



CARE's Work with Adolescents and Youth

Capacity Statement

Adolescents and youth are not only one of the largest generations we've ever seen, but they are the leaders of the future¹.

Young people (aged 10-29) account for 2.4 billion of the world's total population of 7.7 billion.^{2,3,4}

In Sub-Saharan countries, an average of 42% of the population is under age 15; and in fragile and conflict-affected countries, 40% of the population is under 15.⁵ Young people are not simply a demographic subset, but rather should be at the center of development programming. CARE recognizes this, and seeks to prioritize working with adolescents and youth, recognizing they are the key to systematically reducing poverty. In Fiscal Year 2021, 52% of CARE's global projects worked with adolescents and/or youth as a key impact group.



Andreea Campeanu / CARE

CARE'S APPROACH

CARE's programming seeks to build knowledge and skills and strengthen the resilience of young people to the broad range of stressors and shocks they face.⁶ CARE promotes a focus on young girls and boys, women and men as positive change agents who bring creativity, energy and commitment to their communities.⁷ CARE implements Positive Youth Development principles, viewing young people as key partners in the range of development efforts.⁸

CARE works for change across three core domains: building agency, changing relations, and transforming structures.^{9,10} Over the past decade, CARE has tested and refined its model of leadership development for adolescents and youth. We have come to understand that adolescents themselves must be invested in, to enhance their assets and agency. Yet, their ability to change and make change will be limited unless the environment around them facilitates that change. Supportive relationships, networks and norms, in addition to supportive structural environments, are the fertile soil that can support development of individual adolescents' agency and assets.

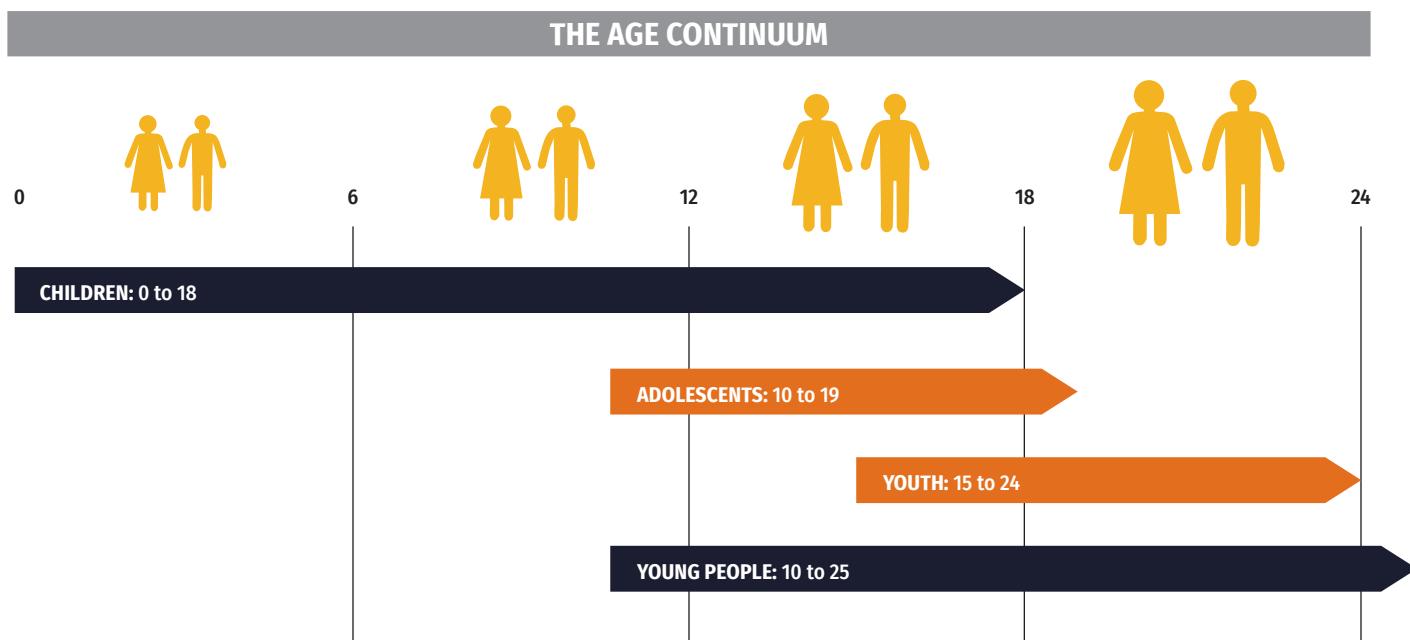
CARE's work takes a rights-based, gender-transformative and life-cycle approach to build agency and capacity through basic services, support systems and resources.¹¹ We also use an asset-based approach, not a deficit-based approach, to adolescent and youth programming.¹²

With increasingly complex political, environmental, and social contexts, the need to abandon the linear "design-do-evaluate pathway" has become apparent.¹³ We take an iterative approach.¹⁴ As actors engage and issues emerge, we tailor and adapt our strategies.¹⁵ We expect the learning and innovation around our model of adolescent empowerment to contribute to global understanding of the complex issues driving barriers to adolescent empowerment, and of the strategies that contribute to a "tipping point" of sustainable change on viable alternative paths to empowerment for adolescent girls and boys.¹⁶

Ages We Target

The United Nations defines "adolescents" as ages 10-19, "young people" as 10-25, and "youth" as 15 to 24.¹⁷ Many governments have national youth policies that define "youth" as being up to 35 years old. The Convention on the Rights of the Child covers birth to 18.¹⁸ CARE has chosen to target adolescents, ages 10-19, and youth, ages 15-24, as illustrated below.

Programming for a 10-year-old differs from that of a 16-year-old or a 24-year-old. Programming with all young people needs to take into consideration what is appropriate for their age, development and cognitive abilities, social abilities, and surroundings.



Who We Aim to Reach

We focus on girls and women because, when they are equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty.¹⁹ But bringing boys and men along in creating a gender-equal environment helps ensure that systems and mindsets are changed in sustainable ways.

Where We Work

CARE supports adolescent and youth empowerment in some of the world's most challenging conflict and post-conflict environments,²⁰ in least-developed countries, fragile states, middle-income countries, countries affected by disaster and crisis, and developed countries.²¹ We work at the nexus of humanitarian and development programming,²² in the most socially marginalized and economically isolated communities.²³

How We Work

Empowerment is at the center of our work, with young people and their communities our equal partners. We equip young people with the skills and confidence to raise their voices to address any underlying harmful norms, power imbalances and structural barriers that keep them from reaching their full potential.

Sectors We Work Through

Each community – like each young person – has unique strengths and challenges. Therefore, we are flexible and nimble in our approach, according to context.²⁴ In one community, the barriers to girls' accessing healthcare may be the biggest challenge, while in another community, the pressures that pull boys out of school and into risky migration may be the biggest area in need of support. Our adolescent empowerment work takes place through: poverty reduction, human rights, educational access and quality, health access and quality, food security, nutrition, economic empowerment and economic development of individuals and communities, building sustainable livelihoods, gender equality and equity, policy and advocacy-based change, life skills development, governance and accountability of service providers, infrastructure, information and communication technologies access, relevance and use, and others.^{25, 26}

Reaching the Most Marginalized

CARE aims to reach young people who are the most marginalized, whether because of gender, economic status, ethnicity, geographic location, disability, education level, religion, age, life-stage, urban/rural status or crisis vs. stable context, or migratory vs. settled status. We target youth who are most impacted by the effects of markets, globalization, political upheavals and crises. These are the people who stand to gain the most from our support, as other systems and structures have failed to reach them.



Toby Madden/CARE

WHY PRIORITIZE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH?

