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 entrap 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.
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.
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

“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

Policy Recommendations

“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 girl’s 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.
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.

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.

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

- Fund the Global Health Initiative and support global maternal health legislation

- Pass the Global Food Security Act

- Enact the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act

- Pass the International Violence Against Women Act

- Pass the Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act

- Prioritize sustainable agricultural development and nutritional programs within the State Department, USAID and HHS that benefit women and girls

- Approve the FY 2011 Budget—which provides increased funding for development programs, including the “Feed the Future Initiative” and maternal health initiatives

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

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:

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

2. Enact the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act

3. Fund the Global Health Initiative and support global maternal health legislation

4. Pass the International Violence Against Women Act

5. Pass the Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act

6. Prioritize sustainable agricultural development and nutritional programs within the State Department, USAID and HHS that benefit women and girls

7. Approve the FY 2011 Budget—which provides increased funding for development programs, including the “Feed the Future Initiative” and maternal health initiatives

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