



Why Women and Girls are at the Center of CARE's Work

At CARE, advocating for the rights of women and girls is a major focus of our work. That is because CARE's mission is to save lives, defeat poverty, and achieve social justice, which means we must help address the root causes that perpetuate poverty, crisis, and inequality.

Women and girls are often the worst affected by poverty and crisis *because of* gender inequality in their communities, homes and throughout their lives. Their needs are also regularly neglected and their voices remain unheard when it is time to find solutions. Without transforming this status quo, the cycle continues, further leaving generations of women and girls behind. But we can break this cycle. Over decades of work, CARE has consistently seen that upholding women's and girls' rights and including them in decision-making about the issues that affect them are key to achieving our mission.

Inequality By the Numbers

The impacts of gender discrimination and the denial of women's and girls' rights are among the major causes of poverty and can exacerbate humanitarian need:

- Globally, women and girls are over-represented among the poor: **330 million women and girls live on less than \$1.90 a day; that's 4.4 million more than men.**
- In **nearly two thirds of countries worldwide, women are more likely than men to report food insecurity.** If women had equal access to agricultural resources, the number of hungry people in the world could be **reduced by 100 to 150 million.**
- An estimated **one in three women worldwide** will experience gender-based violence (GBV) in her lifetime. In 2016, the global cost of violence against women was estimated by the UN to be **US\$1.5 trillion**, equivalent to **approximately 2% of the global gross domestic product (GDP).**
- Humanitarian crises affect women and girls more heavily. A reported **61% of maternal deaths** worldwide occur in fragile states, many of them affected by conflict and recurring natural disasters. Every day, **507 women and adolescent girls die** from pregnancy and childbirth complications in emergency settings. Adolescent girls in conflict zones are **90% more likely to be out of school** than girls in non-conflict settings. A reported **70% of women experience gender-based violence (GBV)** in humanitarian contexts compared with 35% worldwide.
- In lower income countries, **4 out of every 1,000 women** will die in childbirth.
- While much of the global economy depends on work performed by women, women's work remains consistently undervalued. Women average **three to six hours of unpaid housework, childcare, and eldercare per day – more than three times that of men.** Yet, if women around the world had the same opportunities as men in the job market, the **world's economy would grow by US\$28 trillion.**
- The global COVID-19 pandemic has had stark impacts on women and girls. An estimated **31 million additional cases of GBV** could occur in six months of the COVID-19 lockdown and another **15 million** more for each additional three months. The loss of prevention programs and disruptions in education could increase the number of girls facing female genital mutilation/cutting by **2 million** and increase child marriages by **13 million** over 10 years. Women and girls are facing disproportionate job and income loss, unpaid care burdens, and exposure to exploitative work. The opportunity cost of ignoring women's economic empowerment in COVID-19 response could amount to **decreasing global GDP by US\$1 trillion by 2030.**

Investments in Gender Equality Make a Difference

To achieve healthy, safe, and prosperous communities, CARE puts gender equality and women's and girls' leadership at the center of our work. As outlined above, women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and crisis precisely *because of* gender inequality. Addressing these inequalities and including women's voices are central to developing solutions that increase the ability of women and girls to fully participate in, and lead, their societies and communities. Higher numbers of women leaders also correspond with [higher standards of living](#), [better outcomes in access to education](#), [infrastructure](#) and [health](#), and [more responsive government](#).

CARE's gender-focused approach yields more sustainable and equitable results across sectors, meeting the multiple challenges that women and girls face. These include efforts to end child marriage and its consequent negative effects, and to improve women's workplace conditions for greater economic empowerment and safety. Our programs and partnerships in over 100 countries around the world focus on building women's economic resilience and expanding the power of savings groups, ending gender-based violence, and fostering women's leadership and participation in decision-making. We work with communities and local partners to advance girls' education; facilitate women smallholder farmers' access to agricultural resources, and improve nutrition for women and girls. We assist in building healthy communities by supporting community health workers and strengthening health systems, highlighting adolescent girls' health needs, and improving reproductive health care. We respond to disasters to ensure that the most urgent humanitarian needs – including those of women and girls – are met and that women have meaningful opportunities to lead in emergencies.

For effective and sustainable progress, we invest in approaches that transform the norms and structures that hold women and girls back, and to strengthen their opportunities to lead in their communities. **Our programs and partnerships in over 100 countries around the world focus on building women's economic resilience and expanding the power of savings groups, ending gender-based violence, and fostering women's leadership and participation in decision-making.**



Women's Leadership is Catalyzing Impact

ENSURE is a USAID program in Zimbabwe. CARE led on gender analysis, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) programming, and implementation in three of the project's six regions.

One of the highlights of this program was **CARE's investment in gender through a VSLA program**. Savings groups are self-managed groups of 15 to 25 people, mostly women, who meet regularly to save their money in a safe space, access small loans, and obtain emergency insurance. As part of the ENSURE program, **women mobilized \$650,000** in capital through VSLAs. Between savings and loans in their VSLAs, more than 10,800 Zimbabweans could access credit and save for the future. **In one district, \$1,776 from VSLAs went to build latrines in the community.** The women-led group collectively decided to invest their savings to bring lasting and sustainable improvements to the water, sanitation, and health of their community.