Adolescence, which is marked by profound biological, neurological and social transitions, offers a critical window for unlocking human potential.²⁷ It also is a time of great vulnerability. There are more young people ages 10-24 on the globe today than at any other point in human history.²⁸,²⁹ Looking deeper into those figures, 90% of youth live in low- and middle-income countries,³⁰ and 30% live in fragile or conflict-affected countries.³¹ Over the next three decades, the geographic distribution of youth is expected to shift, with the number of people aged 15-24 rising to 1.34 billion by 2050 – 30% of whom will live in sub-Saharan Africa.³²

As young people navigate the path from adolescence to adulthood, they are learning how to be independent and productive members of their communities.³³ During this critical period, adolescents need support that strengthens their capacities, confidence and skills; transforms relationships and social norms to become more enabling and equitable; and shifts formal and informal institutions and structures to adopt an adolescent-supportive lens.³⁴

CARE prioritizes adolescents and youth because:

Young people are agents of change and social transformation.

Throughout history, young people have driven powerful, transformational social movements.³⁵ They have a pivotal role to play in the shifting of cultural and social norms and policy frameworks,³⁶ particularly through civic engagement. Many young people already are proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress and inspiring political change.³⁷ If their talents, skills and potential are fully tapped, young women, men, boys and girls represent an unprecedented opportunity for economic and social development in their communities.³⁸

The period of rapid brain development during adolescence serves as a window of opportunity.

A massive increase in the availability of neurological data backs up the possibilities and promise of investing in adolescence. Because early adolescence (ages 9-14) is a time of neural remodeling and later adolescence (ages 15-24) is a period of solidification, the inputs that affect brain

development and the way in which teenagers spend their time is pivotal.³⁹,⁴⁰ The adolescent brain's increased propensity for taking risks means that young people are more open to try new things and adopt new behaviors that can lead to transformational change. Optimal brain development is a foundation for adolescent well-being, productivity and empowerment across the lifespan.

Youth migration can fuel progress, spark innovation and transfer knowledge, skills and technology.

Each year, 27 million young people leave their homes to seek employment in other countries as international migrants.⁴¹ Too often, migration is a coping mechanism fueled by lack of viable options in a young person's country of origin, and the trek can be unsafe and poorly planned. However, when youth migration is safe and orderly – and accompanied by technical/vocational training and the uptake of marketable skills – it can stimulate virtuous circles of employment creation and inclusive growth.⁴² The massive waves of youth migration, never before seen at this scale, can foster greater interconnectedness of young people across the globe.

Young people's unprecedented connectivity positions them to drive social and economic progress.

Youth are key early adopters of digital technologies,⁴³ but connectivity is highly inequitable, with females and youth in rural, impoverished areas disproportionately left out.⁴⁴ If women used mobile internet as much as men, global gross domestic product may rise by \$700 billion.⁴⁵ The growth of technology platforms presents opportunities for transformative change when youth use mobile phones, internet, and social media platforms to access knowledge, markets and financial services.⁴⁶

A prolonged period of adolescence heightens the importance of this period for capacity building.

Today's young people are spending more time in school and starting work later.⁴⁷ Repercussions of the pandemic and current world crises may further delay their transition into independent adult life.⁴⁸ In this context, ultra-marginalized youth get left further and further behind.

The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without youth.

Achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as CARE's Vision for 2030, cannot be done without significant, focused investment in adolescent and youth well-being.⁴⁹ Meeting goals across all sectors – poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, energy, work and economic growth, industry, inequity, cities, consumption, climate, oceans, land, peace, justice and partnership⁵⁰ – requires the significant engagement of young people.

Investment in adolescents and youth ripples across generations.

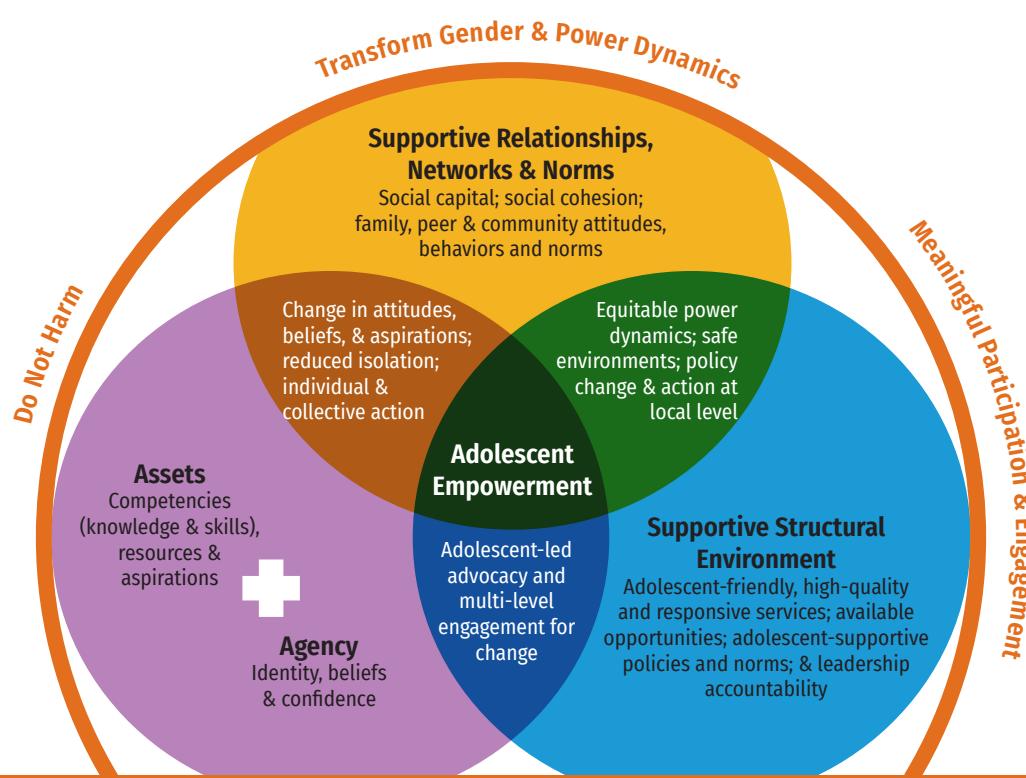
Investing in adolescents and youth represents a triple dividend: improvement in their current well-being, rights and empowerment; greater productivity and well-being in future adult lives; and their pivotal influence on the next generations.^{51, 52}

The planet's sustainability depends on youth.

The actions and capacities of the largest-ever cohort of youth will determine the sustainability of ecosystems, economic development, population mobility,⁵³ and management of the trajectory of climate change.

ADOLESCENT EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

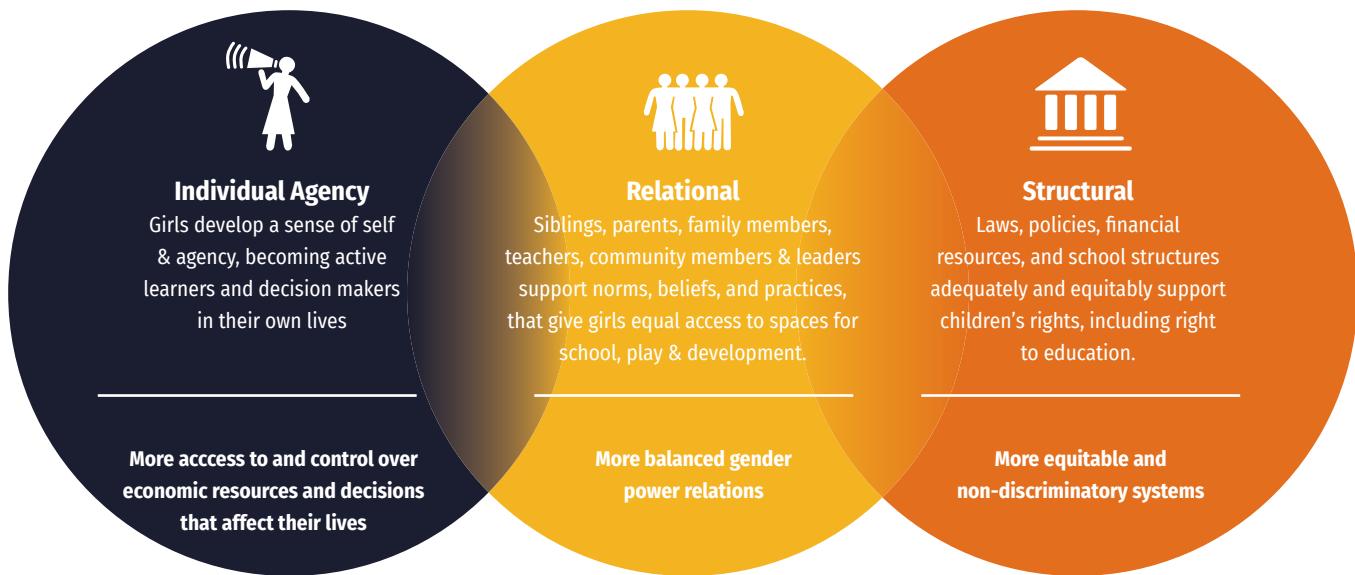
CARE defines adolescent empowerment as: *when young people have power to make their own informed choices, and use their agency to plan their futures, pursue opportunities to realize their aspirations, and lead the change they desire for themselves and their communities.* CARE supports and works in partnership with adolescents across the humanitarian-to-development continuum to ensure that they have the competencies, resources and enabling environment to actualize their empowerment.⁵⁴



