

GLOBAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR CARE'S STRATEGIC IMPACT INQUIRY ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT¹

I. Introduction

The Strategic Impact Inquiry is an attempt to better answer the critical question, “are CARE programs impacting the underlying causes of poverty and rights denial, and if so, how?” CARE has recognized gender inequality as an assault on human rights and a root cause of poverty across the communities we serve, in particular through its impact on women. Therefore, in this first SII on gender and power, we will focus on the question of *CARE's contribution to women's empowerment and gender equity*.

Specifically, the SII will explore the following questions:

- *What contributions have CARE programs made, if any, to the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equity?* We will explore this through changes in women's own agency, in the power structures around them, and through the nature of relationships in which they engage.
- *What evidence (pro and con) exists regarding the link between (a) CARE's program approaches and principles, (b) CARE's internal gender equity and diversity practices and (c) the advancement of gender equity and empowerment?* We will explore this through comparing the effectiveness of different approaches CARE has pursued, and the implications of CARE's own institutional form.

Investigating impact within the broad arena of gender and power is, by definition, a multi-level, long-term challenge. It is, of course, fraught with challenges of measurement, conceptual clarity, determining causes and effects, and teasing apart CARE's specific role in contexts in which larger forces and a range of actors are also working to influence gendered structures and relationships. In this context, the global research framework is offered to support the development of detailed, site-specific research designs. Its intent is to offer a common, minimum core of guidance across all sites, including:

- the basic purpose and guiding principles of this SII
- key questions to serve as a unifying core across diverse research sites/questions;
- critical dimensions along which we will explore evidence of change
- research methodologies and approaches to ensure appropriate rigor

The global framework, then, establishes a minimum, shared framework upon which site-specific research teams should build, in order to facilitate comparisons across sites without limiting each team's ability to specify the questions and methods in ways that best suit their own needs

II. Purpose and Principles of the Strategic Impact Inquiry

The SII on women's empowerment is conducted in the context of many other forms of research, evaluation and learning in CARE, and does not seek to supplant these important forms of organizational knowledge and accountability. It deploys multiple methods, complementing original research with opportunistic review of existing program databases and documentation to harvest as

¹ This 2006 revision to the initial research framework developed in January 2005 reflects learning from Phase 1 and the launch of Phase 2 of the SII. Further learning and evolution is underway during Phase 3, in 2007-8.

much as possible from our existing knowledge base.² These steps will, we expect, generate new lines of inquiry in an evolving multi-year inquiry. The SII, in other words, is founded first and foremost on a learning-process approach in which improving our own skills and knowledge about carrying out impact research is as important – in the short to mid-term – as empirical findings about CARE’s impacts. The SII seeks to bring resources and organizational support to help explore these questions of impact with appropriate levels of rigor, beyond any one geographic or sectoral lens.

Our purpose in conducting this inquiry is three-fold:

- **Ensure Accountability:** To offer stakeholders in and out of CARE a coherent framework and robust evidence within which to critically assess the contributions that CARE is making to the fight for gender equity and against gendered structures of poverty.
- **Improve Impact:** To offer practitioners in and out of CARE insights on the merits of different interventions and approaches in supporting different dimensions of women’s empowerment.
- **Improve Learning:** To develop and test a set of rigorous, participatory, and rights-based methodologies for the measurement of women’s empowerment, as inputs into the wider effort to strengthen impact measurement.

In support of this tri-fold purpose, certain core principles underlie this inquiry. The ethos and approach of CARE’s Strategic Impact Inquiry must be rights-based in itself, and so must adhere to CARE’s Programming Principles.³ A list of resulting principles that should guide all SIIs is found in Annex 1. We will expand here on two that are paramount in *this* particular SII on gender and power:

- **Joint participation of partners, the poor whom the program aims to serve, and external researchers is a fundamental value that must be enacted.** We seek to implement empowering research. Knowledge generated must be owned by the people whom CARE serves and not be produced in an extractive manner. *If at any point a choice must be made between research rigor and participation of the poor and partners, participation must take precedence.*
- **Respect for the physical and psychological safety of participants and informants is paramount.** Deep investigation into the operation of gendered structures of power may put certain people (staff and participants) at risk of psychological or physical violence in the short or long term. Every research team must review appropriate guidelines, and be include an experienced researcher or programmer to ensure that research methods do not put staff, partners or participants at risk. *If at any point a choice must be made between research rigor, data quality, and the safety and security of participants, safety and security must take precedence.*

III. Focus and Key Research Questions

In this section we will outline certain choices explicitly made to define and operationalize the concept of “women’s empowerment.” We then lay out the guiding questions that frame this inquiry.

A. Notes on the Focus on Women’s Empowerment

² See Annex 2 for an overview of methods deployed in FY05 and FY06.

³ These are: promote empowerment, work with partners, ensure accountability and promote responsibility, address discrimination, promote the non-violent resolution of conflicts, and seek sustainable results. Fuller treatment of these principles and the program standards that seek their enactment is available on request.

The Impact Inquiry situates impact on gender and power in the context of CARE’s mission to end poverty and rights-denial. It does not explicitly undertake the broader critique that feminist and subaltern studies advance of the patriarchal/hegemonic nature of the development enterprise as such, although we believe that the values, principles, and research methods we propose will open the inquiry to the issues these scholars and practitioners have raised. For example, we recognize that research participants will put forward very different visions of empowerment and call for local teams to allow – indeed help – women to define crucial concepts like “empowerment,” “equity,” and “equality” themselves before turning their eyes to whether CARE programs are having an effect on them. In addition, we encourage local research teams to build from the basic analytical categories offered in this framework to analyse CARE, its inner workings, and its industry context.

The study’s focus is on whether CARE’s interventions are helping poor *women*, in particular, to fulfill *their* needs and rights. While the relationship between equity, women’s empowerment and impact on poverty levels more generally is an empirical question worthy of study, it lies beyond the scope of this effort to demonstrate any causal link between the two.⁴ By the same token, while fully expecting a gendered lens to explore how identities and opportunities are shifting for women and men, the focus on women is in recognition that gender inequities often reflect women’s subordination and we wish to affirm women’s importance in their own right. The issue here, we believe is one of nuance and emphasis, but one that has specific implications for research design and methods.

Our focus on women’s empowerment – represented by the research questions and evidence categories shown on the next page – is imagined as a fairly broad and inclusive potential field of inquiry on women’s empowerment. However, we fully expect that the actual scope of research in any given site may well explore issues beyond those identified on the one hand, and will very likely need to specify and narrow the range of issues explored, on the other hand. Over the course of the SII, as experience and empirical evidence informs our use of the global framework, we expect to hone in on a “core” set of empowerment dimensions that will, for the purposes of assessment against CARE’s vision and principles, be held constant – some initial guidance on the “core” has emerged during the first year of SII research and, while far from definitive, is included in section III.B.

B. Defining Women’s Empowerment: Agency, Structure, Relationships

One of the key underlying causes of poverty is the construction in different contexts of what it means to be a man, or a woman. Gender is, in this sense, one manifestation of a general model of power which holds that individual and group behaviors produce social structures (ideologies, rules, institutions) which, in turn, reinforce and “normalize” those behaviors to the point where they are seen as common sense, as the “normal” order of things. This social construction of male and female identities, roles, relationships and distribution of resources defines control of, access to, and use of tangible and intangible resources, resulting in a gendered distribution of power and opportunities that is intimately related to women’s human rights and the question of poverty. These gendered “rules of the game” are not always perfectly obvious to women and men who live by them but can be surfaced, discussed, and challenged through personal and collective consciousness and actions. In this way, women and men contest the flow of resources, agendas and ideologies.

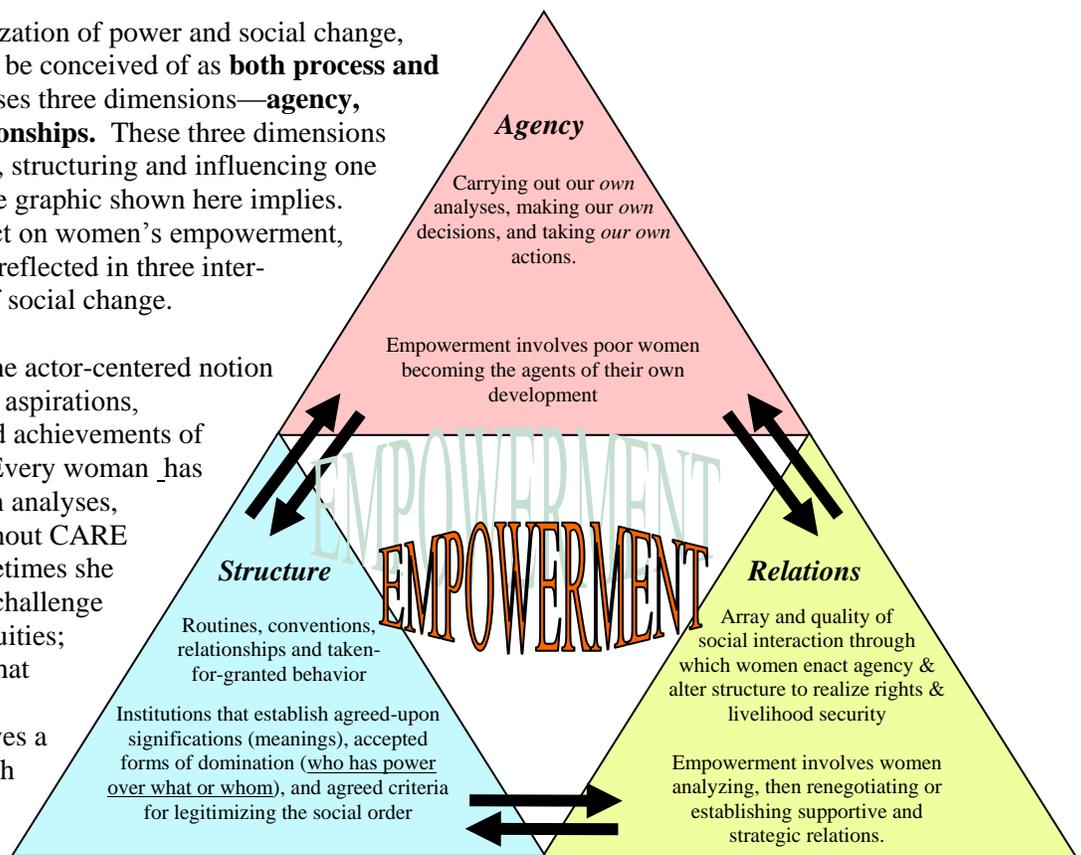
Empowerment has been theorized from many perspectives – including those founded in a more “zero-sum” notion of power and those that take a more expansive notion of power. For the purpose of this study, we focus on those discussions of empowerment that take place within a feminist, gendered

⁴ Such a focus on equity from the perspective of its impact on development and poverty may well be appropriate in a given site, but it is not the overall purpose of this SII. For a full discussion of the instrumental arguments for empowerment see the 2006 World Development Report.

perspective. Empowerment is defined broadly as “**the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives.**”⁵ Notable in this definition is the recognition of empowerment as a *process of building capability* (and not simply the material outcomes visible in CARE’s impact frameworks to date), and of the importance of *structure* as represented by the institutions affecting people’s lives. This broad conception can be further grounded in feminist theory as “the expansion in [women’s] ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.”⁶ This definition is notable in its focus on *choice*, which Kabeer defines as comprising three critical elements: *agency* (power within/to), operationalized in reference to *resources* (*power to/over*), and made visible in its resulting beneficial/valued *achievements*. And finally, agency is exercised, in this conception of empowerment, in opposition to a prior condition of subordination in important (*strategic*) arenas of life. Strategic interests, in gender and development theory, differ from “practical gender needs,” in that they go beyond the basic functions/capacities which allow people to fulfill the gender roles assigned to them, and aim to open new gendered spaces of ideology, action and opportunity. In this sense, empowerment is importantly tied to impact on the structural underpinnings of women’s subordinate status and well-being.

