



Associated Country
Women of the World

RURAL WOMEN IN ACTION: ACWW'S STRATEGY 2022-2026



What is ACWW?

The Associated Country Women of the World was founded in 1929 to bring together rural women and their organisations all over the world, and in so doing address the challenges they faced as a result of the isolation of their communities, discrimination against women, and their lack of access to political processes.

ACWW's membership spans 82 countries, and since 1947 we have passed more than 180 policy resolutions by popular vote. The key concept behind each of these is the empowerment of rural women in all their diversity. This continues to be our driving priority.

Rural Women are the backbone of families, communities, and nations, but they suffer the worst impacts of climate change and conflict, go unheard in legislation, and remain unprotected and unsupported. Associated Country Women of the World exists to change that.

ACWW amplifies the voices of Rural Women, so that the problems they face and the solutions they raise are heard and acknowledged by national and international policy-makers and legislators.

Reaffirming the earliest statements from our founders, ACWW calls for co-operation among women's organisations to ensure action to secure meaningful, quality education for all young people. The advancement of education is a pathway to the relief of poverty and the relief of sickness and preservation of health.

Our work is rooted in the fundamental principles of human rights, and we work on behalf of those who experience intersecting injustices and inequality. ACWW stands against discrimination in all its forms, and works towards gender equality, accessibility, global citizenship, solidarity with those facing discrimination, and sustainable development.

We will work with peers to redress racial inequalities and leverage our partnerships to ensure positive joint working, promoting, sharing, and learning from best practice wherever possible to encourage greater accountability and advocate for meaningful change. ACWW commits to being an anti-racist organisation, and aims to equip all members to address racism within their own communities and collaborate to ensure that the voices of women of colour and indigenous communities are heard.

Setting the Scene

In preparing our Strategic Plan for 2022-2026, we examined 30 years of data on our Membership, income, expenditure, projects work, advocacy, and impacts. We identified the following Strengths and Challenges:

Strengths

- ACWW is the largest international rural women's organisation
- The membership learn from each other and share their knowledge and experiences
- We have a platform to amplify the voices of rural women
- We are inclusive and diverse
- We have existed for more than 90 years
- We have consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, and other UN agencies like UNESCO and FAO
- We play a vital role in Civil Society
- Our network covers more than 80 countries

Challenges

- Decreasing income over the last 30 years
- High turnover of individual members, and member societies shrinking
- Limited ability for impact assessment of action on Resolutions and Recommendations
- Limited impact of projects due to low investment
- Limited scope for achieving effective systemic change
- Misunderstanding about the connection of advocacy and projects, further confused by restricted funds
- Overextension caused by diverse and abundant Resolutions ("spreading ourselves too thin!")
- Historic prioritisation of stability over the realisation of objectives

Values

We believe that to address systemic issues, we must see systematic change. Development projects which empower women in their local communities can only succeed when local, national, and international processes recognise the human rights and needs of rural women.

Our objectives continue to be the relief of poverty, the relief of sickness and protection and preservation of health, and the advancement of education.

Partnership & Friendship

We will strengthen ACWW's network of women's organisations in more than 80 countries by building capacity, facilitating cooperation, and working with like-minded external partners to achieve our objectives.

Advocacy

Globally, the challenges facing Rural Women are often similar. Access to education, safe local transport, healthcare, or social protection systems like pensions, are a concern for every Rural Woman around the world. We are committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and believe that greater representation of rural women is critical to their success. We will continue to use our Consultative Status with the United Nations to amplify the voices of our members and platform them whenever possible.

Sharing of Knowledge and Local Activities

ACWW has always facilitated the sharing of knowledge between Members. We remain committed to this and, where appropriate, will use digital options to broaden these efforts. Area Conferences, and the Triennial World Conference, along with support for meetings, seminars, webinars, and training programmes will further build capacity within our membership. Additionally, every Member Society will have the opportunity to nominate an ACWW Coordinator, to share knowledge from within their society and promote ACWW's work, ensuring the two-way nature of our network thrives.

Community Transformation and Grassroots Projects

Our new strategy sees the launch of a new programme of development projects, ensuring greater community impact for women most at risk of being left behind.