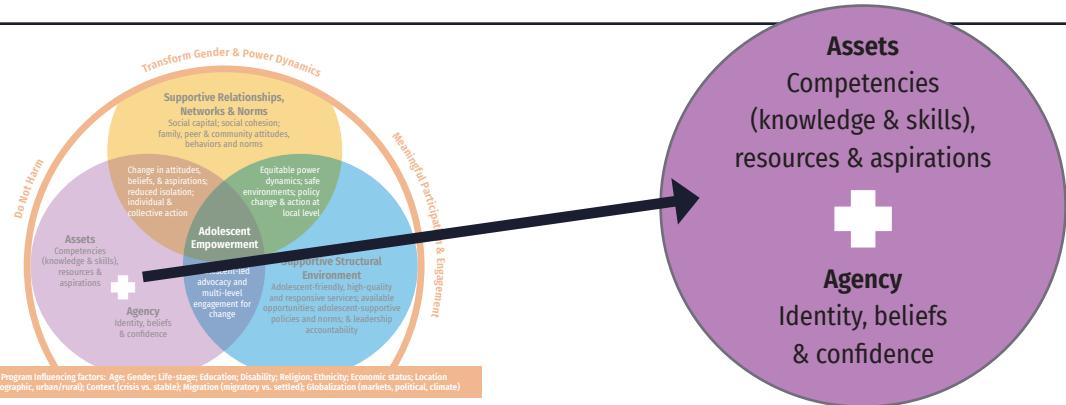
Program Influencing factors: Age; Gender; Life-stage; Education; Disability; Religion; Ethnicity; Economic status; Location (geographic, urban/rural); Context (crisis vs. stable); Migration (migratory vs. settled); Globalization (markets, political, climate)

CARE applies this model of adolescent empowerment with diverse populations and across sectors. For example, the diagram below shows how CARE works at the individual, relational and structural domains to develop adolescent girls' competencies through the education sector.⁵⁵

EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AND ADOLESCENTS



ASSETS AND AGENCY



Assets

CARE works to bring about just and lasting change by equipping young people with critical skills and competencies,⁵⁶ as well as resources.⁵⁷ Between 15-44 % of the income-achievement gap in adolescence may attributable to difference in brain development.^{58, 59}

Competencies (Knowledge and Skills)

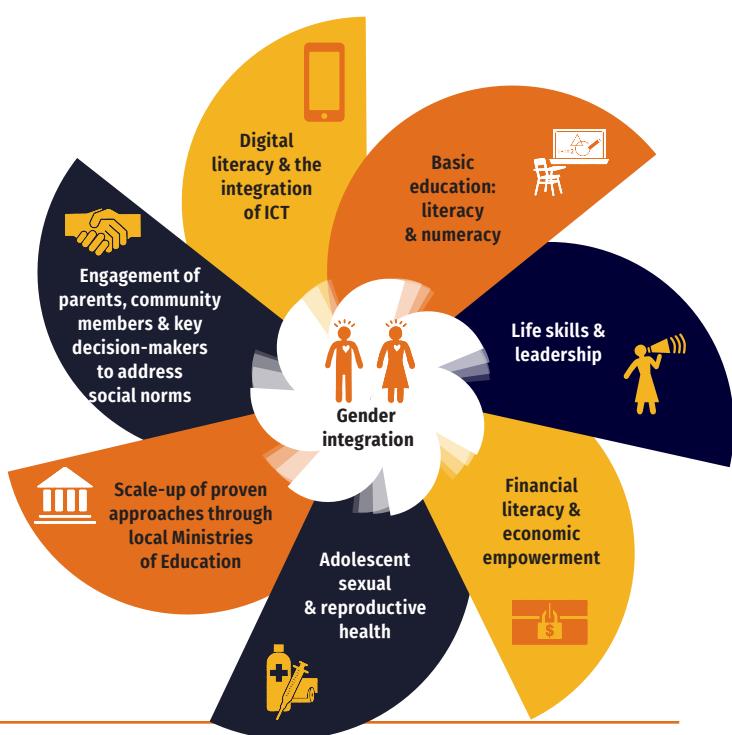
CARE's goal is to give young people the tools they need to make informed choices, live healthy and productive lives, and pursue opportunities to realize their aspirations.⁶⁰ A quality education is the key, and so, CARE increases access to school and training.⁶¹ Our approach is comprehensive, though, designed to create multiple pathways for young people as they transition into adulthood, by creating a culture of enterprise, market access and awareness, agricultural and financial literacy that empowers them to launch, lead or scale micro-enterprises and employment opportunities.^{62, 63, 64} When youth are supported to transition into upper grades or skills training and able to engage in dignified work, they gain increased economic, social and political participation and decision-making power,⁶⁵ which translates into greater empowerment across the lifespan.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **India** and **Nepal**, CARE's *Strengthening Opportunities for Adolescent Resilience* (SOAR) model addresses a critical lack of opportunities for out-of-school children (especially girls) to acquire key academic and life skills. In a compressed 11-month curriculum, SOAR combines academics with financial literacy, digital skills, leadership and life skills, and adolescent hygiene, sexual and

reproductive health. In India, 85% of graduates have transitioned into government schools, with more than 80% completing their eighth-grade education. Among the graduates, 20% of girls went on to college, and 10% became entrepreneurs, with estimated earnings of \$20,000 after age 25, doubling their income compared with girls without secondary education.^{66, 67} The state of Uttar Pradesh, which has a population larger than many low- and middle-income countries, has adapted the model for out-of-school girls. The initiative also has scaled to seven countries, providing an accelerated education to 705,186 students and leadership skills to more than 4 million girls.^{68, 69}

CARE'S SOAR MODEL



Resources

Young people need access to productive assets and resources to be able to increase their income, improve productivity, increase access to nutrients, improve health, mitigate climate change impacts, and become resilient to shocks and stressors.^{70, 71} CARE engages with the private and public sectors to increase youth access to inputs and equipment, along with access to land and water-smart agriculture.⁷² CARE also engages in youth economic empowerment and livelihoods resilience interventions that combine our proven village savings and loan methodology with increased livelihood pathways, support to entrepreneurship and wage employment, market linkages, tailored financial services to buy down lender risks, and support to establishment of agro-dealerships.⁷³ Also, CARE uses Junior Farmer Field and Business Schools, youth clubs, savings groups and other safe spaces as platforms to build skills, competencies and attitudes of youth to successfully participate in food and market systems.⁷⁴

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Rwanda**, adolescent girls and boys participated in school clubs that included a Youth Savings and Loan Association platform, where they practiced budgeting, saving and entrepreneurship. The percentage of adolescents who saved money over the year increased from 40% to 73%, with higher percentage increases among girls.⁷⁵ Students who saved money through the clubs were 17.5% less likely to miss school over the past month, and 12% less likely to drop out of school.⁷⁶