With this conceptualization of power and social change, *empowerment* should be conceived of as **both process and outcome** that comprises three dimensions—**agency, structure, and relationships**. These three dimensions are intimately related, structuring and influencing one another as the triangle graphic shown here implies. We understand impact on women’s empowerment, in other words, to be reflected in three inter-connecting aspects of social change.

The first, driven by the actor-centered notion of “*agency*,” is in the aspirations, resources, actions and achievements of women themselves. Every woman has agency, every woman analyses, decides, and acts without CARE being involved. Sometimes she does so in ways that challenge gendered power inequities; sometimes, in ways that reinforce them. Empowerment involves a journey through which poor women increasingly use their agency to expand their options and challenge inequities.



⁵ Deepa Narayan ed, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001.

⁶ Naila Kabeer, “The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment.” UNRISD Discussion Paper 108. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1999.

The second is in the broader social *structures* that condition women's choices and chances. Structures include routines, patterns of relationships and interaction, and conventions that lead to taken-for-granted behavior; institutions that establish agreed-upon meanings, accepted ("normal") forms of domination (who "naturally" has power over what or whom), and agreed criteria for legitimizing the social order. Structures can be both tangible and intangible; they are composed of both behavioral patterns that can be observed and counted but also the ideologies that underpin why some behaviors – or thoughts – are socially acceptable (acceptable to whom?). Examples include kinship, economic markets, religion, castes and other forms of social hierarchies, educational systems, political culture, resource control/ownership dynamics, forms of organization, and many, many more. Through their actions, individual agents contribute to producing, reinforcing, or changing structures; at the same time, however, structures shape agency in important, and often unrecognized ways.

And the third is in the character of the social *relationships* through which women negotiate their needs and rights with other social actors, including men. Both agency and structure are mediated through relationships between and among social actors while, at the same time, forms and patterns of relationships are deeply influenced – frequently in hidden ways – by agency and structure. Empowerment, in part, consists in individual women building relationships, joint efforts, coalitions, and mutual support, in order to claim and expand agency, alter inequitable structures, and so realize rights and livelihood security.⁷

Women's Empowerment: Sub-Dimensions

Women's empowerment differs from culture to culture and context to context. It cannot be understood uniformly across the developing world. In all field sites one of the very first steps of impact research should be to uncover local women's own definitions and indicators of their empowerment. But this process has been informed by a conceptual framework that asks researchers to at least consider the relevance of 23 sub-dimensions of agency, structure, and relationships. We selected these sub-dimensions because they have, in fact, been shown to be widely relevant to women's empowerment across a great many studies and across numerous social, economic, cultural, historical, and political contexts. In other words, a wide variety of studies have shown an apparent positive relationship between increases/improvements in the sub-dimensions and women's empowerment. In asking staff to at least consider these sub-dimensions we are not pre-determining local meanings of women's empowerment, nor the indicators that are most relevant to decide if CARE is having an impact or not, but rather trying to inform staff of important results that already are found in the rather wide literature on women's empowerment so that we don't reinvent the wheel at every site. These 23 sub-dimensions are briefly defined below:

⁷ Annex 3 offers a deeper discussion of critical definitions and conceptual frameworks that underpin this SII, and begins to illustrate the relationships that the research will explore between poverty, gender, power, and our programmatic efforts.

<i>Impact Question:</i>	<i>What contributions, if any, to women's empowerment women & advancement of gender equity?</i>		
	<i>Dimensions of Empowerment and Equity</i>	<i>Sub-Dimensions</i>	<i>Evidence Categories/Indicators⁸</i>
Question 1A <i>What evidence that programs support expansion of women's abilities to identify, pursue, and achieve basic needs and rights?</i>	Agency-based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological • Legal • Socio-cultural • Political • Organizational • Productive / Economic • Human / body 	1. <i>Self-image; self-esteem</i>	<i>Positive images of self, belief in one's abilities, feelings of self-efficacy</i>
		2. <i>Legal / rights awareness</i>	<i>Knowledge of laws around issues of women's social positions, status, equality, etc.</i>
		3. <i>Information / skills</i>	<i>Access to information and skills that a woman deems helpful or necessary; awareness that such information/skills even exist</i>
		4. <i>Educational attainment</i>	<i>Access to and ability to deploy formal and informal forms of education</i>
		5. <i>Employment / control of labor</i>	<i>Fair and equitable access to employment opportunities; fair and equitable working conditions; freedom to chose forms of labor</i>
		6. <i>Mobility in public space</i>	<i>Freedom and safety to circulate in public spaces</i>
		7. <i>Decision influence in HH finance & child-rearing</i>	<i>Kinds of decisions that women can make over household resources, processes, people, investments, etc.</i>
		8. <i>Group membership / activism</i>	<i>This sub-dimension certainly overlaps with the element below, Relations. Here, at the level of agency, we are looking at the degree to which women are free to join groups as a result of their own wishes to do so</i>
		9. <i>Material assets owned</i>	<i>The kinds of material assets (land, goods, animals, crops, money) women have the power to control</i>
		10. <i>Body health / integrity</i>	<i>Access to core health services of acceptable quality; freedom to make decisions over what happens to a woman's own body; a right to bodily well being and pleasure</i>

⁸ Many of these are qualitative **and need to be carefully defined, specified, and operationalized in local sites**. Many can be quantified through subjective scaling or scoring if quantification is required. But we need to get more comfortable – and get our stakeholders more comfortable – with the importance and relevance of qualitative indicators for a multi-dimensional, non-linear process such as empowerment. Superficial quantitative proxies for something as profound and transformative as true empowerment may limit our understanding of our impacts rather than enhance it.

Question 1B <i>What evidence that programs promote a more responsive and equitable enabling environment?</i>	Structural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural (ethnicity, religion, caste) • Legal / Judicial • Market/Economic • Political • Bureaucratic • Organizational 	11. Marriage/Kinship rules & roles	Degree of freedom and control of marital resources; equitable inheritance, divorce, and family law more generally; control of one's own body
		12. Inclusive & equitable notions of citizenship	Degree of inclusiveness and equity of laws and practices around what it means to be a citizen
		13. Transparent information & access to services	Degree to which duty bearers ensure that women have the chance to know what they're due, how they can access this, and what to do in the event that they are denied information or services
		14. Enforceability of rights, access to justice	Enforceability of human rights claims as well as specially designed laws and judicial services to promote gender equity
		15. Market accessibility (labor/credits/goods)	Equitable access to work, credit, inputs, fair prices
		16. Political representation	Extent of women elected and appointed to public office – in the formal and informal spheres – and their degree of influence once there
		17. Share of state budgets	Allocations the state offers for important services, guarantees, and enforcement mechanisms around issues central to gender equity
		18. Density of civil society representation	The density and quality of civil society organizations that address gender inequity and social exclusion
Question 1C <i>What evidence that programs promote more interdependent & accountable relationships?</i>	Relational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation • flexibility • cooperation • accountability 	19. Consciousness of self/ others as inter-dependent	Awareness of own power in relation to others, and reliance of others on them. Ability to see leverage and mutual advantage in joint actions both for self and for others.
		20. Negotiation/ Accommodation habits	Ability and interest in engaging duty bearers, the powerful, but also other marginalized social actors in dialogue
		21. Alliance/Coalition habits	Extent to which women and women's groups form larger alliances and coalitions and seek collective gains
		22. Pursuit / acceptance of accountability	Skills, confidence, and knowledge to hold duty bearers and the powerful accountable; recognition that human rights bring, also, forms of accountability to every individual
		23. New social forms	Social and structural recognition of non-traditional household forms. Generation of new kinds of organizing, new or altered relationships, new kinds of behaviors.

To summarize, we understand impact on women's empowerment to be reflected in three inter-connecting aspects of social change. The first, driven by the actor-centered notion of "*agency*," is in the aspirations, resources, capabilities, attitudes, and achievements of women themselves. The second is in the broader social *structures* that are both socially produced by people but that also, once produced and "normalized," condition women's choices and chances. And the third is in the character of the social *relations* through which women negotiate their needs and rights with other social actors. The 23 sub-dimensions written above **may or may not be important in a particular social context** and the **concrete indicators that would show improvement along one of the sub-dimensions may well differ from place to place, era to era in the same place, or even from group to group of women in the same place and time**. Nonetheless, we are interested in whether and how CARE programs purporting to focus on gender and/or women's empowerment are targeting these sub-dimensions as they appear so frequently in the gender and women's empowerment literature.

Women's Empowerment: Experimenting with a Common Set of Core Indicators in FY06

During FY05, CARE projects and programs used the above empowerment model to guide research. They all identified a small handful of sub-dimensions of empowerment most relevant in their situations, identified locally appropriate indicators of those sub-dimensions, and used these to measure impacts. Important commonalities emerged among sites, and between SII sites and the evidence frameworks guiding other studies, but there was no attempt to actually hold any empowerment measures constant as we tested the basic conceptual framework. This approach has already allowed the SII to play an important role in connecting women's own views and priorities of their own empowerment with the insights of academics and activists in the arena of gender and empowerment in ways that enrich both worlds, and re-ground theory in the realities of women's daily lives.

In FY06, it is essential that research teams continue to generate locally the empowerment evidence categories that matter most to women and the program. At this stage in CARE's global learning process, however, we see merit in proposing some further guidance here. First, we expect the research teams to ensure adequate exploration of structural and relational changes that may have been at work, either as a result of CARE's intervention, or in spite of it. While the value of drawing on women's own conceptualizations of empowerment remains clear, we also recognize that women often do not name, or perhaps even understand, some of the structural forces that affect their processes of empowerment. This can lead to distorted or incomplete understanding of the empowerment processes and the effectiveness CARE's own contributions to it.

