

Women Overcoming Unpaid Care Work to Lead Resilience: A Series of Inspiring Case Studies



The women's group in Kotintaabiga draws a household map to highlight issues related to violence and sanitation in their community.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID GHANA

Ghana

Sensitisation redresses unpaid care burdens to reduce disasters: Boapoka Naab

45-year-old Boapoka Naab is from Kotintaabiga community, in the Upper East Region of Ghana. As a mother with six children, her high burden of unpaid care looking after her husband and family used to take up the majority of her day. This reduced Boapoka's ability to build her family's resilience, or to engage in community resilience meetings and activities, despite the prevalence of bush fires and disease outbreaks which frequently impact her community. Last year, because she was not able to prepare her land, Boapoka's rice farm was engulfed in a bush fire.

Unpaid care work in Ghana

In Ghana, the burden of unpaid care work frequently denies women the time to engage in actions or activities that support their personal and community development. Women are typically viewed as caregivers, confined to the home and farm for 24 hours a day doing chores for the benefit of the household. In Kotintaabiga community, women's household chores include cooking, child care, taking care of the sick and elderly, arranging funerals, and any other family errands. With farming being predominant in the community, women do a lot of work that will provide food for their families while

also supporting their children's education. In addition, the high level of household conflicts have led to 75% of women in this community stating that they have experienced at least one form of violence within the last three to four years.

Due to the time constraint posed by unpaid care, women in Ghana (and particularly in Kotintaabiga) are not able to participate in economic and political actions including income generation, education, local politics, or prevention and management of disasters.

Discussions in the Kotintaabiga community Women's Group found that because women and girls spend more than eight hours per day doing unpaid care work activities for their families and community, they hardly have time to clean their surroundings to prevent disease outbreaks, or to prepare fire belts around their farms to reduce bush fires. Care activities such as collecting water, cooking, gathering firewood, and looking after elderly relatives meant they were unable to prioritise these activities. The implications to the community are considerable – for example, when children get sick often, they cannot attend school so their education is impacted, and parents also face the financial pressure of purchasing drugs and paying hospital bills.

Empowering women

Boapoka joined her community's women's group in 2016 when ActionAid Ghana and local organisation BONATADU conducted a community sensitisation meeting to empower women, and supported the group to continue by funding its logistics and training facilitators. Boapoka and the other women are educated about their rights, issues of unpaid care work, and community development using "Reflection Action" as the main methodology.



The Kotintaabiga women's group meets to raise awareness on unpaid care work.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID GHANA

The women's groups challenged the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, and the time spent by women on this. Women and men were sensitised by performing time diaries and through community drama, to raise awareness on unpaid care. Women also drew a community 'household map' and realised that sanitation was a huge problem in their households. Through these analyses, the men in the community began to appreciate how much time was spent by women to unpaid care activities, and the impacts this was having on the community as a whole.

A positive impact for Boapoka

Boapoka was one of the women whose husbands took part in the sensitisation activities. As a result, he understood how her unpaid care work was a burden on Boapoka, and committed to supporting her in this role. Boapoka's husband now supports her by cleaning the home and supporting some of Boapoka's other unpaid care activities.



Boapoka's husband supports his wife by washing dishes while she sweeps the courtyard. Because of this support, Boapoka has more time to participate in resilience activities for herself and her community.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID GHANA

As well as resulting in an improvement of sanitation, which resulted in a reduction of childhood illnesses within her family in the rainy season, this more equal distribution of labour has had other benefits. Boapoka has been able to make time to work with her husband and create a fire belt around her farm. Unlike last year, when she lost her rice crop to bush fires, this new belt has prevented any bush fires from impacting her.

Boapoka says "I'm now able to attend meetings to learn about new farming methods that I didn't know before, such as stone bounding, and using compost to increase soil fertility. I have had triple benefits from the activities in the women's group: my child attends school without any fever and malaria, I have managed to save my farm from bush fires, and my yield has improved. I have a changed life, and not just for me alone – for my entire family."