Aspirations

Aspirations create hope. They give young people a goal and a vision for improving their futures. CARE equips adolescents and youth with the skills they need to voice their ideas, articulate their aspirations, negotiate their concerns, and ultimately lead productive and healthy lives.⁷⁷ We use a holistic approach,⁷⁸ integrating the concept of reaching toward aspirations across all sectors. One of our tools is the Aspirations Quiz,⁷⁹ which playfully asks parents what they know about their children's hopes and dreams. After taking the quiz, parents and adolescents reflect together on their aspirations, exploring commonalities and analyzing gender issues before creating posters to depict adolescent girls' dreams and the pathways to reach them.⁸⁰

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Somalia**, CARE uses girl-led action as a tool for personal empowerment to shift self-defeating narratives and curtailed aspirations among historically marginalized pastoralists girls who are severely affected by climate change. Gender units from the Ministry of Education train **Girls' Empowerment Forum** mentors to guide adolescents to take action to address girls' education. Girls who participated in the empowerment forums increased leadership scores by 7%,⁸¹ compared with 1.2% in comparison sites. Participation in forums was the strongest predictor of improved literacy and numeracy outcomes – a 16% increase – with 5% higher school retention rates. Over three years, grade progression increased by 12% among pastoralist girls in intervention sites affected by drought and displacement, while decreasing 22% in comparison sites where girls were not supported through CARE interventions.⁸²

In Zimbabwe, Michelle Uses Entrepreneurship Skills to Continue her Education



Michelle participates in CARE's *Empowering Adolescents for Life-long Learning* project. "My teacher taught me that in every business I should be able to calculate whether I am making a profit or loss," she says. "When I visited my grandmother in Gutu district, I found her roasting maize. She gave me a brief lesson on how to do it, including how she spiced the maize to enhance its taste. When I returned home in Zaka, I tried to roast some maize, but it did not come out good. The following day

I tried for the second time. But it was only on my third trial when my aunt, after tasting, said, 'Apa wagona apa' (these are perfect!)."

Michelle decided to start selling roasted maize. "I started with a batch of 30," she says, "but I only sold 12 packets on my first attempt. **I did not get discouraged** and kept bringing this first batch until it was all sold. Since then, I have embraced selling roasted maize as my business. I earn enough profit to cover my daily school expenses.

My market is made up of teachers and learners at my school. I am balancing well my schoolwork and business, as I only sell during break and lunchtime. My peers have approached me so that I teach them how to roast maize, and I have shared my knowledge with them. I have a recipe that I am keen to share with anyone who wants to try roasting maize. I feel that even when I complete school, if I fail to get a job, I can expand my business and make a living.⁹⁵



Many Kate MacIsaac/CARE

Agency

CARE's approach is not simply to support adolescents, but rather to build their capacity to influence change for themselves.⁸³ "Agency" is defined as the ability to take action or to choose what action to take.⁸⁴ CARE's Power Within model focuses specifically on promoting skills and abilities in leadership so that adolescents and youth can be at the core of decision-making on food, nutrition, water, security, education and a number of other sectors.⁸⁵

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Globally, CARE has steadily strengthened adolescent girls' sense of agency, building leadership skills and cultivating girl-led activism as a long-term investment over a number of years.⁸⁶ When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and programs around the world were forced to pivot and contract almost immediately, girls were at the forefront. In **Niger**, girls worked with community management committees to develop localized messages centered on COVID risks and how community members could protect themselves.⁸⁷ In **Nepal**, government-mandated restrictions on movement halted an important research study, but girl leaders used their proximity, contextual knowledge and connections to carry out the research. They then presented findings to community members and used study findings to advocate for rights and mobility of girls during the pandemic.⁸⁸ In **Bangladesh**, when gender-based violence services came to a halt, adolescent peer leaders started providing referrals and basic psychological first aid to GBV survivors.⁸⁹ In **Côte d'Ivoire**, local health authorities approached youth-led organizations whose advocacy capacity and social capital had been strengthened through a yearlong partnership with CARE. These adolescents led community-based outreach on COVID-19 prevention, mitigation and access to essential health services.⁹⁰

Identity, Beliefs and Confidence

CARE designs and promotes initiatives that strengthen young people's confidence, capacities and skills.⁹¹ CARE's interventions seek to influence relationships and social norms to become more equitable, and to influence formal and informal institutions and structures to become more supportive of adolescents.⁹²

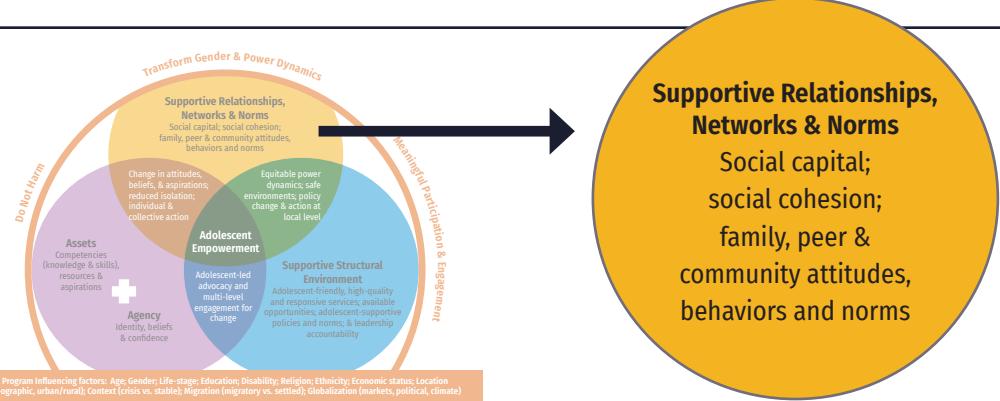
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Syria**, an initiative called *Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds* meets the immediate needs of married, pregnant or first-time adolescent mothers in crisis-affected settings, while simultaneously addressing community consciousness and engagement around gender, power and social norms. The initiative provides life skills and sexual and reproductive health training to adolescent girls. It also ensures that healthcare workers provide youth-friendly, rights-based services and creates safe spaces for young mothers to build their personal capacities while engaging parents and community leaders to support adolescent girls and transform inequitable gender and power dynamics. Of the participating girls, 73% report increased self-esteem, and 89% report increased confidence to participate in household and community decision-making.^{93, 94}

"I see myself in a positive way now. It's harder for others to change that, and I can persuade my family to see that value, too.

Participant in the Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds Initiative, Syria

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS, NETWORKS AND NORMS



Supportive relationships, networks and norms provide the fertile soil in which adolescent empowerment can sprout. Supportive relationships with adults and peers are essential for health, well-being and positive development across the lifespan. Networks empower young people to join forces, and serve as a core prerequisite to multiplying impact. Norms shape and govern what communities and individuals see as possible.

Social Capital

CARE uses positive affiliations, safe spaces, networks and youth movements to build substantial capital to end social injustice.⁹⁶ We work with a range of actors, young girls and women, young men and boys,⁹⁷ mothers, fathers, teachers, community leaders, government officials and many others to foster structured allyship⁹⁸ that nurtures adolescent-led activism.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Ethiopia**, a project called TESFA (which means “hope” in Amharic) has improved economic, sexual and reproductive health outcomes for married girls through peer-based solidarity village savings and loan groups and community engagement with influential adults. Girls consider the sense of “sisterhood” and friendship one of the most important benefits of the solidarity groups. Previously, girls had felt isolated in community gatherings and experienced discrimination or lack of respect from their mothers-in-law and husbands. The girls found solidarity group meetings to be a safe space where they could share their problems and feelings. Group members support each other during catastrophes and illnesses, as well as share happiness on joyous events like childbirth.

“I appreciate the sisterhood more than any other thing. We love each other, we miss each other until we meet again, and if one member gets sick or ill, we suspend our meeting and go visit her at home. ... I like our group because there is love among members.”

