



care®

Defending dignity.
Fighting poverty.



Strong Women, Strong Communities

Empowering Women and Girls in the Fight Against Poverty

Growing Awareness of the

Importance of Women's Empowerment

Today, the world has an **unprecedented opportunity** to break the cycle of long-term poverty—and help billions of people lead more productive and fulfilling lives—by **empowering women and girls**.

Women and girls comprise more than **70 percent of the world's 1.4 billion poor people**. When they are empowered to play active roles in society, women and girls improve the education, health and earning power of their families and communities. But in too many places, they face **discrimination and violence that entraps them in poverty**—along with their families and communities.

CARE's experience in communities around the world shows how best to empower women and girls—and **break poverty's vicious grip**. This powerful development strategy is now being adopted in policy and practice around the globe. American policymakers have a unique opportunity to build on what works—and help women and girls **lift entire communities** out of poverty, build more **democratic societies** and contribute to a more **stable and peaceful world**.

Real and Lasting Empowerment is a Powerful Strategy for Achieving Development Goals.

CARE works in 72 countries to help the world's poorest people improve their lives. Increasingly, CARE's work focuses on addressing the injustice, discrimination and exclusion that prevent women and girls from achieving their full potential.

CARE concluded a four-year study assessing programs serving women and girls in 24 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The learning from this research illustrates what "empowerment" really means for women and girls in developing countries, the obstacles they face in realizing their potential—and steps policymakers and practitioners can take to help.

Research and experience in developing countries show that empowering women is a powerful strategy for reducing poverty and achieving other development goals:

- 60 percent of all farmers in Africa are women—making them major contributors to Africa's agriculture-based economy.
- A woman's earning power increases 10-30 percent for every year of education she receives—which means more money to invest in her family and community.

- For every year a woman is educated, the mortality rate of her young children is reduced 5-10 percent—her children are better fed, better cared for, and more likely to have their medical needs met.
- Girls in school are six times less likely to be married off to older men—preventing forced pregnancies and abuse.

Policymakers and development experts have begun to focus on empowering women as a central strategy in international development. The US government has already begun to make substantial investments in women and girls as part of its development strategy.

CARE applauds the *President's Global Health Initiative*—a six-year, \$63 billion effort to help countries improve and expand access to health services—for its emphasis on improving maternal health. Now we need to ensure that investment in women and girls—throughout their lives—is comprehensively woven into development assistance policies and programs.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

CARE provides timely, in-depth information and recommendations to help U.S. policymakers make informed investments and create effective initiatives to help women and girls achieve their full potential.

Among CARE's recommendations:

- Make the empowerment of women and girls a priority of US diplomacy and development policy
- Take a 360-degree approach that addresses all of the barriers holding back women and girls at critical points in their lives
- Commit to sustained, multi-year investments in areas that make a real difference

See page 5 for details.

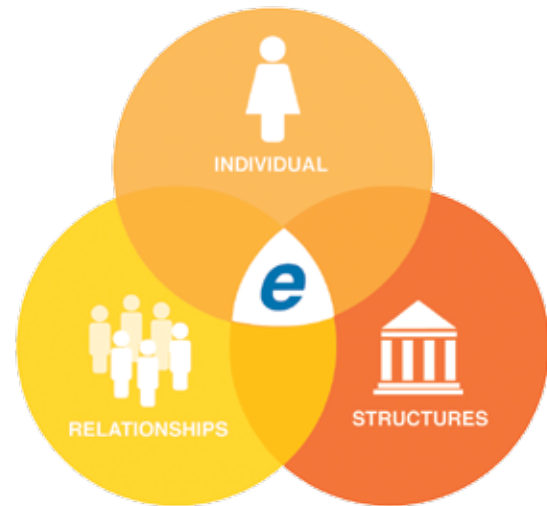
Empowering Women Requires Changing Perceptions of Women's Roles in Family and Society.

Empowering women requires much more than providing access to health care, education and financial resources. In addition to improving their own health, knowledge and skills, women must also contend with **social structures**, **cultural traditions** and **personal relationships** that affect their success. For example, a woman can receive a small loan to start a business, but if social norms prevent her from owning property, or her husband won't let her out of the house, the loan will do her little good.

CARE's research and experience shows that true empowerment comes in addressing the needs of the individual woman, as well as the social structures and personal relationships that influence her life. To truly empower women and girls, policies and programs must address all three dimensions.

empowerment

At the intersection of individuals, relationships and structures



Relationships

Goretti Nyabenda lived with her husband in the hills of northern Burundi, confined to her home and forbidden by her husband to socialize with other women. However, Goretti pushed to join a Village Savings and Loan Association, where a group of women pooled their modest savings to grow a pot of money from which they could borrow to start small businesses. Her ability to bring home a steady income helped her to negotiate with her husband. Goretti now can leave home without permission, and is learning to read and write.

Individual

In India, a country where more than 30 million girls go without any education, girls are enrolling in Udaan camps—in informal boarding schools—to learn an entire primary education curriculum in less than a year. They're also participating in activities—such as student government, athletics and drama—that boost their confidence and encourage them to reevaluate their roles in society.