Unrestricted Funds. Unrestricted Impact.

For some years, ACWW has had restricted and unrestricted funds. Restricted projects funds were used for project funding only, initially excluding even the direct associated project costs and more recently including delivery costs associated directly with projects. Unrestricted funds (“Pennies for Friendship”) funded every other element of ACWW’s work and maintenance.

However, this model is completely unsustainable, and leads to confusion about the nature of international development work. From 1 July 2022, all donations to ACWW will be to the unrestricted “Rural Women in Action Fund”.

Donations to this fund will support all of ACWW’s work, from projects to advocacy to education and awareness-raising, with the belief that supporters will come to understand how vital it is that all of these elements are connected and cohesive.

There is a genuine need to reunite grassroots development work with national and international lobbying. If you only do grassroots development work without any attempt to influence changes to systems of inequality and oppression, you are only making short-term progress which is easily lost. This has been drastically obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic.

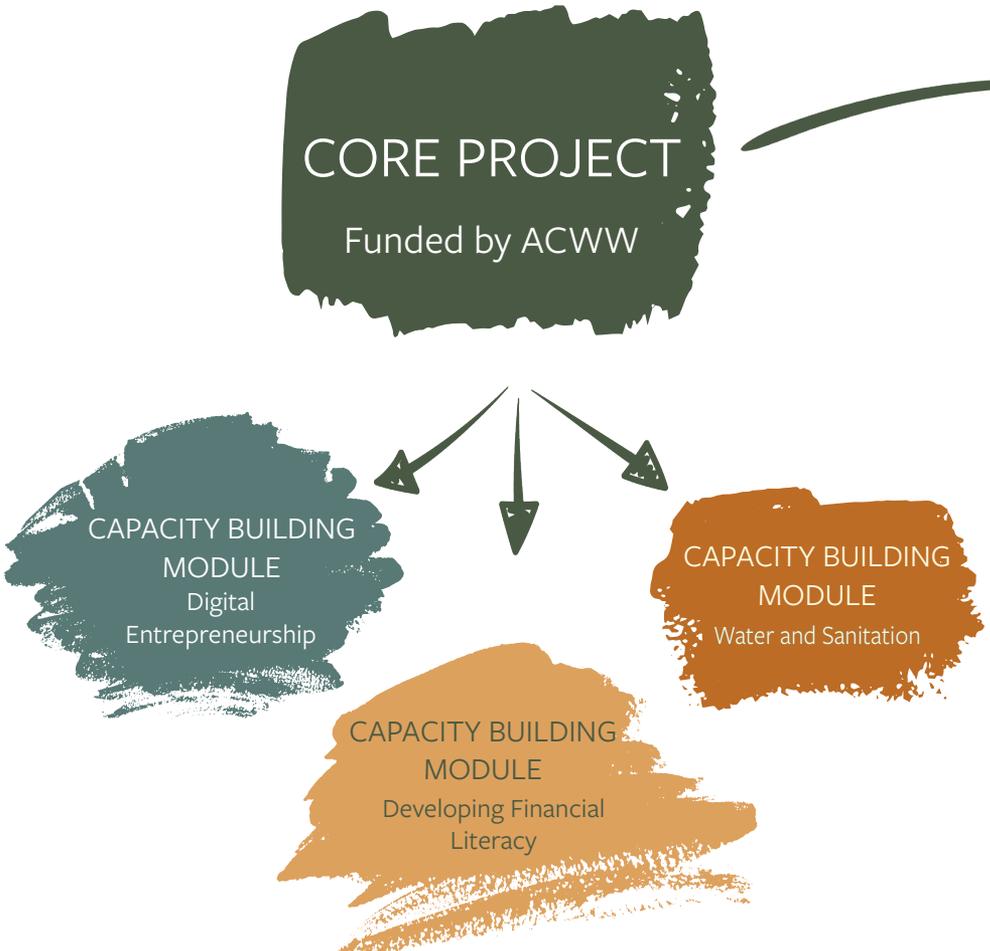
Restricting funds to one particular aspect weakens all aspects of ACWW’s work, and makes it more difficult to achieve our interconnected goals.