– Member of girls’ solidarity group

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion – a sense of inclusion and common good – is a major factor in communities' ability to define and achieve collective goals.⁹⁹ To foster that cohesion, CARE targets the root of “pull factors” that may attract young people to join movements that engage in violence, extremism or social upheaval.^{100, 101} At the same time, CARE encourages young people to finish their education¹⁰² and engage in productive livelihoods that build security and resilience.¹⁰³ In conflict and fragile contexts, we integrate social protection strategies such as cash vouchers, food for work and other strategies.¹⁰⁴ CARE integrates youth-specific information into conflict analysis and emphasizes the critical role that young people play in households and the community. Also, we have developed specific tools like the Youth-Centered Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment to engage young people in disaster risk reduction, which is a critical component of social cohesion.¹⁰⁵

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Afghanistan**, *Livelihood Advancement for Marginalized Populations* works to create employment opportunities for youth and marginalized internally displaced persons and returnees. The project uses greenhouse technologies to create agriculture-related “off-farm” job opportunities for community members who have limited access to land. It also strengthens the value chains for vegetables, dairy products and eggs through livestock and poultry production. In parallel, the project facilitates access to vocational training programs, job identification services, placement services, business planning, business management advice and support, and school-to-work transition support for secondary and university graduates. In provinces with high rates of extremism, the project opens pathways for viable and meaningful livelihood pathways.¹⁰⁶



Behaviors And Norms

CARE works with young people and their communities to question existing norms and raise their voices to address the underlying norms, power imbalances and structural barriers that negatively impact adolescents' health and well-being.¹⁰⁷ Changing social norms requires going beyond changing individual attitudes, so we focus on building a critical mass of individuals and groups that support gender equality and the empowerment of young people.¹⁰⁸ CARE uses our Social Analysis and Action tool¹⁰⁹ to stimulate reflection and dialogue with communities on gender and social norms and spark reflection and problem-solving, as we support young people and their communities to create their own solutions for challenging rigid gender roles.^{110, 111}

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Niger**, CARE tested a holistic package to empower married adolescents, ages 15-19, to delay the birth of their first child.¹¹² CARE works with young men and boys as partners and allies in strengthening gender equality and girls' voices.¹¹³ CARE employed its social analysis and action approach to address norms around early childbearing,¹¹⁴ where community members engaged in participatory dialogues to reflect on, and take action, and transform norms impacting early childbearing among adolescents in the community. Husbands and other males were enlisted as allies in helping adolescent girls delay first birth through existing “fada groups” (traditional Niger male clubs for socializing, tea drinking and sharing food).^{115, 116} The fada groups used an interactive curriculum on sexual and reproductive health, relationships, financial literacy, health and economic benefits of delayed first birth, communication skills, and gender and social norm transformation.¹¹⁷ CARE also supported men's leadership potential with skills and tools to carry out awareness-raising activities and community action plans, in collaboration with Girls' clubs, known locally as ‘collectives’. Following implementation, each fada club nominated one married and one unmarried co-leader, who received training and mentoring by previous fada facilitators. These efforts facilitate sustainability and ownership, providing opportunities for men to build their leadership, knowledge, self-efficacy and skills in working to change social norms.¹¹⁸

Family, Peer and Community Attitudes

CARE programming addresses the knowledge, attitudes, and practices that influence adult-decision-makers and “opinion leaders” – parents, influential community members, religious leaders – to support adolescents’ well-being and rights.¹¹⁹

Family Attitudes

Families are essentially the “first system” that adolescents experience, as they play an indispensable role in supporting children’s health, education and well-being.¹²⁰ Families’ attitudes shape adolescents’ access to services, resources, exposure to gender-based opportunities and barriers. More importantly, their attitudes shape adolescent self-concept and sense of agency, as well as lifelong capacities. Family attitudes are formative during early childhood but continue to exert a strong influence on development and well-being throughout adolescence.¹²¹

“I had planned for my son to marry a girl in our neighborhood. She is 14 years old. But now, I will cancel the marriage and wait for her to be 18 before my son marries her.”

– Syrian Mother, Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Zimbabwe**, members of CARE’s mother group trained women in the school community on how to mentor, guide and counsel girls and parents on education, the importance of regular attendance, gender-based violence, and hygiene and menstruation¹²², as well as engaging members in village savings and loan activities. These group interventions resulted in greater functionality of child protection committees, establishment of gender violence abuse reporting mechanisms, higher enrollment rates for girls, and reduced school dropout of girls.¹²³ In addition, when mother groups engaged in VSLAs, their daughters’ school enrollment rates and numeracy scores were higher.

Peer Attitudes

Peer influence becomes increasingly important in adolescence, which creates opportunities but also risks.¹²⁴ CARE works to maximize the ability of youth to positively impact their peers through encouraging solidarity clubs, creating safe spaces for sharing, supporting adolescent-led activism, and linking networks of girls.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Bangladesh**, CARE cultivated adolescent peer leadership of girls’ collective safe spaces. When COVID-19 hit and other services became unavailable, trained adolescent peer leaders stepped up to provide referrals and basic psychological first aid to survivors of gender-based violence.¹²⁵ The project conducted a mapping of GBV resources that were accessible during COVID, and adult facilitators trained peer leaders. These peer leaders were essential to ensuring continuity of services during the pandemic and developing a model for sustainability that would outlive the project.¹²⁶

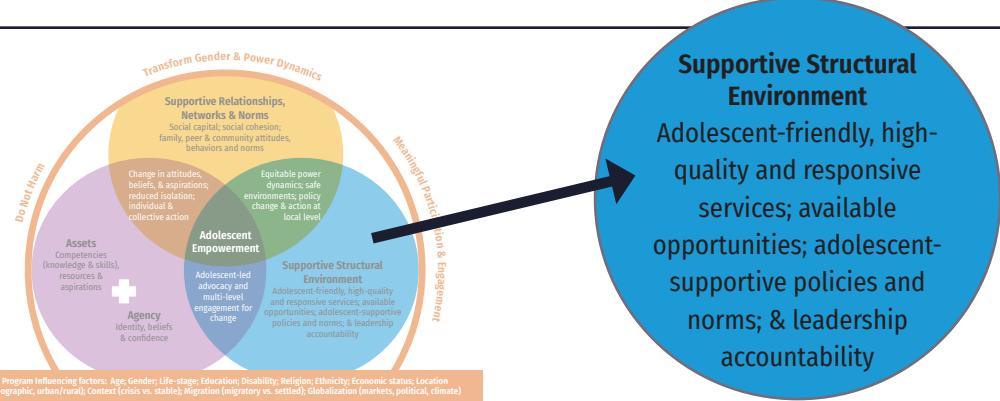
Community Attitudes

Community attitudes govern the local norms that either hinder or foster adolescents’ well-being. These attitudes provide a platform for development of trusted relationships, social support networks and supportive socio-emotional environments.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Afghanistan**, CARE pioneered a community-based education approach that provides classes in village homes to increase girls’ education access in extremely conservative environments.¹²⁷ Amid strong opposition to girls’ education, Afghan local village councils were mobilized to become advocates for girls, monitor study at home, discuss violence against girls, check on girls’ workload, and attempt to prevent early marriage. The proportion of girls reporting severe depression dropped to 25%, compared with 48% among girls not supported by local village councils.¹²⁸

SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENT



We have refined CARE's model of adolescent empowerment to address the realities that we have seen in our programs over the past decades. Simply supporting young people to build knowledge and skills is not effective or sustainable if we do not also address underlying socioeconomic, cultural and political barriers to adolescent empowerment.¹²⁹ For example, in food security and nutrition, CARE addresses both upstream issues to ensure producers can access inputs and services, and downstream issues to connect producers to more profitable market opportunities.¹³⁰ CARE applies inclusive market systems and value-chain lens to our agricultural programming, such as addressing the structural constraints that create barriers to young women's participation in agricultural value chains, and facilitating entry points for young women's to enter into traditionally male-dominated value chains, through tools such as Youth inclusive Value Chain Analysis and Youth Food Systems Mapping.¹³¹