Second, we are increasingly confident that over its three years, the SII will allow us to identify a crucial core of empowerment sub-dimensions and indicators to guide all of CARE's women's empowerment programs and research. Our research to date suggests that across diverse contexts, any "empowered woman" enjoys **bodily integrity** (she is free of coercive forces over her very physical being), has positive **images of her own worth and dignity**, has equitable **control and influence over strategic household and public resources**, and lives in an enabling environment – a sociopolitical context – where women can and do engage in **collective effort and act in solidarity**.

As a result, within the construction of evidence frameworks that reflect local voice and context, we seek where possible to pilot the following core operationalization of empowerment in the SII research:

Core Sub-Dimensions of Empowerment	Indicators Tending Towards Informing us of Agency-level changes in Women's Lives ⁹	Indicators Tending Towards Informing Us of structural-level Changes in Women's Lives	Indicators Tending Towards Informing Us of Relational-level Changes in Women's Lives
Notions of self worth; dignity	1. Knowledge of rights and structures of gender inequality 2. Education Level 3. Changes in self-images	4. Equitable access to basic human services	10. Participation in civil society/solidarity groups and those groups' connections with other groups 11. Incidents of Violence Against Women and active prosecution of same 12. Influence on formal and informal decision-makers to make pro-women decisions 13. Male attitudes regarding gender roles and norms
Control and Influence over HH and Public Resources		5. Participation in political processes	
Bodily Integrity		6. Legal changes and/or enforcement of women's control of strategic resources	
Collective Effort/Solidarity		7. Pro-women changes in family/kin norms and institutions	
		8. Equal economic opportunity, (land, labor, livestock, credit, home)	
		9. Pro-women state budgets and development policies	

We suggest that these four sub-dimensions, and 13 indicators, be tested where appropriate in FY06 as a minimum evidence framework for research into CARE's impacts on women's empowerment. It is important in considering these to recognize their pilot, trial-basis nature – they are here to be improved upon, but also to push us to address what are emerging as key strategic arenas of change, and to push us to take seriously the need to develop reliable measures at the levels of structure and relations, as well as agency.

Some notes and caveats to consider:

- The 13 do not map in any simple one-to-one relationship to the four sub-dimensions in the left-hand column of the table above. It is probably more helpful to consider the 13 as a holistic system which, we hypothesize, leads to the four sub-dimensions being achieved in a more sustainable way.
- Each indicator, while situated provisionally in either agency, or structure, or relations in the table above – reflects multiple changes that would naturally (as the framework posits) need to take place across the three dimensions. For example, while education level may reflect changes in individual choices and capabilities, it may also reflect structural changes in the allocation of education budgets shifting labor market incentives. Without wanting to complicate this pilot, please consider where it may be helpful to specify related/linked variables in these other dimensions.
- Many of the indicators proposed are qualitative, as can be seen, and almost all need more concrete and specific operationalization in specific contexts.
- They are also, by design, a combination of what some M&E specialists would consider “effect level” and “impact level” indicators: there is, truth be told, a great deal of ambiguity in such characterizations and the debate about whether, say, a permanent change in a woman's knowledge of her rights and the social structures that deny her equality and equity is an

⁹ The indicators are a mixture of effect and impact level measures. They may be quantified – if that makes sense in a particular site – or may be left as qualitative indicators and researched in that fashion.

“effect” or an “impact” is not one that we really wish to fuel with this work. Instead, we hypothesize that any CARE program that is, indeed, having a sustainable impact on women’s empowerment would show positive changes in all 13 indicators. We also wish to underscore that it does not have to be CARE that is producing those changes across all 13.

The above “core” does not pretend to answer crucial questions about research methods, exactly how you gather and analyze data related to the 13 indicators, or even the important conversation around quantitative or qualitative methods. Those are questions that need to be addressed in the research design itself in a specific site, for a specific purpose/audience, and within the constraints of resources available. A project or program could gather data on all 13 indicators through a questionnaire, through interviews, through projective techniques of various kinds, through secondary data (for example, the local government already collects data on violence against women), through different kinds participatory methods, etc.

C. Key Research Questions

This triangle graphic on page 4 and the table on pages 6-7 demonstrate how agency, structure, and relational dynamics interact to create (or undermine) an empowerment process – and reveal the importance of seeking how our work effects changes in all three if we are to gain a more complete picture of the contributions we have made to empowerment.

Research into our impacts on women’s empowerment needs to investigate two broad domains. The first domain of inquiry is into the changes achieved in the three dimensions and sub-dimensions of empowerment. The second line of inquiry turns to CARE itself in order to understand our contribution to change. The sub-questions here explore the approaches that the organization has used to promote women’s empowerment, and the relative effectiveness and implications of our institutional strategies and forms.

Research Domain #1 (Impact Level):

What contributions (positive and negative) have CARE programs made, if any, to the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equity?

- a. (Agency question) What evidence is there that CARE’s programs support the expansion of women’s capabilities to identify, pursue, and achieve their basic needs and rights?
- b. (Structure question) What evidence is there that CARE’s programs promote a more responsive and equitable enabling environment, as embodied in cultural constructs, legal and policy frameworks, economic and market forces, and bureaucratic and organizational forms?
- c. (Relational question) What evidence is there that CARE’s programs promote more interdependent and accountable relationships between women and the key people and institutions they engage in pursuit of their needs and rights?

Research Domain #2 (Approaches Level):

What evidence (pro and con) exists regarding the link between (a) CARE’s program approaches and principles, (b) CARE’s internal gender equity and diversity (GED) practices and (c) the advancement of gender equity and empowerment?

- a. What is the real mix of approaches (principles, models, strategies) that have guided, and today guide, CARE’s programmatic interventions?

- b. What is the real mix of internal organizational development practices used to promote gender equity and diversity (through impact on culture, structure, staffing mix, resource base, etc)?
- c. What types and mixes of these programmatic and internal interventions seem most effective to promote gender-equity and women's empowerment? How prevalent are such practices in CARE?
- d. What types and mixes of interventions seem least effective, or counter-productive, in their impact on gender-equity and women's empowerment? How prevalent are such practices in CARE programs?

IV. Methodological Guidance for Field Research¹⁰

We all carry with us deep assumptions, values, and beliefs about what constitutes evidence, proof, comparability, and plausible causal relationships. We may be divided by very deep, philosophical and ethical disagreements on this issue or we may simply wonder whether it is best, most effective, or most externally persuasive to demonstrate causal relationships quantitatively or qualitatively. In this SII, we wish to dissuade CARE from either/or reasoning on this important concern. Quantitative, experimental designs with strict controls, leading to statistical reliability and validity for conclusions drawn by the objective, outside researcher is right for some questions, some times, in some places. Research deploying participative, action-learning focused, constructivist, actor-centered, and emergent approaches, leading to qualitative forms of reliability and validity for conclusions drawn jointly by external, CARE, CARE partner, and participant researchers is right from some questions, some times, in some places. We strongly believe that in trying to grapple with complex issues such as CARE's impact on gender inequity, we are wisest to look to the strengths of each of these forms of scientific inquiry rather than eliminate either from our palette of possibilities.

We need to be explicit and honest about the challenge that faces CARE as it seeks to gather evidence of how it is affecting gendered structures of power. One approach would be to determine tangible, quantifiable indicators of women's empowerment and ask all country offices to report on them on a yearly basis, perhaps through the existing API process. It is possible that such transcultural, transnational, transhistorical indicators exist, but as we all know, gender, power, equity, and equality are all complex, many-faceted phenomena resisting simple quantification. As a result, we believe it preferable to err on the side of impact research that starts with women's own voices, interpretations, meanings, indicators, and judgments rather than research that seeks to pigeonhole women into frames imposed from the outside.

But we are not starting from scratch on these questions. The framework for empowerment described in section III.B above has been drawn, already, from the concrete experiences of women in scores of developing countries, across all regions of the globe, as synthesized from hundreds of published studies. That frame should not be applied unthinkingly, or mechanically, in our research sites, but we do wish to use it as an intelligent starting point for research design and methods selection.

¹⁰ The global SII mixes in-depth, field research in projects/programs with various kinds of broader, global methods (meta-evaluation, portfolio analysis, proposal analysis, various forms of desk review and literature review). The methodological guidance offered here refers specifically to field research. Additional methodological guidance for other forms of impact assessment are available from the Impact Measurement and Learning Team (IMLT). Contact Elisa Martinez (emartinez@care.org), Kent Glenzer (kglenzer@care.org), Michael Drinkwater (drinkwater@care.org), or Jim Rugh (rugh@care.org).

Few of the guiding research questions or evidence categories in the proposed empowerment framework oblige the adoption or use of a particular methodology. The most critical methodological decisions in this SII, therefore, will occur at the level of the specific research sites, and be a product of dialogue between the external research team leader, CARE staff team members and, where and if appropriate, partners and participants themselves. Methodological decisions will also depend upon the specific research questions, project interventions, and analysis needs at the three research sites.

Still, the SII seeks to draw reliable conclusions about our contribution to women's empowerment and improving gender inequities. And as such, while methodological, data gathering, and data analysis choices must be localized rather than universalized across three very different kinds of projects, interventions, and operating contexts, there is a core of methodological guidance that we wish to offer. The guidance is focused not on good social science research design or methods in general¹¹ – e.g., principles and practices around sampling, control groups, experimental/quasi-experimental/non-experimental designs, cohesion between questions/methods/data/ analysis, data capture/treatment, etc., etc. – but methodological recommendations or considerations specifically related to researching women's empowerment. We divide these into the following categories:

- A. Protection of participants
- B. Getting at questions of meaning
- C. Addressing power structures within the research process itself
- D. Disaggregating the monolithic category “women”
- E. Qualitative quantification (“Participatory Numbers”)
- F. Looking at the larger context
- G. Analysis
- H. Methods, sources, and global evidence categories

Each section describes issues, obstacles, or challenges we believe may arise in all three sites and suggests ways to overcome or transform them into opportunities. While not a how-to or guide, the section offers some resources or paths forward that we can re-examine and refine as the research unfolds.

A. *Protection of Participants*

While all research involving people must adhere to basic ethical guidelines about the protection from harm, investigations into women's empowerment can put women at a particularly heightened risk of violence (by men who take issue with the nature of the research and women's participation in it) and psychological trauma and retraumatization (occasioned by women thinking about, remembering, or perhaps speaking to researchers or each other about past violence, abuse, or present circumstances). The protection of women in the context of the SII must be of paramount importance in the selection of research designs, methods, approaches, sampling procedures, security of data, and forms of analysis and reporting.

