. But in the regular course of things, they do not get the chance to articulate what they need or be included in the decision-making process. Being left behind means inequality in the fulfilment of people's rights. Being left behind also means people lack the chance to participate in the process of the SDGs and of development more broadly. In other words, they are deprived of their political rights.

Where citizens are given the opportunity to participate, **participation itself brings many benefits:**

- It clarifies each community's proposals at a level of fine detail, which would make development much more effective if it were done on a widespread scale.
- The process of participation gives an opportunity to engage people, giving an empowering sense of agency and perhaps bringing a greater sense of hope to their lives.
- It can bring people to a position where they can hold decision-makers accountable for delivering their commitments, and in parallel, it can provide a forum where cultural norms – for example, on the role of women – can be discussed and change can begin.

Ms Phinh and her husband working in their green tea field.
PHOTO: ActionAid Vietnam

**Countries are already developing mechanisms to engage citizens in SDG processes**, including formalising the participation of CSOs in SDG implementation mechanisms, including CSO and citizen representatives on official delegations, and developing roadmaps or other policy frameworks setting out how citizens will be included. These mechanisms should be widespread – but can also go further, such as by engaging diverse people's movements, engaging citizens at local as well as national levels.

**Citizens want to contribute to their own development** – however, they can only go part of the way themselves – wider collective efforts, facilitated by government, are also needed.

In articulating their proposals, there is a recognition of the need for **government-led policies** to do things that can only be done on a large scale for the benefit of everyone – for example water and electricity and other public services to reduce the burden of unpaid care and domestic work (relating to SDG 5), and better training to enable young people to work (relating to SDG 8). Fundamentally, governments hold responsibility for ensuring national development addresses the concerns and demands of marginalised groups. For example, in order for citizens' demands on SDG 8 to be met, governments must do more than facilitate job creation. They need strong laws, policies and safeguards to ensure that these jobs provide reasonable wages, that women and people with disabilities are not discriminated against, and that young people can access meaningful work. They also need policies to develop the sectors of the economy that create decent jobs.[58]

Currently, essential public services are often insufficient in developing country contexts, partly because, as this report has demonstrated, **democratic participation and accountability** mechanisms must be stronger to ensure that people have the opportunity to articulate what they want and then ensure duty bearers fulfil their obligations. There are also broader reasons. Available **finance** is insufficient. Public services and facilities that are essential for achieving SDGs 5, 8 and 16, from vocational training to kindergartens, clean water, and police services that respond adequately to domestic violence, need public funding to ensure they reach the most vulnerable, primarily through progressive taxation.

Furthermore, while participation and accountability, as we have seen, are woven right through the globally agreed SDGs, **the current global trend in many areas is for increasing private provision and financing of public services,**[59] with the private sector an increasing player in the SDGs. However, the provision of essential services and the fulfilment of human rights is an obligation that falls on

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[58] See: ActionAid. What a way to make a living: using industrial policy to create more and better jobs.
[59] Bayliss K and van Waeyenberge E. Unpacking the public private partnership revival, Journal of Development Studies, 27 March 2017. See: http://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/documents/research/ppps_final_version_002.pdf

states, not the private sector. From the perspective of accountability, this trend is likely to reduce rather than increase the ability of marginalised communities to hold duty-bearers to account. The large corporates who run private services are primarily accountable to their investors and consumers. The concerns of marginalised communities – who often have little ability to pay – cannot be the companies' priority, and neither can marginalised people's access to services. We see this played out, for example, in the increasing provision of private schooling[60] (education is one of the services crucial to relieve the burden of unpaid care and domestic work). Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that the private option is expensive[61] – it is the route followed because many see it as the only option. However, ActionAid does not believe that it is, and is concerned that focusing too much on the role of corporate players will further marginalise communities, rather than addressing the concerns they have raised in this report.

These conclusions lead to a set of recommendations.

## Recommendations

- **A primary measure of countries' progress in delivering the SDGs should be whether young people's, women's and all citizens' voices and experiences are included in planning, implementation and monitoring.** This is not least because the SDGs are all about equity and meaningful participation, but also because participation is positive in itself. Country Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and SDG Reports should be required to include detailed information on how citizens have been engaged in implementation. Citizens' voices, especially those left behind, should be a key source of data, alongside other quantitative and qualitative sources of information.

- **National processes to develop strategies and monitor SDG progress (for example via the Voluntary National Reviews) should prioritise the voices of marginalised people and people living in poverty** based on (for example) age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic status. To achieve this, information on the SDGs and their implementation needs to be widely shared, including with remote communities and other marginalised groups. Representatives of CSOs and people's movements should be part of national SDG implementation mechanisms, and meaningful consultations on SDG implementation and monitoring undertaken at the start of relevant processes.

- **Governments should develop strategies to implement the recommendations of local and national citizens' groups on SDGs 5, 8 and 16** as presented in this report (and indeed, citizens' recommendations as facilitated through other processes), creating better connectedness with local government departments/processes and ensuring local citizens' voices are heard in key national spaces.

- **National governments should ensure resources and power are redistributed to local levels** - including to those in marginalised, economically disadvantaged and remote areas, and be accountable to community members at local level. Local budgets should be developed through participatory processes involving broad community representation, including marginalised groups.

- **Governments and the international community should focus on ensuring public financing for the SDGs**, increasingly through domestic resource mobilisation (expanding tax bases in a progressive way and allocating spending to priority services), as well as through donor contributions and international action to set and enforce new tax rules.

- **Publicly financed solutions that are publicly delivered should be the priority for SDG delivery, and mechanisms to deliver on the SDGs through private sector partnerships must ensure that the fundamental human rights of marginalised communities are central**, avoiding models that have failed to deliver for marginalised groups. Private sector initiatives to implement the SDGs should be rigorously monitored for their impact on poor and marginalised groups.

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[60] ActionAid. The effects of privatisation on girls' access to free, quality public education in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Liberia and Nepal. ActionAid, Johannesburg, 2017. See: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/the_effects_of_privatisation.pdf
[61] Vervynckt M and Jose Romero M. Public private partnerships: defusing the ticking time bomb. Eurodad, Brussels, 2017. See: http://eurodad.org/files/pdf/1546817-public-private-partnerships-defusing-the-ticking-time-bomb--1518706762.pdf

**Participation works – what citizens are doing or planning themselves**

While the process leading to this report led towards advocacy to government, many of the groups also talked about what they wanted to do to support themselves. This in itself demonstrates that a process of empowerment can lead to solidarity, which may mean that initiatives for change get off the ground.

The Tanzanian community in Chamwino resolved to educate each other about gender equality, rights of women and girls, and to report criminals who physically and sexually violate women and girls.

In some of the communities in Bangladesh the role of high-status community members was highlighted in combating workplace violence. On a different note, a youth group from Nilphamari formed a human chain to demand youth employment opportunities and skills training. Across the Bangladeshi areas, young people have contributed to their communities through activities such as repairing religious and community infrastructure, and providing tuition. They have also put issues forward for community development, such as public works and access to tubewells.

In Nigeria, CSOs have established community based accountability cells, which are making demands of government. The government has responded by renovating schools to support retention.

In Vietnam, women's unions in two communities (Krong No and Lam Ha districts in the Central Highlands) agreed to establish community clubs to continue discussion and work around reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work.

A group of Kenyan young people summed up the essence of this section by saying that communities should do the following: get involved in holding leaders accountable, participate in public accountability initiatives, and create awareness amongst themselves.