Social Structures

In Nepal, women are typically married off at a young age and forced to become mothers, some as young as 12. However, in most Nepalese communities, expecting mothers are often discriminated against. To overcome these challenges, women united in "Dabi" groups—organized groups of mothers—and sought to end the practice of banishing pregnant women to cowsheds. By successfully pushing back, these women made it safer for a woman to deliver her child and easier for them both to receive the care they need.

WHAT REAL & LASTING EMPOWERMENT LOOKS LIKE

When the individual woman, her personal relationships, and the social structures she lives within are in harmony, she has the potential to live a productive life and experience true empowerment. Genuine, long-lasting empowerment is achieved when a woman can:

- Make important decisions within the household
- Participate meaningfully and visibly in the public sphere
- Make decisions about her body and her reproductive health
- Control assets such as farmland or capital
- Live without fear of violence or sexual assault



Policy Recommendations

“Until women around the world are accorded their rights—and afforded the opportunities of education, health care and gainful employment—global progress and prosperity will have its own glass ceiling.”

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

1 Make the empowerment of women and girls a priority of US diplomacy and development policy.

Foreign assistance and aid effectiveness can both be improved when policies acknowledge the value of women and focus on giving them the tools and resources they need to take the lead in ending global poverty. We urge the Administration to:

- **Convene an annual Progress Summit of women and girl leaders on the advancement of supportive policies and programs**
Building upon commitments made with the creation of the White House Council on Women and Girls, CARE urges the Administration to publicly reaffirm high-level support for the global empowerment of women and girls, including releasing the Interagency Review—an assessment by the Administration’s leadership of federal policies impacting women’s issues—by the end of 2010.
- **Legally establish the Office of Global Women’s Issues**
CARE applauds the Administration for elevating the importance of women’s issues in foreign policy by appointing an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues (GWI) in the State Department. As an official office, GWI would be required to release an annual report on global progress in women and girls’ empowerment in developing countries.
- **Establish a comprehensive system of accountability to ensure sustained progress**
CARE is encouraged by United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) release of its Guide to Gender Integration & Analysis, which will require that a “gender lens” is built into all planning and programming. However, there is no system in place to ensure that the design, implementation and evaluation of USAID programs must include aspects of empowering women and girls.



CARE has found the most effective approach to truly empowering a woman includes addressing all the challenges in a woman's life that constrain her—such as being forced into marriage as a young child, enduring physical abuse and sexual violence, dying while giving birth, and suffering from a lack of access to food and financial resources throughout her life. We urge Congress to:

2 Take a 360-degree approach that addresses all of the barriers holding back women and girls at critical points in their lives.

- **Enact the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act**
Child “marriage”—in which girls as young as 12 are forced into relationships with adult men—puts girls at greater risk of HIV infection, domestic abuse and dying while giving birth. Keeping girls out of forced relationships—and in school—gives them a chance to earn an education and lead a healthier life.
- **Fund the Global Health Initiative and support global maternal health legislation**
More than 300,000 women and girls die each year from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Giving new mothers and their newborns the healthcare they need will create more stable families—and both women and their children will be healthier, better educated and more productive.
- **Pass the Global Food Security Act**
Women farmers produce up to 80 percent of the world's food, yet own only one percent of its land—making it difficult for them to make enough money to feed their families. In addition, climate change threatens their productivity. With more tools and skills, women will have a chance to adapt to climate change, get their crops to market and earn a living.
- **Pass the International Violence Against Women Act**
One in three women around the world is beaten, forced into sex, or mentally abused—with violent acts ranging from acid burnings to “honor” killings. With greater protection against violence, women can live free from fear and have a greater chance to reach their potential through education and productive work.
- **Pass the Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act**
More than 800 million women survive on just \$1 a day. But research shows that when women have even a small amount of extra money, they invest it in their children's education, health and housing. Providing women access to small loans that they can use to start successful businesses will help them earn more income and provide for their families.



For development programs to make a real difference in the lives of impoverished women and girls, they must be adequately funded for the long term. Therefore, we urge Congress and the Administration to:

3 Commit to sustained, multi-year investments in areas that make a real difference.

- **Prioritize sustainable agricultural development and nutritional programs within the State Department, USAID and HHS that benefit women and girls**
Women make up 60 percent of small farmers in Africa and are responsible for the health and wellbeing of their children. Programs that provide tools that develop their agricultural skills and increase their knowledge about nutrition will benefit not only them but also their communities.
- **Approve the FY 2011 Budget—which provides increased funding for development programs, including the “Feed the Future Initiative” and maternal health initiatives**
The United States made financial commitments to food and maternal health initiatives at the 2009 G8 Summit—an annual meeting of the eight most industrialized countries discussing the world's most pressing issues. Honoring these commitments is critical to make progress toward reaching the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and reducing maternal mortality.



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Founded in 1945, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor women because, equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to help whole families and entire communities escape poverty. Women are at the heart of CARE's community-based efforts to improve education, health and economic opportunity.



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