At the outset of this SII, CARE commissioned a set of guidelines to ensure the safety and security of research participants and teams; we expect all research teams to review and consider how to incorporate these guidelines in orientation, training, data collection, analysis and presentation.¹² We

¹¹ This research protocol assumes the contracting of well qualified social science researchers in each research team, as well as participation on the global SII team of CARE staff with strong backgrounds and experience in the basics of good research. As a result, this section in no way pretends to offer a primer or how-to on the ABCs of research design, methodologies, or data analysis.

¹² These guidelines can be found on the CARE portal (Divisions\Program\Program Resources and Learning\Impact Measurement and Learning Team\2005 SII on Women's Empowerment – additional

have also identified key references that you can consult to ensure that your research does not put women at risk of physical or mental harm. No evidence is worth putting women in your research area at risk. Period.

B. *Getting at questions of meaning*

We believe that to some extent, prior to trying to assess the strengths and weaknesses of CARE programs, all three sites will be looking first at questions of interpretation and meaning such as:

What do “power” and “empowerment” mean to women in the project zone? Does it mean the same to all women? Are there patterns of difference and similarity?

What does “equity” and “equality” mean to different kinds of women in the project zone?

What does it mean to be “socially excluded” and is the experience of exclusion the same for all women?

Starting with local definitions of power, empowerment, and so forth offers very firm grounding in local realities and opens the possibility of having women themselves develop the operational definitions of “empowerment” (as BOTH outcome and process) against which you can assess and measure CARE’s impact. These kinds of operational definitions can then, actually, be transformed (with care!) into large scale, survey questionnaire methods if you wish to/need to deploy such a method. A potential obstacle or blind spot for researchers, however, is to utterly reject any universalist criteria whatsoever for these concepts, thus risking in the worst of cases the reinforcement of certain forms of exclusion, inequality, and inequity through romanticization of the subaltern perspective.

Such challenges of getting at questions of meaning are not unique to studies of women’s empowerment, of course, but they are of tremendous importance if CARE wishes to render itself accountable for its work in this arena. Certainly, some manner of direct questioning of women themselves on these definitions is called for, either in individual or small group interviews. But we need to consult the secondary, ethnographic, political economic, and macrosociological literatures on these questions too. It is not necessarily the case that individuals (men or women) are completely aware of how power, equity, equality, and exclusion are at play in their own lives and we should be keen on this form of triangulation and on helping women, as a result, make wider connections and build deeper understanding of these dynamics in our research process itself. Other, less obvious ways of getting at such questions of meaning include:

- Observation of public events or important decision-making processes and careful analysis of who speaks, when, what is said, what is done with such contributions, and how women ultimately influence the flow or allocation of crucial resources. We do not, here, wish to minimize women’s subjective impressions of their own power, powerlessness, or empowerment but rather to emphasize the importance of triangulating on questions of meaning.
- Use of diagramming and graphic methods that allow women to get beyond the confines of the verbal and generate alternative ways of describing complex phenomena. Many PRA and/or PLA diagramming methods can be adapted quite readily to surfacing questions of meaning.
- Ranking methods can also be quite helpful in getting at questions of meaning and women’s empowerment. For example, asking women to identify “powerful” or “empowered” women in their social milieu, ranking them in terms of their power or empowerment, then surfacing in the context of that exercise the categories and indicators that help differentiate women from one another is sometimes very helpful and can result in a quite nuanced understanding of forms of

documents\SII Research Methods) or upon request. Please contact Elisa Martinez or Kent Glenzer if you wish to have a copy emailed to you.

power and empowerment in a relatively short time. Researchers can quickly saturate¹³ such categories in the course of a relative handful of such interviews and triangulation can occur through combining individual and group methods.

- Finally, cognitive mapping (sometimes referred to as semantic mapping) can also help to get at questions of social meaning. Such an exercise asks respondents to not just define a particular concept, but to also do things such as define its opposite, define something similar to it (and make clear the distinction between the two), and other kinds of semantic/cognitive opposition or relationships. There are even ways of quantifying such maps, although this is unlikely to be helpful in the context of our work.

C. Addressing power structures within the research process itself

One of the unique aspects of researching gender and power is that we on the research team itself are not free of the very dynamics that we wish to objectify and study! Just as we carry biases and assumptions with us about what constitutes “proper” research and research methods, so too do we all carry assumptions, values, norms, and mental models about gender, power, and empowerment. Furthermore, we work in a multicultural, multinational space ourselves, one in which the identity of “CARE staffer” risks obscuring that we all carry with us different and diverse ideas about masculinities, femininities, and indeed power itself. We also are not magically free of local sociocultural norms just because we are a CARE staffer: there is no fundamental reason why an Ecuadoran working with CARE Ecuador is any more, or less, enlightened about gender and power as any other Ecuadoran. As a result, while researcher bias is a risk in any kind of research, such risks may be particularly important to a study of women’s empowerment.

The methodological implications of this are important. First, we must assemble research teams that are appropriate to the participant population in question – adequately trained/skilled and with attention to the gender, class, caste, ethnic, language, and other dimensions that can help or hinder good dialogue in the field. Bangladesh, Yemen, and Ecuador all represent programs with good experience and rather deep knowledge of these kinds of questions, of course, and such sensitivities and existing understandings were important reasons why the three sites were indicated for this year’s SII. Still, local research teams will want to carefully consider who should be on the team, whether additional training or orientation on gender and power is desirable, and how such awareness and capacity building may affect your research design and implementation plans.

Second, it behooves us to constantly remind ourselves to maintain a respectful and non-judgmental stance in the research process, and avoid imposing our own assumptions or values onto others. This is particularly important with regard to the deployment of the global empowerment evidence categories described in section __ above: they should not be thought of as normative bars which women, households, communities, or nations are expected to cross, otherwise they are not empowered or not gender sensitive. Rather, they should be thought of as initial guides for structuring an investigation process, a starting place rather than a finishing line.

Third, we need to recognize that other forms of power are at work in our research process, forms that may be even more important than gender. We have organizational hierarchies that will permeate our research teams, for example. We face ideas about power and knowledge in the communities where we work that constitute relationships between development workers and community members, too. We may even face issues of power over control, interpretation, and conclusions between our external,

¹³ Category “saturation” is considered a good indicator of validity in qualitative research. It refers to the phenomena – with regards to questions of meaning, in any case – to the stage when no new answers, no new categories of evidence or response, are produced by additional research gathering techniques or efforts.

consulting team leaders and CARE staff and participants. We have no magic, methodological bullets on these difficult issues; rather, we encourage research teams to make these relationships open topics of conversation and discussion throughout the research process.

D. Disaggregating the monolithic category “women”

A common analytical error is to assume that all women are the same, that they all occupy the same social position, are equally empowered or disempowered, are equally advantaged or disadvantaged by the reigning culture and political economy. This is clearly not the case. We need to try to understand a) which kinds of women are included in our programs and which are not, and whether we ourselves are unknowingly excluding some women, b) the spectrum of positive and negative impacts our programs are having on different categories of women, and c) how we might shift or expand programs so as to benefit the poorest and most marginalized women.

Our challenge will be to recognize and explore the diversity within communities, both in the construction of a robust sample, and in the types of questions and lines of inquiry pursued. Some key diversity factors to consider include gender, age, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, family status, wealth, and livelihood strategies. The identification of different categories of women need not be a complex, burdensome task, however. Staff themselves frequently carry this information as tacit knowledge about their own societies and cultures. Women can usually offer this information through interviews or participatory group methods. Studying existing socioeconomic surveys or ethnographic studies can help here, too. The challenge will be to identify the most strategically crucial categories of women and sample across them.

E. Qualitative Quantification (“Participatory Numbers”)

There is a growing movement in development research to wed qualitative and quantitative methods in the form of “participatory numbers.”¹⁴ Proponents of this seek to combine the best of both research paradigms by using qualitative, participatory methods to quantify social, economic, and political phenomena. As the poor themselves generate the relevant categories, definitions, and measures, one can be more assured of the face validity of the research constructs while also having a way of quantifying progress or regress.¹⁵

Locally generated participatory numbers – or qualitative quantification – cannot be aggregated across different research sites, but they do seem to offer a potentially useful tool for collaborative analysis, thinking, and decision making about the level of impact CARE programs are having on the empowerment of women and on gender inequity. A number of the evidence categories in Section III.B above could lend themselves to this approach and help establish retrospective, quantitative baselines for empowerment efforts if these do not already exist. Participatory numbers might have a very valuable role to play, we think, in helping us understand things like the differential impacts of our programs on different categories of women, in triangulating on other forms of both qualitative and

¹⁴ See, for example, R. Chambers and L. Mayoux “Reversing the Paradigm: Quantification and Participatory Methods” EDIAIS Conference on New Directions in Impact Assessment for Development, U. of Manchester, November 2003. There are a number of other papers from this conference that provide guidance and case studies.

¹⁵ If the concept of “participatory numbers” strikes you as odd or, perhaps, unscientific, it really is little different than such common, accepted, mainstream forms of qualitative quantification such as Likert scales, IQ and psychometric test results, consumer confidence indices, etc. The main difference is that instead of leaving scale, index, or test structure/content to Ph.D. experts, project participants construct them.

quantitative data, and on helping us better understand the lived, material and psychological experience of gendered structures and relations of power.

F. Looking at the larger context

It is by now a truism to invoke globalization, the growing integration of communication, economies, and politics, and the increasing hybridity of identities that characterizes our era. It is also common knowledge that there are strong and important links between gender inequity, empowerment, and social exclusion and national and international political economies, links that may indeed be far more important in the long run than any single CARE project or program. Drawing this larger context into our thinking and assessment of our programs' impact on women's empowerment is not at all easy or straightforward but needs to be incorporated. The lack of doing so may result in two different but related analytical errors: First, improvements in women's empowerment in a given span of time might be a) demonstrable in CARE's project zone, but b) due entirely to large-scale political economic and/or socioeconomic shifts. On the other hand, improvements in women's empowerment in a given span of time might be a) absent in CARE's project zone, but b) due entirely to large-scale political economic and/or socioeconomic shifts. In either case, failure to consider the larger context would lead to less than accurate conclusions about the worth, value, and impacts of CARE's local level work.

Getting a handle on the key macro political, economic, social, and cultural forces that form the backdrop and context for CARE's work should have occurred in country office strategic planning and project design processes, so this should not have to happen from scratch in your research on women's empowerment. The difficulty will be determining the extent to which positive or negative impacts of CARE's programs are related to macro level changes. Clearly, one tried-and-true manner of dealing with this question is by deploying control groups in your research design and trying to see if the same impacts happened in sites where CARE does not work. But you can also – if time and resources are short – undertake what might be called “desk controls.” This is a process by which secondary reports are studied for evidence of similar outcomes in zones where CARE does not work, or in which informants from organizations working elsewhere are interviewed to see if they are seeing similar results in their zone of operations. A final technique for trying to think through such complex connections and interconnections is to bring in external experts to help you interpret your data: economists, sociologists, and political scientists working at the national level might be able to tell you that the results seem particularly unique or not, for example.