New Projects Model for 2023

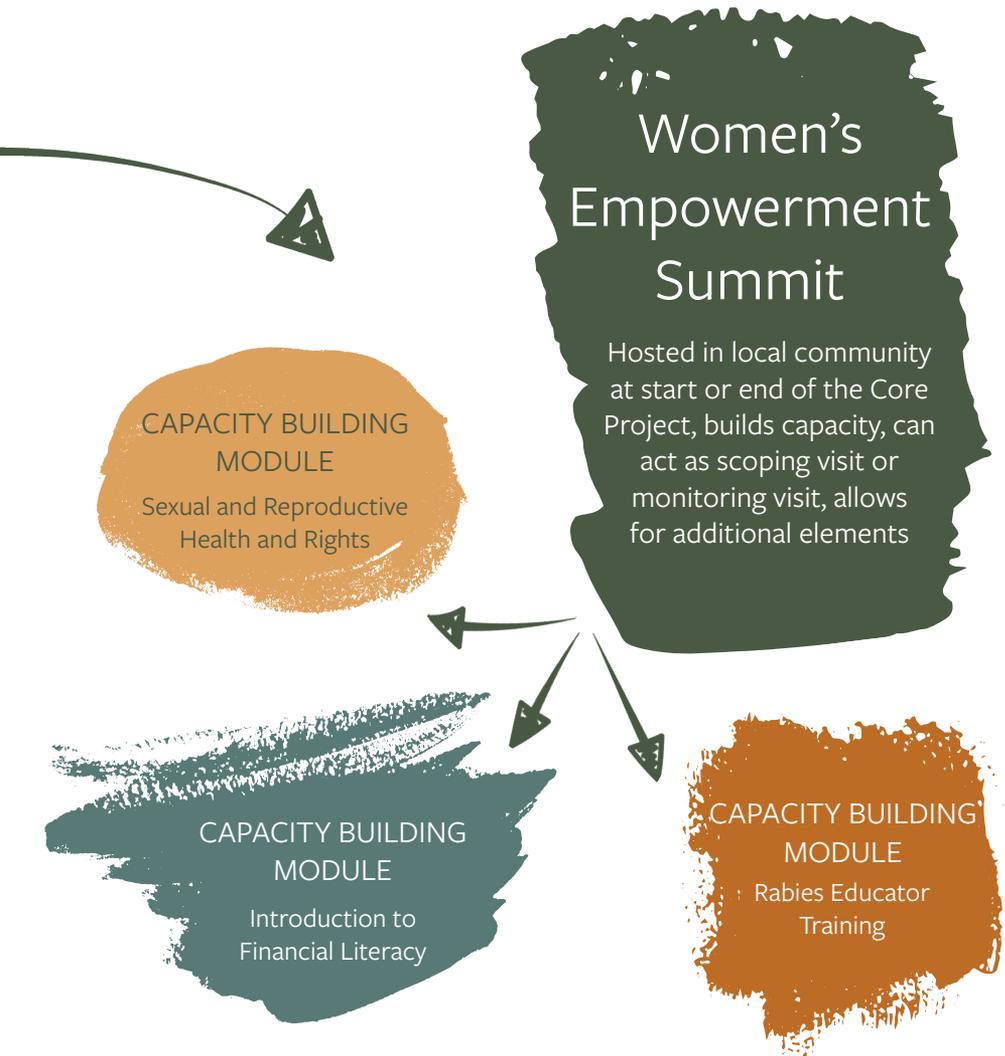
The diagram below is a map of what an example ACWW project may look like under the new strategy. The opportunities for community and individual development are significantly increased, and ACWW is using its network and years of experience to bring about real, measurable change.

In addition to the capacity building modules, ACWW will have the opportunity to work with strategic partners to develop digital and financial infrastructure in communities that need it, responding to the unique needs of each community. Using this model, ACWW has already secured support from strategic partners, and this will lead to additional external funding.



We will, of course, continue to rely on our members for their donations, and hope that this new initiative will inspire even more support among the members of our member societies, as well as giving them a connection to a vital, thriving international network that may attract new, younger members to their local societies.

