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CARE 2020 PROGRAM STRATEGY: Women's Economic Empowerment



By 2020, as part of the CARE 2020 Program Strategy, CARE has committed to support 30 million women to have greater access to and control over economic resources.

CARE defines women's economic empowerment as the process by which women increase their right to economic resources and power to make decisions to benefit themselves, their families and their communities. This requires equal access to and control over economic resources, assets and opportunities as well as long term changes in social norms and economic structures that benefit women and men equally.



Vietnam. © CARE/Peter Caton

Why does the economic empowerment of women matter?

It is imperative for poverty reduction. At its most basic, the economic contribution of women in low income households is vital for the survival of everyone in that household – women, men, girls and boys.



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It is essential for equality between men and women. Gender equality will never be achieved while women have fewer economic rights, less control over economic resources, and less access to economic opportunities, than men. It is, fundamentally, an issue of social and economic justice.

CARE sees the importance of supporting economic empowerment of women as a key contributing factor to overall empowerment of women and thereby to substantive equality between men and women. In our work to economically empower women, CARE seeks to strengthen women's position as economic actors and to address their

exclusion from economic processes and structures (informal as well as formal). This reduces women's exploitation, marginalization and vulnerability; enables them to participate in and reap the benefits of economic opportunities; and build prosperity for themselves, their families and their communities.

Where will we achieve impact?

In 2015, CARE's projects featuring women's economic empowerment directly reached more than 2.8 million people. CARE currently implements women's economic empowerment programming in over 50 countries across the emergency-to-development continuum. Whilst much of our program implementation is concentrated in areas of gross marginalization and economic exclusion in low and middle income countries, it is equally necessary to work where economic power currently sits in order to change structural patterns globally. This means that a significant part of our private sector engagement and multiplying impact work is focused in the Global North, South Asia and South East Asia, where many large corporations and multinational organizations are headquartered.

What we do

The CARE 2020 Program strategy lays out the three main roles we play for impacting poverty and social injustice, in our efforts to achieve lasting impact at scale.



HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In times of crisis women often end up with greater economic responsibility for the household, yet they are often less well equipped economically than men. Economists sometimes describe women as economic 'shock absorbers' in conflicts, disasters, climate change and economic crises. By strengthening women's economic status and capacity to partake in and reap full economic rewards, we also increase their resilience to shocks. Our work focuses on fragile and conflict-affected states, rapid emergency response situations and slow onset or protracted crises. A large part of our work involves supporting women to protect themselves from, adapt to and recover from the impacts of climate change and humanitarian crises.



PROMOTING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Our programs and projects are led by a framework and tools for measuring the impact of women's economic empowerment across all of our work. We provide innovative solutions for addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment. We also engage with men and boys to challenge negative gender norms that see men as the sole breadwinner and natural decision-maker, and address women's time poverty by men and boys taking an active role in unpaid care and domestic work.



MULTIPLYING IMPACT

We work with women in communities, factories, businesses and many other contexts and settings to support them to claim their rights. We play a leadership role in key global partnerships and alliances through our engagement with women's organizations, wider national partners, alliances and coalitions to demonstrate scalable solutions, advocate for change and influence social norms and practices at local, national and international levels.

All of CARE's work seeking to economically empower women must simultaneously consider how to support a shift in **unpaid domestic and care work**. This involves working at household levels to shift expectations between couples, at community level to reset the perception that women must do the work at home, and at institutional levels to advocate for greater recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid work through investment in social protection (e.g. affordable childcare).

How we do it

In line with CARE's approach, and based on where we believe we have the strongest comparative advantage, and the resources, capacity and opportunities globally, we have identified 4 key areas of intervention for the economic empowerment of women:



Kenya. © CARE/Kate Holt

- **Financial inclusion:** CARE is a recognized leader and innovator within savings-led financial inclusion. Our flagship work around Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) is an area which we will continue to champion. It is a powerful foundation for the rest of our women's economic empowerment efforts. We will expand our reach and impact through continued creation of innovative products, services and models for outreach that can be scaled up. In Sub-Saharan Africa, CARE services 4 million VSLA clients, predominantly women.
- **Dignified Work:** CARE works to support women to gain equal access to quality work which is safe, fairly and equally rewarded, and to have greater levels of control over their earnings from this work. This requires a combination of efforts to improve labor rights, both legally and in practice, and to change attitudes to women's productive vs. reproductive roles at household, community and structural levels. For example, CARE works with garment workers in South and South-East Asia to realize workers' rights.
- **Women and value chains:** We aim to significantly grow our value chain portfolio in selected priority economic sectors through: scaling up our existing work; working in larger value chains and starting new initiatives where CARE currently doesn't work on value chains. It is our goal to increase the number, size and scope of our strategic partnerships with companies working on inclusive value chains.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Some of the key constraints to female entrepreneurship include lack of skills and knowledge, limited control over economic resources and earnings, lower productivity in sectors that women typically engage in, and lack of access to credit and financial services. CARE supports women's ability to build financially (and environmentally) sustainable, profitable and growing enterprises, with the potential to enter the formal economy, by targeting the specific vulnerabilities women face.

Investment required

An investment of **at least USD 50 million** is required to advance program quality, technical excellence, knowledge management and dissemination of learning; leverage organizational experience and skills; advocate for policy change and implementation; build strategic partnerships for influencing; and identify, advance, and scale up innovations emerging across CARE and its partners to economically empower women.



Examples of our successful programs



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Increasing gender equality and strengthening women's voice. The Ishaka project (which means "Courage for the Future") in Burundi empowered 20,000 poor, adolescent girls (ages 14-22) in urban and peri-urban areas of Bujumbura and Gitega provinces. Groups of young women mobilized and grew their savings without external capital and used the platform to jointly take action on their common social and economic problems. The results of the project showed an increase in safety and well-being: belonging to a solidarity group, being financially empowered and being exposed to knowledge about reproductive health and human rights. By far the most significant change was the reduction in the proportion of girls who satisfy their needs through prostitution or begging. Economic empowerment, a new found confidence, and support of the group restored their dignity.

Promoting inclusive governance. Our governance approach works toward shifting the perceptions and actions around the economic contribution and economic 'worth' of women. The CARE Bangladesh Women in Factories Initiative implemented actions based on the following premise: Women will be empowered by exercising greater choice in decisions affecting their lives **X** reducing violence against women and girls **X** building strong social movements for women's solidarity. Through different initiatives and training programs, female garment workers were able to increase their self-esteem to take greater control of their lives and careers.



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Increasing resilience and reducing risk. CARE works to support communities and marginalized households to cope and adapt to adverse changes and shocks arising from disasters, conflict or climate, political or economic stresses. Our work in Ethiopia in response to the El Niño crisis draws together actions around economic support, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and resilience.

PLEASE SEND ANY COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS TO:

Emily Scott scott@careinternational.org or Sandra Golding golding@careinternational.org

CARE International Secretariat
Chemin de Balexert 7-9
1219 Chatelaine, Geneva
Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 795 10 20
Fax: +41 22 795 10 29
cisecretariat@careinternational.org
www.care-international.org