G. Analysis

Every research method produces data that can be analyzed in a myriad of ways. This brief research framework is not a primer on data analysis techniques; rather we want to simply underscore the importance of including women participants in CARE programs in your analysis process.

As we've noted above, a fundamental value and principle of this research on the empowerment of women in CARE's programs is that the research itself should be rights based, should itself be empowering, and should itself lead to enhancing women's ability, capacity, and confidence to analyze their own lives. We need, therefore, to ensure that women are included in every step of the research process, have a voice and influence over the questions we ask, the information we seek, the manner we seek it and, finally, how we interpret it. This is not to say that poor women's analysis supercedes all other perspectives but, instead, that their interpretations are equally important as others.

CARE staff are already familiar, for the most part, with a wide array of PRA, PLA, or PAL techniques designed for just this purpose. The choice and sequencing of such techniques is a local issue, one needing no treatment in this global research framework. However, we would like to call your

attention to a couple of perhaps lesser known techniques for embedding women in the entire research process as such participation is perhaps essential for increasing women's abilities to analyze their situations and design pathways forward.

One promising technique that has been used already in CAREs Zambia and Cambodia is Peer Ethnographic Research. In this model – still in a pilot phase of development by the University of Swansea – participants undergo a two-day training in interview and observational techniques, then are given assignments to interview peers and observe their communities. Peer ethnographers may be given tape recorders or even digital cameras to make records of their work (and, in this way, even illiterate people can become impact researchers). More information can be obtained at the Swansea U. web site.

A second promising technique for participatory data gathering and analysis is giving women disposable cameras and asking them to go out and take pictures of things or people that relate to the impact research terms of reference, evidence categories, key questions, or indicators. After the film is processed the photographer can be either interviewed alone or a larger group event can be organized in which many photographers share their pictures, explain why they constitute “data,” and offer their analysis of the data.

A third potentially empowering technique for participatory analysis involves bringing larger, male and female, neighborhood, community, or even intercommunity groups together in an action-planning event that is designed to identify concrete actions for advancing women's positions. This may not work, of course, in settings where women and men cannot speak or work together in such a way in a public space and great care must be used in deciding that such an event is appropriate and will not result in physical, emotional, or mental harm against the women who have participated in the research. The interesting aspect of this technique is that rather than simply leave the research data and analysis in the hands and minds of those closely affiliated with the CARE project, instead the data and analysis drives a larger, wider, deeper consensus process that may even link planned improvements with local political, religious, or economic bodies and thus give them a higher profile and more importance.

H. Methods, Sources, and Core Evidence Categories

There is no single method, information source, or approach for analyzing any of the sub-dimensions of empowerment that the global research framework identifies. All of the sub-dimensions are highly contextual and methods or data sources that are appropriate or effective in one site may not be in another. The table below is, therefore, intended merely as an initial mental prod for your own creativity as you try to think about your specific, local research questions. We offer them only as a starting point, a list of commonly deployed methods and information sources in other studies of women's empowerment that we've consulted over the past few months or, in some cases, particular methods that we've seen deployed in only one or a small handful of studies but that seem interesting.

<i>Dimensions of Empowerment and Equity</i>	<i>Sub-Dimensions</i> (13 proposed “core” across sites are highlighted)	<i>Definitions</i>	<i>Possible Methods or Information Sources</i>
A G E N C Y	1. Self-image; self-esteem	<i>Feelings of self-worth, self-efficacy; beliefs about own ability to influence, act, decide</i>	Secondary studies; internationally validated self-efficacy scales; life history interviews; media portrayals/images; diagramming or ranking exercises; participant-observation; peer ethnography; UNDP’s Gender-related Development Index; Community-level gender attitude measures (see Oppenheim Mason and Smith 2003)
	2. Legal / rights awareness	<i>Knowledge of rights under the law</i>	Secondary studies; CARE baselines; interviews; focus groups; survey questionnaire
	3. Information / skills	<i>The kinds of capacities, abilities, and knowledge possessed</i>	Interviews; survey questionnaire; # and accessibility of various information sources
	4. Educational attainment	<i>Formal schooling but also adult training/learning</i>	Interviews; survey questionnaire
	5. Employment / control of labor	<i>Safe, fairly-remunerated work; freedom to decide on own work</i>	Government or donor statistics; livelihood security assessments; CARE baselines; secondary studies; interviews
	6. Mobility in public space	<i>Freedom of movement; Ability to use transport (bike, bus, taxi..)</i>	Laws; secondary studies; interviews; “barefoot” photography or film; mobility mapping
	7. Decision influence in HH finance & child-rearing	<i>Degree of decision-making authority and/or influence in HH financial management and over children</i>	Secondary studies; socioeconomic or HLS surveys; interviews; longitudinal studies; CARE baselines; Gender Equitable Men Scale (GEM); Participative theater; projective techniques; participant observation
	8. Group membership / activism	<i>Participation in groups, associations</i>	Organizational member lists; interviews; survey questionnaire; participant observation; critical incident analysis; participative theater
	9. Material assets owned	<i>Kinds of assets over which a woman has full decision-making power</i>	Interviews; land and capital ownership laws and norms
	10. Body health / integrity	<i>Level of care, control over what happens to her own body (choice, resources); exposure to gender-based violence/coercion</i>	Health post statistics disaggregated by sex; secondary studies; violence against women statistics; life history interviews; key informant interviews; analysis of media images/portrayals; Gender Equitable Men Scale (GEM); contraceptive use; projective techniques; participative theater

S T R U C T U R E	11. Marriage/Kinship rules & roles	<i>Cultural, social, and historical norms, conventions, customs in the household, extended family, clan, and other relevant social groups</i>	Secondary ethnographic studies; interviews; life history interviews; social network mapping; cultural economics analysis; inheritance norms (formal/legal, informal/extra- or quasi-legal); Gender Equitable Men Scale (GEM); power analysis; gender analysis
	12. Inclusive & equitable notions of citizenship	<i>Degree to which women's human rights are enshrined in the law of the land and to which such rights are believed/respected by citizens</i>	Laws; corruption statistics; judicial system functioning; interviews of men and women regarding notions of "citizen"; gender analysis; power analysis
	13. Transparent information & access to services	<i>Non-discrimination in access to the full range of information and services needed for enjoyment of human rights</i>	Service use statistics obtained from service providers; comparison of global norms/standards regarding proximity and quality of services and that prevailing in study zone; analysis of service providers information diffusion strategies; tests of women's knowledge via either interviews or surveys and comparison of this with other social groups
	14. Enforceability of rights, access to justice	<i>Degree to which customary and formal authorities enforce such rights, and that judiciary authorities upholds such rights and hold duty bearers accountable</i>	Secondary studies on quality and equitability of judicial processes; analysis of local court records and outcomes; interviews
	15. Market accessibility (labor/credits/goods)	<i>Non-discrimination in access to employment, credit, inputs, products, control of capital, etc.</i>	HLS surveys; laws; microcredit regulations and client lists; interviews; survey questionnaires
	16. Political representation	<i>Degree to which women, women's rights and women's issues are visible and influential in the formal, public, political space</i>	# and % of women in elected office; # and % of women in appointed office; observation of public decision-making processes; UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure
	17. Share of state budgets	<i>Percentage of national budgets devoted to structures and services that ensure that women can fully enjoy their human rights</i>	Budget analyses: national, regional, local
	18. Density of civil society representation	<i>The number, linkages, and quality of civil society organizations actively pursuing a woman's empowerment and/or gender equity mission and vision</i>	# and power of civil society organizations that focus on women's issues; extent of women's representation in civil society organization management roles/posts; observation of negotiation and decision-making processes between civil society organizations and between such organizations and political and/or state bodies

R E L A T I O N A L	19. Consciousness of self / others as inter-dependent	<i>Relational norms/patterns of mutual care and exploitation. Consciousness of “subordinate power” in hierarchical relations (with husband, mother-in-law, for example).</i>	Interviews; peer ethnography; internationally validated psychometric scales
	20. Negotiation/ Accommodation habits	<i>Relational norms/patterns of conflict and compromise. Awareness and skills to both negotiate for an agenda but to also accommodate/compromise with agendas of other actors</i>	Interviews; focus groups; peer ethnography; observation; secondary studies; natural setting experiments to assess capabilities
	21. Alliance/Coalition habits	<i>Relational norms/patterns of individualism and solidarity. Awareness and actions to build broad alliances and coalitions of groups to fight for full enjoyment of human rights by women</i>	Group and civil society organization memberships; personal diaries; life history interviews; social network mapping
	22. Pursuit / acceptance of accountability	<i>Relational norms/patterns of accountability and impunity. Rights-bearers and advocates hold duty-bearers accountable; d-b (individual and bureaucratic) understand and accept their accountability to respect the human rights of all</i>	Interviews; focus groups; observation; analysis of media stories; interviews of state and political officials
	23. New social forms	<i>Creation of new social forms (relations, structures, organizations, new norms, e.g.)</i>	Interviews; participant-observation; secondary studies; key informants

Annex 1:
Key Principles Guiding CARE's Strategic Impact Inquiries

All Strategic Impact Inquiries should:

- Be framed by and critically assess CI programming principles and the unifying framework;
- Address impact questions relevant to ongoing programs/projects, producing actionable recommendations for increasing sustainable impact on the underlying causes of poverty;
- Deploy quantitative and qualitative methods in ways respected by wider industry communities of practice. Inquiry designs will be as simple as possible but as complex as needed;
- Probe issues of gender but, more generally, power, marginalization, and exclusion, no matter the theme;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of CARE programs;
- Bring participants into the research process as more than simple informants;
- Bring together internal/external expertise on SII teams;
- Adopt learning process approaches that seek to build skills in CARE, partner, and participant groups around impact assessment;
- Be accompanied by a specific knowledge management and learning plan;
- Offer mutual benefits to COs, regions, and the global organization; and
- Address accountability for organizational effectiveness and organizational policy changes.

Annex 2

The FY05-06 Strategic Impact Inquiry's Global Methodological Quiver

Researching CARE's impact on gendered power relationships, women's social exclusion, and gender inequity entails multiple levels and methods of analysis. **Original field research** in specific projects, programs, and country offices represents the critical core and heart of the impact inquiry but is but one arrow in the SII's global methodological quiver. That research differs from site to site, methods vary widely, as do mixes of quantitative and qualitative data, participative and more traditional approaches, and specific indicators and their operationalization. What else is happening to try to form a global picture of the impact of CARE's program on women's empowerment? The list below summarizes efforts that have either already started, are planned, or are of potential interest.