CARE's results also illustrate the unlocked potential of adolescent girls as leaders, maximizing the capacity and efficiency of services while being agents of change.¹³² While such cultivation of models of adolescent capacity building build upon long-term investment in social norm change, community and girl-led activism, they can easily be scaled up, and – in many cases – at a fraction of the cost of more sophisticated interventions and with far greater sustainability, including in extremely fragile contexts.¹³³

Adolescent-friendly services and interventions

Low- and middle-income countries often struggle to deliver on plans that are responsive to the unique needs of individuals- whether it means they have approaches that meet the needs of girls and boys; of young adolescents versus older adolescents or youth, of those that are in rural areas or migratory tribes, etc. Rarely do government services, such as health services, consider the specific vulnerabilities of adolescent girls- particularly around becoming a mother while still a teenager and/or marrying early. CARE's and its partners' leverage existing community structures, such as existing health clinics, and work with adolescent and youth groups ensure easy and non-judgmental access to services.¹³⁴ Adolescent and youth-focused programming also is being tailored to support girls from diverse backgrounds in order to build back from the pandemic more inclusively.¹³⁵

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Rwanda**, CARE has worked to make mass media communication strategies more adolescent-friendly. For instance, radio talk shows are designed to be more age-appropriate and focused on adolescent issues. A show called "Ask Auntie" builds on the role of village aunts as sources of advice to convey information to girls. CARE staff also send text messages with girl-specific essential information pertaining to gender-based violence prevention and response, health services and economic empowerment.¹³⁶

High-Quality and Responsive Services

As systems have struggled to roll out new service modalities in the time of COVID-19, CARE has raised attention to the importance of adapting approaches to meet the needs of adolescent girls and boys who lack the connectivity, efficacy, time and means to access services.¹³⁷ The Community Score Card,¹³⁸ one of our most innovative and effective tools, brings together service users, service providers and government officials to sustainably improve the performance and responsiveness of service delivery.¹³⁹ CARE's work has shown that it is possible to pivot existing community structures quickly and efficiently to respond to adolescents' needs, particularly in areas where projects have already engaged in social norm change processes to address barriers to adolescent well-being.¹⁴⁰

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Malawi**, floods caused by Cyclone Idai forced entire communities to evacuate their homes. CARE engaged women and girls to identify their greatest needs and concerns. They identified the need for private washing facilities where adolescent girls and women could clean stained clothes and menstrual sanitary materials discreetly.¹⁴¹ This meant that girls and women could access community washing facilities with ease and without the stigma or embarrassment.



Available Opportunities

CARE's approach connects young people to available opportunities – in education, livelihood pathways, service delivery, community resources, mental mindsets or social capital. This connection is particularly important in locations of conflict, high economic deprivation or prevalent early marriage and childbearing. One tool that CARE uses is the Youth-led Labor Markets Assessment,¹⁴² which is designed to identify key self-employment and wage employment opportunities and the required skills needed for young women and men to viably engage in work.¹⁴³ This process considers youth's needs, attitudes and preferences related to livelihoods, as well as their capacities of youth and the market to avail these opportunities.¹⁴⁴

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Niger** and **Bangladesh**, CARE's IMAGINE approach – *Inspiring Married Adolescent Girls to Imagine New Empowered Futures* – aims to open potential opportunities in married girls' lives by strengthening their capacity and agency to exercise their rights and make decisions about their own life courses. The intervention addresses social and structural barriers that prevent delaying first birth, while also expanding alternative economic opportunities for girls so that early motherhood is not their only option.¹⁴⁵ IMAGINE's foundational component is the Girls' Collective groups, which serve as a platform to share reproductive health information, create social support and build critical life skills among adolescent girls. Girls also expand their potential life options through collective savings, entrepreneurship training, linkage to vocational training and mentorship around income-generating opportunities and life skills. IMAGINE engages husbands, mothers-in-laws, health care workers, and influential community members, to become supportive of girls to pursuing alternative opportunities to early motherhood.¹⁴⁶

Adolescent-Supportive Policies and Norms

Adolescents' needs, especially girls' needs, have not been adequately prioritized in national plans, emergency responses and donor investments.¹⁴⁷ Adolescents' experiences often remain hidden within existing data, obscuring the complexity and uniqueness of their situation.¹⁴⁸ As COVID-19 has threatened to polarize disparities and reverse global gains in adolescent outcomes, CARE has highlighted the need for donors, governments, and all stakeholders recognize the unique impact of crises on adolescents, and invest in policies that meet young people's needs.¹⁴⁹ CARE prioritizes girls themselves to take leading roles in shaping program, policy, and research initiatives to address adolescents' needs.¹⁵⁰

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Zimbabwe**, the START4GIRLS initiative brought together school staff, school development committees, parents, female learners, male learners, local leaders, and local and national authorities to design pathways for school systems to become more risk-aware, prepared, responsive to learners' needs, safe, free from violence, harassment, bullying and abuse, and resilient to economic shocks and stresses.¹⁵¹



Leadership Accountability

CARE supports adolescents with the capacities and space they need to meaningfully engage with powerholders and hold programs, service delivery systems, policies and governments accountable.¹⁵² CARE's COVID-19 response programming has elevated the role and the importance of girl-informed assessment, planning and accountability efforts.¹⁵³ One tool for citizen-driven accountability is CARE's Community Score Card,¹⁵⁴ which brings together parents, community, religious leaders, women's groups and adolescents to define and address issues and policy barriers encountered in accessing high quality services and hold programs, policies and institutions accountable.¹⁵⁵ Together, they then develop a joint improvement action plan, monitor progress indicators, and engage local, district and regional monitoring systems to track progress toward improvement.¹⁵⁶

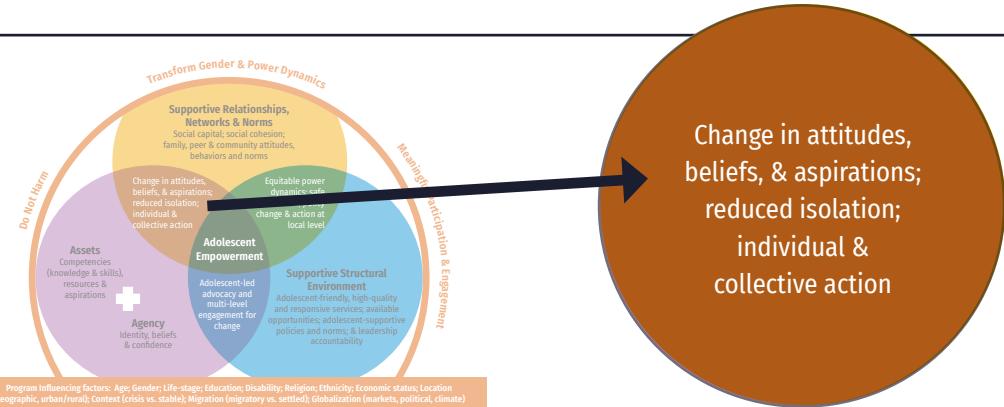
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In **Malawi**, CARE used an electronic version of our Community Score Card as part of the implementation of the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability. A customized system for reporting teacher absenteeism empowered students, head teachers and school management committee members to submit reports on teacher attendance via text message.¹⁵⁷ The data was elevated to service providers as evidence of service delivery failures that needed to be addressed. The mechanism also brought to light some corrupt practices in the school system. CARE then adapted and expanded the education-oriented electronic score card to cover multiple sectors, giving local policymakers, service providers and community members the information they needed to track progress in improving service provision.¹⁵⁸

THE NEXUS OF CHANGE ACROSS AGENCY, RELATIONSHIPS AND STRUCTURES

CARE works to: *build adolescent assets and agency; enhance supportive relationships, networks and norms; and transform the structural environment.* At the nexus of those three areas, change is sparked across the adolescent empowerment model.