In this way, we are seeking to address a challenge identified by the Board; We seek to not only expand ACWW's network, but also help our member societies with their shrinking membership numbers by strengthening the links between the whole network: members, supporters, and project participants.



Rural Women in Action: ACWW's Strategy 2022-2026

Community Transformation and Grassroots Projects

Grounding our development projects in 40 years of experience, combined with recognised good practice, we will continue to prioritise the issues highlighted by rural women in their communities.

In line with experience and global priority, we will focus on Climate-Smart Agriculture, Rural Women's Health, and Education & Community Development for our Core Projects.

Alongside Core Projects which respond to local priorities, we will work with strategic partners to add Capacity Building modules to each project, strengthening impact and building sustainability.

We will fund fewer Projects each year, but continue our annual spending at the same level, so there is greater investment in each community.

Sharing of Knowledge and Local Activities

To strengthen the sharing of knowledge between Member Societies, we are inviting all Societies to nominate ACWW Coordinators; they will receive training and support, and have regular online meetings with each other, their Area President, and the World President. This will mean global representation, and greater communication.

Coordinators will be assisted in organising local activities, awareness-raising events, and encouraged to implement fund-raising activities and organise local Women Walk the World events.

Area Conferences will continue to benefit from the support processes established in 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this will be strengthened with Capacity Building workshops and training sessions.



Advocacy

ACWW will continue to use its Consultative Status with the United Nations and its Agencies to amplify the voices of Rural Women, and highlight the issues they raise at the international level. Amongst other policies, we will prioritise the following:

With the FAO, we will advocate for the importance of family farming, women's land rights, Indigenous seed protection, food security and food sovereignty.

At UNESCO we will advocate for equitable access to quality education at all levels for women in all their diversity, the importance of traditional and inherited knowledge, Indigenous languages, and global citizenship.

We will use our access at the Human Rights Council to promote understanding and implementation of CEDAW for women everywhere.

We will raise awareness of critical UN Declarations and Conventions that are specifically relevant to our membership.



Partnership

ACWW's global network of women's organisations is unique, and important to protect. By focusing our efforts on building capacity within our network, we will strengthen both our Members and our Membership.

For many years we have worked with partner organisations who are aligned in policy and intent; we will continue to build these relationships and work in like-minded coalitions where appropriate to achieve our aims.

We will establish strategic partnerships to help deliver Projects, fund our core work, and advance our advocacy work. Partnerships will be considered at global, national, and local levels.

All partnerships will be built in line with ACWW's established policies and the Statement of Ethics adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2021.

Our Members will continue to be our priority, as we work to achieve the agenda they have set for ACWW.

ACWW's Board on the Strategic Plan

“We are on the threshold
of the opportunity for
great growth. It will allow
us to not just survive,
but THRIVE.”

Bonnie Teeples
USA Area President



“It is always a challenge for
women in rural communities
in developing countries like
Cameroon to give more, but we
also all need to understand
the reality of ACWW's
financial situation”

Irene Chinje
East, West, & Central Africa
Area President



“I believe it is important that the
members have a concise, clear
understanding of the need for ACWW
to have continuing financial stability to
better serve the various needs
associated with being
Rural Women in Action.”

Christine Reaburn - Honourary Secretary





“ACWW will be 100 years old in 7 years but with the present financial position of the organization it is not certain that it will make that important milestone if nothing is done. Looking back over 30 years of financial figures, it shows how there has been a steady decline in membership numbers and donations from members to our unrestricted funds. The Covid-19 pandemic has motivated us to take a close look at ACWW’s future and we’ve found that our present reliance on members giving donations to carry out ACWW’s aims and objectives is not sustainable.”

Alison Burnett - Agriculture Chairman & Acting Treasurer

“It is important that the members realise the need for sustainability and that measuring this sustainability and impact is so crucial. Advocacy aims to make things happen in the most direct and empowering ways possible. Self-advocacy is the ultimate aim where women and young girls speak out and act on their own behalf!”

Edwina Marr
Projects Committee Chairman



If you would like more information, please visit
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Registered Charity 1174798
Ao4 Parkhall 40 Martell Road
London SE21 8EN

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