1. **Secondary Literature Review:** Considerable reviews are done in order to prepare and consistently update the global research protocol and in each original field research site.
2. **Analysis of CPIN Data:** Each year, we mine CARE's global project information database (CPIN) for insights, clues, patterns, norms, and gaps in CARE projects that self-declare as being strongly focused on women, empowerment, or gender.
3. **Meta-Evaluation:** In FY05, we conducted a meta-evaluation of 31 CARE projects, investigating the extent of their impacts on women's empowerment. We plan to replicate this method in FY07.
4. **Project Proposal Desk Review:** In conjunction with CARE UK, in FY05 we conducted a desk review of a sample of project proposals from around the CARE world to look at the manner in which rights-based approaches are being adopted and adapted. A component of this proposal analysis was an investigation into how well positioned the projects seemed vis-à-vis achieving an eventual impact on women's empowerment.
5. **Gender Mapping:** In FY05, Asia region identified the range of concepts, goals, approaches and measurement frameworks guiding programming on gender inequality and women's empowerment. Other regions might find the method helpful for framing their own work.
6. **Phone Interviews/Surveys:** Phone surveys/interviews of selected CARE projects that have a strong empowerment and/or gender focus. Such a method – while not yet used in either FY05 or FY06 – would allow us to widen the sample of projects/programs touched by the SII while admittedly representing a different level of empirical and analytical rigor.
7. **Promising Practices Search:** In an effort to zoom in on projects around the world that might represent the best CARE has to offer when it comes to impacts on women's empowerment, a small group of projects have been identified and will be conducting self and peer reviews to identify what those promising practices might be.

Finally, it is of critical importance that we remember that the SII is multi-year in nature. Part of the global methodology is to spread the inquiry over three or four years, incorporate many field research sites over time, and move forward methodologies 1-7 above as needed and as our learning progresses. A key conversation that we hope to have as we synthesize the lessons and findings of this first year of the SII will revolve around the question of which array of methods are most appropriate for answering gaps in our understanding.

Annex 3: Definitional Matters

Definitional Matters

Some notes on the conceptual underpinnings of the Gender/Power SII

One purpose of strategic impact inquiries in CARE is to permit the organization to speak more empirically, authoritatively, and rigorously about the impact it is having on the underlying causes of poverty. A criticism of much NGO research on gender, power and empowerment is the lack of a clear and robust conceptual framework against which the evidence can be analyzed.¹⁶ To this end, the following notes frame some of the key concepts, models, and frameworks that lay the foundations for how CARE proposes to explore its impact on the empowerment of women, and the advancement of gender equity.

Modeling Poverty, and its Causes

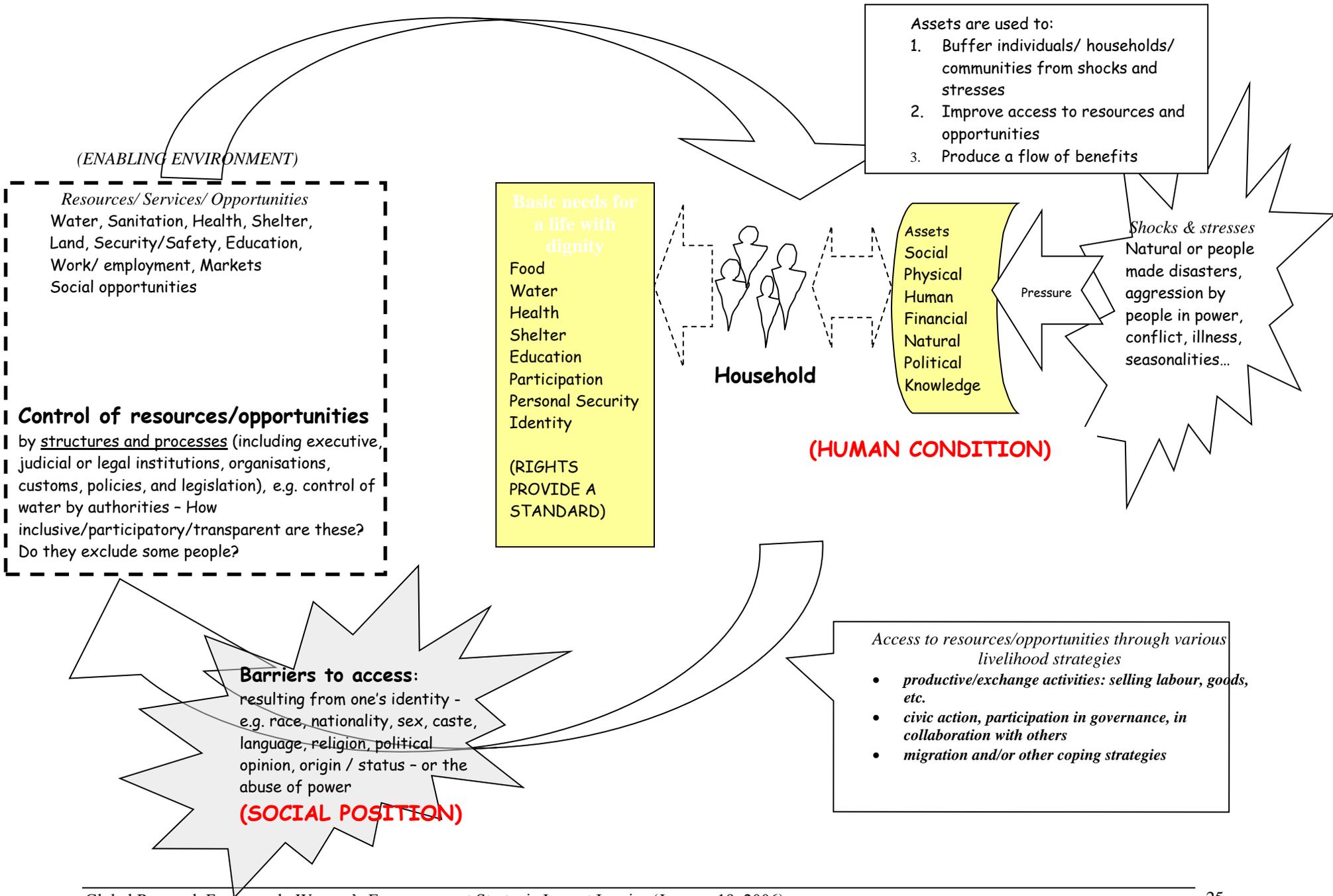
CARE's mission is to fight poverty, and as such, our approach to questions of gender and power is largely grounded in the impact that these forces have on the ability of people to break the poverty cycle. CARE's concept of poverty has been deeply shaped by its humanitarian and development assistance work, with its focus on the barriers people face to meeting their material human needs on a sustainable basis. However, it has also been deeply impressed over time by the voices of poor women and men, who have pointed out to our own staff and to outside researchers the non-material dimensions on which they are deprived and which they consider to be central features of poverty – stigma and discrimination, invisibility, hopelessness.¹⁷

CARE does not aim to develop a general theory of poverty, nor a particular definition. However, to help our staff to think about these different dimensions of poverty and its underlying causes, there have been significant efforts in recent years to bring them into a more coherent conceptual framework. The basic framework that guides CARE's thinking about poverty and the choices that confront the poor as they pursue their needs and rights has been the **Household Livelihood Security framework** (HLS, see CARE UK framework graphic, next page).

¹⁶ See, for example, Malhotra et al (2002), "It should be noted that these criteria led to the effective exclusion of most of the reports emerging from NGO programmatic efforts at "empowering" women. Many of these reports lack the conceptual and empirical rigor we felt was necessary for inclusion in the current review." (p.22).

¹⁷ See, for example, Narayan et al (2000), *Voices of the Poor* study prepared for World Bank's 2000 WDR. More recently, the compilation of studies brought together in the DfID/World Bank collaboration on "Power, Rights and Poverty" (Alsop ed., 2004), underscore that understanding and addressing local expressions of power and social exclusion is central to poverty reduction (see, esp. papers by Eyeben and Woolcock).

The Household Livelihood Security Framework



As described in the excerpt below, HLS is an attempt to model, and thereby more strategically support, the choices that poor people make in order to meet their basic needs for a life with dignity, in the face of shocks and constraints.

“A livelihoods approach emphasizes the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. The most frequent definition used is that: ‘A **livelihood** comprises the **capabilities, assets** (stores, resources, claims and access) and **activities** required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from **stress and shocks**, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation” (Chambers and Conway 1992). A sustainable livelihood therefore requires the presence of sufficient capabilities and assets to achieve the resilience required to cope with stresses and overcome shocks. The measurement of livelihood status is usually conducted through assessing asset levels and livelihood outcomes, the latter usually seen in material terms. Improvements in either assets and/ or outcomes would be seen as indicators of livelihood improvement. Conversely, decline in either areas would be a measure of livelihood deterioration.

An adequate analysis of livelihoods needs to be holistic in nature, encompassing an understanding of context, social differentiation between households, and social disaggregation within households, particularly with respect to gender and generation. Nevertheless, whilst livelihoods approaches are adequate for ensuring effective identification of poor and vulnerable groups, they place less emphasis on an analysis of power, and the measures required to achieve greater social equity.”¹⁸