CHANGE IN ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND ASPIRATIONS



CARE approaches attitudes, beliefs and aspirations as the most important input – and the most upstream – that generates change in adolescents' lives. Because of that, changing mindsets is woven into every thread of our programming fabric.

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In the **Balkan States**, the *Young Men's Initiative* resulted in improved awareness, attitudes and intentions around violence. Male adolescent awareness of emotional

violence increased, with boys saying they no longer use name-calling, stereotyping and other forms of emotional violence.¹⁵⁹ The initiative reduced tolerance for violence against women. In Prishtina and Sarajevo, graduates were less likely to support men's use of violence against women who were unfaithful, and less likely to believe a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together. Graduates also showed an increase in intention to remain nonviolent if their friends got involved in a fight.¹⁶⁰

"I had always thought that physical violence has some major consequences. Later, I realized that verbal violence has the biggest consequences because ... bruises will heal, but emotional violence remains in the psyche."

—Young adolescent male in Sarajevo,
graduate of the Young Men's Initiative

Reduced Isolation

Bringing young people together through safe spaces, networks and movements helps reduce isolation while also building their power as a collective force. CARE also uses “structured allyship” to leverage other actors – girls, boys, mothers, fathers and community leaders – to support and promote adolescent empowerment.¹⁶¹

CARE helps build adolescents’ technology and digital skills to ensure that they can access information on markets and risk mitigation, learn about business and career opportunities, build financial and market literacy, grow social and professional networks, and develop leadership, management, language and communication skills needed to succeed in the workplace.¹⁶² While increasing youth connectivity, though, CARE is vigilant about the dangers of heightened connectedness. We work with girls to raise their awareness on the risk of online abuse.¹⁶³

Innovative communication and outreach strategies are a core feature of CARE’s girl-centered approach.¹⁶⁴ During COVID-19 restrictions, we refined online and phone modalities to keep providing services such as gender-based violence feedback, complaint and response mechanisms, hotlines and community focal points¹⁶⁵ in a number of locations.

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Somalia**, girls’ anxiety and depression rates were high in conflict-affected locations, where girls faced insufficient access to food and water, economic deprivation of basic needs and extreme uncertainty. CARE strengthened the capacity of mentors and community groups to provide psychological first aid and support girls’ well-being and mental health.¹⁶⁶ In Somalia, 52% of girls who were not engaged in the CARE intervention reported severe depression. That number dropped to 40% among girls receiving the support of CARE project mentors and community groups.¹⁶⁷ During the pandemic, mentors provided emotional support and counseling and supported girls to continue to participate remotely in leadership clubs.¹⁶⁸ In addition, 50% of girls reported receiving support from teachers, including guidance on home study and additional help with difficult topics.¹⁶⁹ The combination of inputs to support girls resulted in higher learning outcomes, with girls studying at home scoring 4% higher on word identification, 8% higher on reading comprehension, and 38% higher on numeracy, compared with their counterparts.

Individual and Collective Action

Research demonstrates that major social change only occurs when those excluded from power collectively organize into social movements to challenge existing systems.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, CARE has prioritized adolescent girl-led activism.¹⁷¹ This approach has empowered girls through facilitating remote learning, sharing vital information, informing effective service provision, and engaging in efforts to prevent and respond to violence, particularly during the pandemic.¹⁷² CARE developed the *Tipping Point* approach, which works with multiple groups (e.g. girls, boys, parents, community leaders) in a coordinated strategy, ensuring everyone has space to engage in dialogue and identifying solutions.¹⁷³ CARE promotes “allyship” by parents and adolescent boys to help girls find and collectively step into spaces to reflect on and tackle inequality.¹⁷⁴

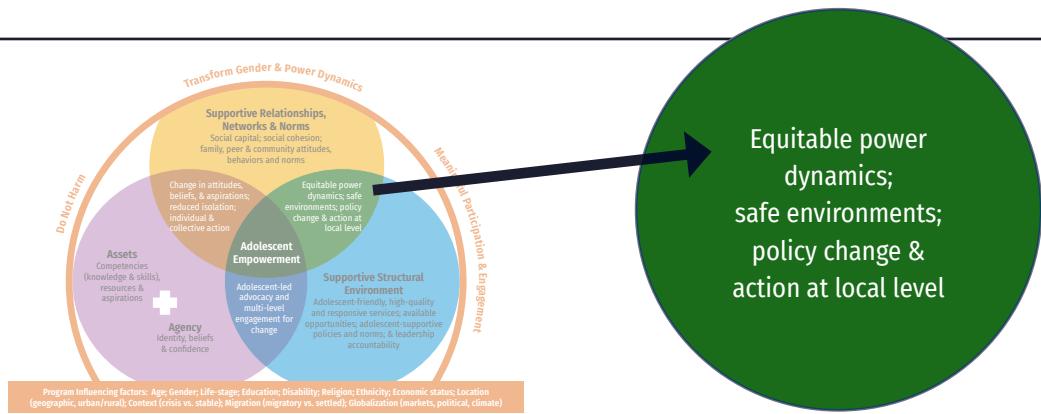
THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Mali**, CARE’s *Education for Change* project built adolescent capacities to engage in individual and collective action to analyze and monitor disaster risks, vulnerabilities and capacities in their communities.¹⁷⁵ Teachers and adolescent peer mentors mobilized 52,428 adolescent girls and boys into groups that engaged in reforestation, demonstrating drought-adapted agriculture techniques, and improving community water management and sanitation. The groups used mobile platforms to exchange information on disaster risk reduction, menstrual hygiene, sexual and reproductive health issues, and COVID-19. 76% of girls received messages on the risk of drought, 72% on flooding, 42% requested information on climate change-related events and 40% on natural disasters. The proportion of girls who recognized improved agricultural techniques as a key tool to address climate change increased from 45% to 73%.¹⁷⁶

“Excessive cutting of trees is causing huge problems, especially drought. I explained to relatives and friends the disadvantage of overcutting. Thanks to this awareness, our family has planted several trees.”

– Member of adolescent group

EQUITABLE POWER DYNAMICS



CARE believes young people should not simply be seen as “beneficiaries” of services,¹⁷⁷ but rather as key partners in all development efforts, from nutrition programming to strengthening agricultural markets, from climate change mitigation to school system reform. Across sectors, strategies and projects, CARE seeks to amplify the perspectives of adolescents, especially girls, and to highlight opportunities where their voice, leadership and participation can be central to both sustainable solutions and recovery from crises.¹⁷⁸ For example, in the water sector, CARE encourages youth participation in local water governance bodies and seeks to promote youth voices in water resources management spaces.¹⁷⁹ In the social protection sector, CARE works to create improvements in youth’s linkages to market and governance systems, enabling households to “graduate” from social protection schemes as livelihoods are transformed.¹⁸⁰ In the gender sector, CARE has built a model of synchronized intergroup dialogue between adolescents, mothers and fathers that challenges and transforms power dynamics on topics including menstruation, gendered division of labor, dowry, access to safe spaces, girls’ mobility, girls’ aspirations, family honor and sexual harassment.¹⁸¹

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Egypt**, CARE used the Community Score Card approach to strengthen local participation in monitoring and evaluating primary school performance.¹⁸² Parents and students alike became more vocal about concerns and more assertive in demanding improvements. Specific action plans emerged in response to the demands of young people and parents: extra literacy classes for struggling students, reward programs for good attendance, and the provision of free after-school learning sessions.¹⁸³ The process of increasing transparency on school performance and raising the accountability of school institutions had the effect of shifting the power dynamics at local level.¹⁸⁴ Social workers in the local area observed increased community confidence in schools in CARE intervention sites.¹⁸⁵