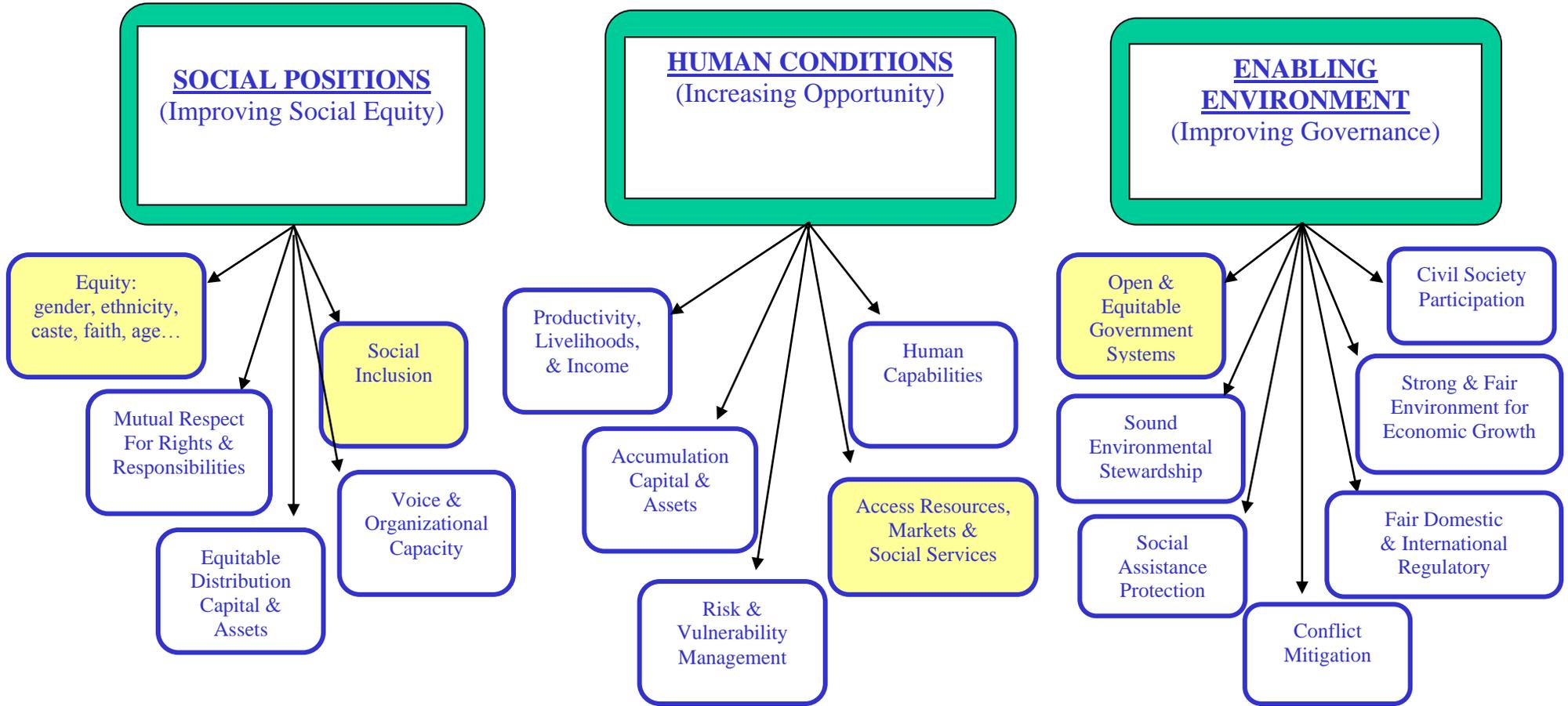
This framework has been enriched through the years by CARE’s work on rights, gender, governance and other manifestations of power relations, breaking down the unitary notions of a welfare-maximizing household, and generating much richer understanding of the material, political, and social dynamics underpinning household options and behaviors. At the same time, these new insights also generated a certain degree of conceptual confusion among competing lenses.

One attempt to re-organize our thinking has led recently to the development of a second conceptual model CARE calls the **Unifying Framework**. The Unifying Framework is a very broad causal hypothesis about the production and reproduction of poverty in the countries where CARE works. It seeks to focus CARE beyond the immediate and intermediate causes of poverty that occupy much of our attention to date, and organizes the underlying forces that shape the options and behaviors of the poor into three key “categories” of causes – those related to basic material or *human conditions*; to identity, influence, and *social positions*; and to the structure of laws, norms, and institutions that constitute the *enabling environment*.

The Unifying framework is intentionally meant to be flexible, open, and fluid; its major function is to spark local conversation and analysis. Rather than try to introduce into CARE any new theory of poverty, or to force a particular definition of poverty, the Strategic Impact Inquiry will instead adopt the Unifying Framework as its own theoretical model, understanding this to be an alternate and current representation of the dynamic HLS framework.

¹⁸ Drinkwater, “A Common Framework” unpublished paper draft, February 2004.

Unifying Framework for Poverty Eradication & Social Justice



Gender and Gender Inequity

One of the key underlying causes of poverty is the construction in different contexts over time of what it means to be a man, or a woman. **Gender** analysis in the context of development and poverty work exposes and explores differentials in the beliefs, behaviors, resource endowments, and outcomes attached to women and men (and girls and boys) in a given context. Fuller treatment of gender as a critical component of HLS and rights-based programming is available elsewhere¹⁹ and will not be repeated here. However, in constructing the overall relationship between poverty, gender, rights and power, it is worth signaling here a few of the ways in which a gendered lens conditions our view of power and power relations.

In one important sense, gender is one ramification of a general model of power outlined below, which holds that behaviors patterned over time and space give rise to social structures (ideologies, rules, institutions) which, in turn, reinforce and “normalize” those behaviors to the point where they are seen as a natural and biological order of life. In this way, behaviors associated with reproduction of private and family life (child-rearing, cooking, housekeeping, etc) come to be seen as intrinsically female in most societies, while those of production and public life come to be seen as essentially male. In this patterning of identity, roles, relationships and resources, power is distributed, and institutionalized, in ways that condition the self-images, attitudes, capacities, and outcomes that women and men – the set “the rules of the game” within which any given individual seeks to fulfill their dignity. These gendered rules define the character, composition, and distribution of all social resources and opportunities, and are therefore inextricably bound up in the question of poverty. The rules are often hidden or silent, but can be surfaced and interrogated, or overtly challenged, through personal and collective consciousness and actions that deviate from the norm. In this way, women and men contest the flow of resources, agendas and ideologies.

In another sense, gender theory offers an important critique/enrichment to standard models of power – by emphasizing the constructed, fluid, and fungible nature of power, even in its most structured forms. It shines an important light on people’s ingenuity in constantly modulating and manipulating gender norms and identities in order to maximize their room to maneuver and obtain their basic needs and rights. Consider, for example:

- The intersection of gender interests/rules with those of ethnicity, class, caste... and how women and men reconstruct their identities to enable them to negotiate those intersections to maximum advantage.
- The fluidity over the human lifecycle in meanings (and, therefore, resources and opportunities) assigned to masculinity and femininity, and the construction and reproduction of a life-cycle of power and capability over time.
- The variability of gender identities in function of the external environment, and people’s adaptation in patterns of migration, or even in the different spaces in which they operate in one simple day’s movement through a village.

While gendered structures of power can be said to produce general rules of dominance and subordination across cultures, and result in exclusions from the resources and opportunities needed to secure a sustainable livelihood, these examples demand constant questioning of any orthodoxies regarding gender and its link to power and poverty. An exploration of gender and power, then, requires a close and deeply sensitive attention to the strategies deployed by individual men and women, and their collectives, in negotiating the gendered power structures, and modulating behaviors of compliance and defiance.

¹⁹ See, for example, [Gender Equity Building Blocks](#) (CARE, 2002).

Power and Empowerment

A key breakthrough in CARE’s evolving understanding of the underlying causes of poverty has been the explicit recognition of power as the “currency” of material and social well-being. Theories of power are not in short supply. Yet much of the professional development literature – particularly so-called “gray literature” – that discusses power lacks any explicit theory of power. Globally, CARE has only begun work that might lead to the adoption of a common theorization and definition of power.²⁰ The SII will build upon that work and try to move it forward.

Power has been simply and instrumentally defined by gender activists within the development industry as “the ability to get what you need, keep what you have, and influence others in order to meet your interests.” The simple but intuitive appeal of this definition is grounded in the more sophisticated treatment given by Sen and subsequent theorists to the notion of capabilities, and empowerment as the process of expansion of capabilities. The capabilities approach, in turn rests critically on the concept of **agency**, the active exercise of choice in the face of power relations and structures.²¹

The theory of power that CARE has begun working with – and which underpins the work of most theorists mentioned so far – is strongly rooted in Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (1984).²² Central to Giddens’ theory are several simple notions:

1. **Agency.** The individual person is central in society: people are deeply knowledgeable for Giddens. They can step back and assess the context in which they act, they can even talk about the large-scale structures that might act as constraints to freedom of action, and they can decide to take action in conformity with such structural constraints or in contradiction to them. The individual – no matter his/her social identity – always has agency. Large-scale structures are human creations for Giddens, and people can therefore change them. Nobody is powerless; nobody is all-powerful.
2. **Structure.** Agents (i.e., individuals) produce and reproduce routines, conventions, relationships and taken-for-granted behavior. Over time these become givens and we enact them largely without thinking why or how. Such patterned, reproduced, and constantly reinforced relationships are what Giddens considers social structure. All social structures come to seem objective, as “out there” in society, as outside of our control. They imply deep, unspoken rules which are deeply implicated in the reproduction of social relations, rules that often lie hidden behind formalistic rules such as law, bureaucracy, politesse, language, etc. Structure accomplishes three crucially important social goals: It establishes agreed-upon significations (meanings), accepted forms of domination (who has power over what or whom), and agreed criteria for legitimizing the social order.
3. **Subjectivity.** Social structure (and the vast array of rules, norms, conventions, etc. that become “second nature” or “normal” for societal actors) is imprinted in the minds of social actors in two ways: “Practical consciousness” and “discursive consciousness.” For Giddens, practical consciousness is not normally accessible to agents: it is unconscious. Discursive consciousness is precisely what people can articulate about their own actions and motivations. The discrepancy between practical and discursive consciousness is critical to structures of power in any

²⁰ See Elisa Martínez, “Notes on Understanding and Measuring Empowerment,” May 23, 2004, available upon request from author martinez@care.org. This paper was presented at the May 2004 meeting of the DME Cadre in Egypt.

²¹ After Kabeer, “Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the MDGs” IDRC 2003.

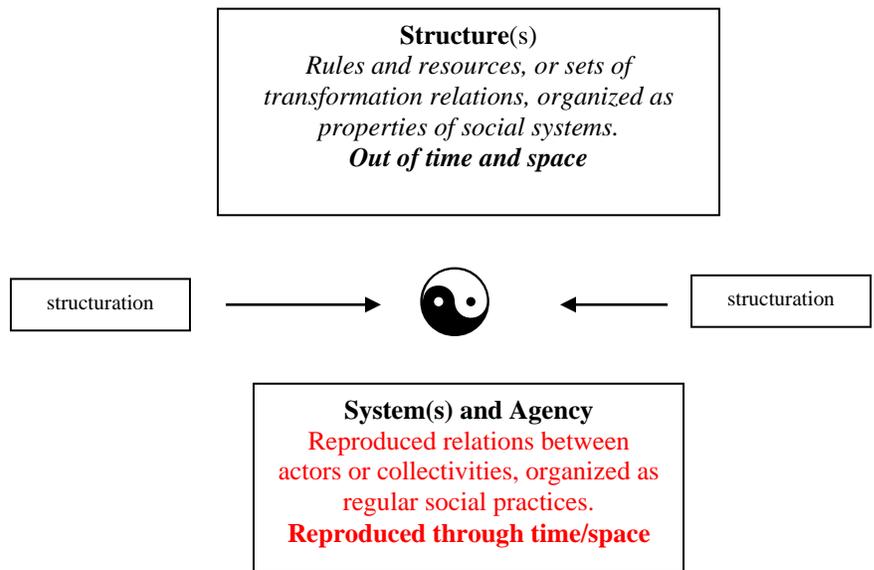
²² Anthony Giddens, “Elements of the Theory of Structuration,” In *The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration*, 1-40. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984. Martínez’ work marries gender theory to the World Bank’s effort to better measure empowerment. While the Bank does not cite Giddens, his work underpins scholarly work referred to by the Bank.

society...and critical to effective research on the impact of CARE’s programs on gendered structures of power.

4. **Resources.** Power is inescapable in social life. As long as there are groups of people power is at work. For Giddens, power is at work over resources. Thus, any social grouping is organized to have resources flow and accumulate in certain ways. And two categories of resources are critical for Giddens: Allocative and authoritative. *Allocative resources* are those capabilities that command control over objects, goods, or material life. *Authoritative resources* refers to control over people.

The graphic to the right schematizes Giddens’ model of the production and reproduction of social life.

Power, it follows, can have many forms – economic, political, social, cultural, symbolic (including semantic) – and actors rarely dominate them all. No actor is powerless: all, for example, have the ability to reflect on relationships between structure and agency, to learn, and to take individual or organize collective action. Another consequence of Giddens’ thinking is that power is not necessarily a zero-sum game: just because one social actor has power does not mean that others do not, nor does the accumulation or loss of power by a social actor automatically mean that some other social actor gained or lost the same amount. And finally, “power” itself is a socially constructed category, one that does not necessarily have the same social signification in, say, Harlem, New York, as it does in Kandahar, Afghanistan.



Finally, Giddens’ theory of structuration points us to the different “modes” in which power operates – the fact that it is simultaneously present and acting in a number of dimensions. Wolf (1990) has called these “four modes of power,”²³ , and we have adapted that framework to illustrate its link with forms/modes of power commonly discussed in gender literature²⁴:

Personal: Power within, Power To: An individual’s ability to know, pursue, and, in some cases, achieve their interests. Based on self-images, other-images, skills, resources, and motivations

Interpersonal: An individual’s ability to influence other agents and structures around her/him, in order to achieve their interests – can be cooperative (**power with**) or controlling (**power over**). This latter takes important implications when applied to the structural domain, in visible, hidden, and invisible forms:

Visible: derives from the formal/public forms, rules, and processes governing the interpersonal process. EG – membership in collectives, electoral laws, budgets.

Hidden: determines which agents/agendas become part of the interpersonal process – and the ability to control (often behind the scenes) the settings in which agents interact.

Invisible: define, through processes of acculturation, the very field of the “possible,” the “reasonable” or the “logical.” Examples include kinship in some societies, capitalism, religion,

²³ Eric Wolfe, “Facing Power,” *American Anthropologist* 92, 3 (1990): 586-596.

²⁴ Notably, the discussion of forms and mechanisms of power in Veneklasen and Miller *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, 45-49.

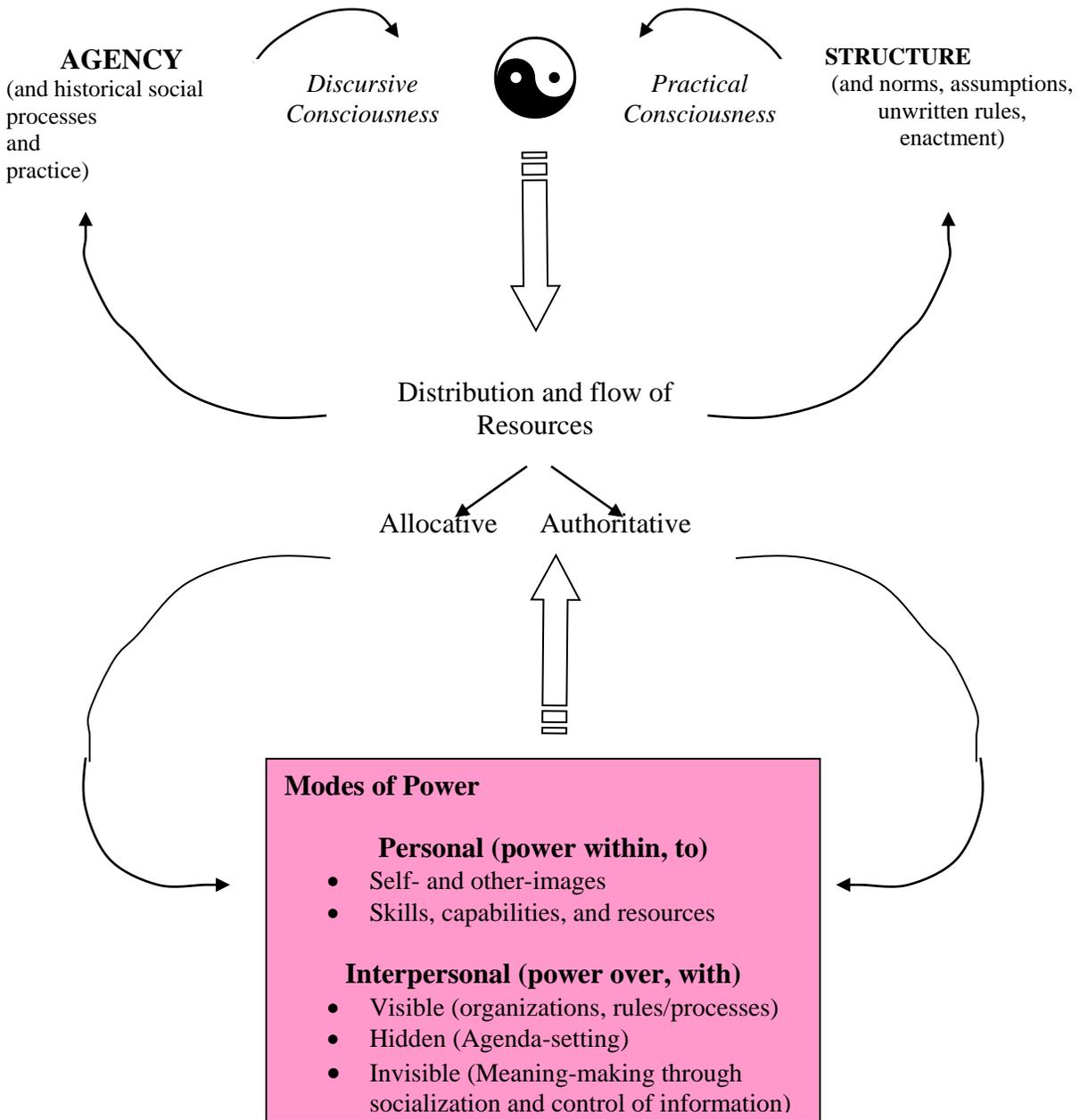
science, and education. This kind of power comprises and maintains the macro political economy and serves to define the “possible field of action of others.”²⁵

The graphic on the next page offers not so much a theory but a conceptual model – based on these adaptations of Giddens’ theorization – for power that will be used in this SII. It is used as the basis of the core evidence categories, indicators, data sources, data gathering methods, and data analysis methods for the SII.

This model expresses how power dynamics drive interaction among material, social, and environmental causes of poverty found in CARE’s Unifying Framework. It also places more centrally the creation and contestation of *resources* that is core to the HLS framework. It reveals the underlying causes to be *historical, relational, and relative* rather than static and absolute. The model also suggests the cohesion among CARE International’s six program principles. Each of the principles aims to generate programs that are effective in addressing the web of causation shown in the model.

We propose that this model of power can be held constant – for research purposes – across CARE’s future inquiries into how RBA and a focus on poverty alleviation articulates with power in the societies where CARE works. The model also provides CARE researchers with the broad evidence categories they should incorporate into research designs.

²⁵ Wolfe., p. 587.



Bringing Strands Together: Women's Empowerment

CARE's treatment of the SII theme of women's empowerment derives directly from these various elements – our understanding of how poor women and men navigate the livelihood choices and opportunities available to them, our recognition of the dynamic and contested nature of even the most enduring systems of gender relations, and our growing recognition that sustainable empowerment for women relies on a combination of changes and interactions affecting social positions, material conditions, and the broader structural environment. The conceptual framework of women's empowerment proposed by this study draws from existing efforts to conceptualize and measure empowerment, seeking to validate or enrich these efforts by placing women's own voices into the framework, and weave them into a coherent model consistent with these strands.

Empowerment has been theorized from many perspectives – including those founded in a more “zero-sum” notion of power and those that take a more expansive notion of power. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on those discussions of empowerment that take place within a feminist, gendered perspective. Empowerment is defined broadly as “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives.”²⁶ Notable in this definition is the recognition of empowerment as a *process of building capability* (and not simply the material outcomes visible in CARE's impact frameworks to date), and of the importance of *structure* as represented by the institutions affecting people's lives.

This broad conception can be further grounded in a feminist theory as “the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.”²⁷ This definition is notable in its focus on *choice*, which Kabeer defines as comprising three critical elements: *agency* (power within/to), operationalized in reference to *resources (power to/over)*, and made visible in its resulting beneficial/valued *achievements*. And finally, *agency* is exercised, in this conception of empowerment, in opposition to a prior condition of subordination in important (*strategic*) arenas of life. Strategic interests, in gender and development theory, differ from “practical gender needs,” in that they go beyond the basic functions/capacities which allow people to fulfill the gender roles assigned to them, and aim to open new gendered spaces of ideology, action and opportunity. In this sense, empowerment is importantly tied to impact on the structural underpinnings of women's subordinate status and well-being.

This impact inquiry interlinks these insights on gendered power relations, their sources and manifestations, into three broad domains that closely reflect the Giddens model put forth earlier, exploring how CARE's work has affected the means, processes, and outcomes of empowerment through impact in the domains of agency, structural, and relations²⁸. It is important to note that with respect to assessment CARE's contribution to the empowerment of women in poor communities, we recognize that it is no less relevant to explore the gendered dynamics of power and identity that define and drive our own organization. This is not only because we recognize CARE's norms and forms to be crucial elements of the structural and relational landscape within the women exercise their agency, but also because CARE's own staff and stakeholders as likely to be impacted upon as they are to foster impact in the lives of others – and registering and directing these changes is critical if we are to take our personal and institutional place in the transformations that will lead to a more just society.

By implication, some of the arenas that this framework calls us to explore and probe include:

²⁶ Narayan, *Sourcebook on Empowerment*. World Bank 2001.

²⁷ Kabeer, “The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment,” UNRISD Discussion Paper 108, August 1999.

²⁸ While others have subsumed relational dimensions within either agency (as a manifestation of women's choices under constraint) or structure (as a set of rules and codes enshrined in the normative environment), they fall perhaps most aptly into the realm of “structuration,” for they represent the moment and space of contact between the individual and her environs – a process of co-creating possibilities that is neither wholly within her power to control, nor wholly external to her.

- the visions and goals poor women identify for themselves, with respect to their own empowerment – and how these are supported or conflict with those of CARE staff and programs
- the gendered nature of poverty outcomes and their causes in any given community
- the nature and gender dynamics of household livelihood strategies
- the dimensions and degrees of empowerment that do or don't arise
- the interactions or breakdowns that arise between changes in agency, structure, and relations – and how CARE programs recognize or respond to these
- the relationship between CARE's approaches and organizational form and any changes wrought in women's conditions, positions, and environments.