Safe Environments

CARE prioritizes the importance of “safe spaces” for young people, whether at schools or in local youth-focused organizations, clubs, community centers or on other platforms.¹⁸⁶ Safe spaces enable youth to connect, affirm their identity, build their voice, develop leadership skills and access opportunities.¹⁸⁷ CARE’s Common Indicator Framework monitors and tracks safe learning environments that enable all students to participate equally in educational activities.¹⁸⁸,¹⁸⁹ Creating safe, supportive conditions at schools is a key strategy across CARE’s education interventions because a safe environment fosters regular attendance and meaningful engagement. We work to ensure the classroom environment is free from physical and psychological fears, that violence and abuse are not tolerated, and that abuse reporting mechanisms and protocols are in place.¹⁹⁰ Safe environments also extend to water and sanitation facilities, so that safe and accessible buildings, functioning water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and adequate privacy combine to reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence.¹⁹¹ CARE also works to create safe communities, by engaging community members in “Walking Transects” to map safe and unsafe locations for adolescents.¹⁹² Another tool CARE uses to create safe spaces at the community level is the Community Score Card process, where adolescents and youth are given a safe space to voice their concerns and define the issues they encounter in accessing high-quality services in their communities.¹⁹³

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Burundi**, CARE worked with local partners to empower adolescent girls in urban settlements who were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including girls involved in transactional sex and begging.¹⁹⁴ A total of 12,290 girls formed 616 solidarity clubs, which served as safe spaces. Through these clubs, girls engaged in training on sexual and reproductive health, financial education and life skills. Cultural activities and sports helped the girls build self-confidence and make social connections. Access to information on sexual, reproductive health and rights enabled girls to identify when to seek support services, particularly girls with high vulnerability to HIV and sexually transmitted infections.¹⁹⁵ Through the clubs, girls saved money and took loans to start small businesses. Financial access gave girls the resources and leverage they needed to control what happens in their lives, while training, mentorships and social networks helped them safeguard their well-being.¹⁹⁶ By the end of the project, reliance on prostitution and begging for survival declined from 17% to 7%.¹⁹⁷

Policy Change

CARE collaborates and coordinates with youth networks, youth-led organizations and youth movements to reach young people, to amplify their voices in formal and informal decision-making, and to influence policy.¹⁹⁸ CARE recognizes the interaction between programming, research and advocacy. Therefore, we work to generate and capture compelling evidence to support policy advocacy agendas at the local, regional and global levels.¹⁹⁹ We work to ensure that advocacy agendas include a focus not only on policy enactment, but also policy implementation.²⁰⁰

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Zimbabwe**, CARE worked with partner schools and education officials to develop a leadership skills curriculum. After implementing the curriculum in girls’ clubs, a quasi-experimental study showed that participating girls had improved numeracy, higher gains in reading fluency, were more likely to enroll in school and had higher attendance than girls outside the clubs.²⁰¹ The national government later approved the Adolescent Development Model for use throughout Zimbabwe.²⁰²



Action At Local Level

CARE works to engage adolescents and other local actors in addressing systemic challenges, identifying solutions and implementing action, in close partnership with local and national governments, civil society organizations and international partners.²⁰³ Even in countries with weak institutions, CARE has found it viable for local actors to initiate action and engage government in scaling approaches, if partnership is fostered from the beginning.²⁰⁴ Through “girl-led” activism, adolescent agency becomes concrete action. By engaging adolescents and youth in initiating local action, our programs not only better address their needs, but also build a generation of engaged and active individuals who are in tune with the needs of their communities, capable of initiating activities to address challenges, and catalyzing change at the local level.²⁰⁵

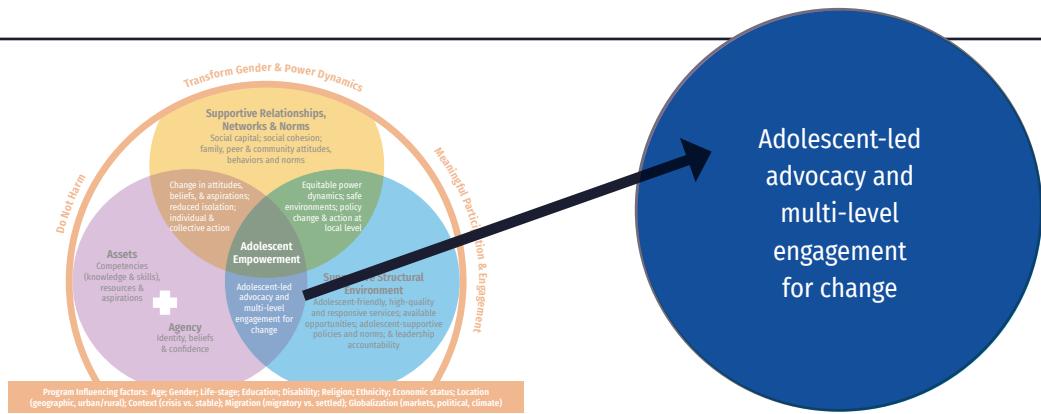
THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Honduras**, the RENACER project worked in 46 communities that had prevalent gang violence, poor education outcomes, high dropout rates and teenage pregnancies.²⁰⁶ Youth-led community risk assessment

and risk mapping captured challenges facing their peers, and young people worked together to address priority concerns around safety and school retention.²⁰⁷ Youth arose to become facilitators for their peers and younger children, and the project provided accelerated learning and alternative education in leadership, vocational and life skills. Classes were located in homes, churches and community centers, and served as safe spaces for those excluded from the formal education system due to pregnancy, the need to work or social marginalization.²⁰⁸ Initially designed to address the needs of adolescent girls, the project adapted to include boys so that both genders could learn together about the barriers each faced and challenge stereotypical gender roles. As confidence increased, youth identified other areas of needed social change and created Committees for the Rights and Defense of Youth.²⁰⁹ CARE supported committee members with training in leadership, administration and management to enable them to design, implement and advocate for community interventions. Advocacy by adolescents and community members led to increased budget allocation for education.²¹⁰



ADOLESCENT EMPOWERMENT



Adolescent-Led Advocacy

CARE approaches advocacy as a deliberate process of influencing those who make decisions about developing, changing and implementing policies to reduce poverty and achieve social justice.²¹¹ We elevate the voices of girls themselves and support opportunities for their leadership and participation.²¹² Girl-led action ensures that interventions are relevant and sustainable.

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Ecuador**, girls exercised leadership and participation skills by founding a girl-led network, the National Network for the Defense of Children's and Adolescents' Rights, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.²¹³ Girls identified the need to have a space where they could discuss ideas, share concerns and advocate for solutions. The girl founders felt that girls' voices were not being adequately prioritized,

and that they did not have sufficient opportunity to participate in advocacy, planning and decision-making.²¹⁴ The girls identified COVID-related challenges in accessing healthcare, risks to adolescents living in detention, and the need for resource allocation to promote girls' access to education. The network started a campaign on girls' education, advocating for remote learning technology equipment, capacity-building for teachers, and information on access to healthcare. As a longer-term goal, the network proposed policy changes to the National Code for Children's and Adolescents' Protection to prohibit domestic work for adolescents, because it exposes girls to violence and sexual abuse. This prohibition was included in the draft code discussed by the National Assembly in the first parliamentary debate. Girl-led initiatives began to result in transformative action with far-reaching impact on adolescents across the nation.²¹⁵



"We girls were under-estimated, not only because of our age, but also because of our gender."

– Co-founder of Ecuador's National Network for the Defense of Children's and Adolescents' Rights

Multi-Level Engagement for Change

To promote collective action, CARE layers community programming with advocacy at national, regional and global levels.²¹⁶ We build evidence of impact and then share that widely to encourage scale-up and replication, while also multiplying global impact by advocating for stronger youth policies.²¹⁷ In addition, tools like CARE's Community Score Card engage local, district and regional monitoring systems in tracking progress toward improvement.²¹⁸

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Nepal** and **Bangladesh**, through the *Tipping Point* project, CARE challenges social norms at the root of early marriage and forced marriage. Locally, the project engages adolescent girls and boys, parents, community

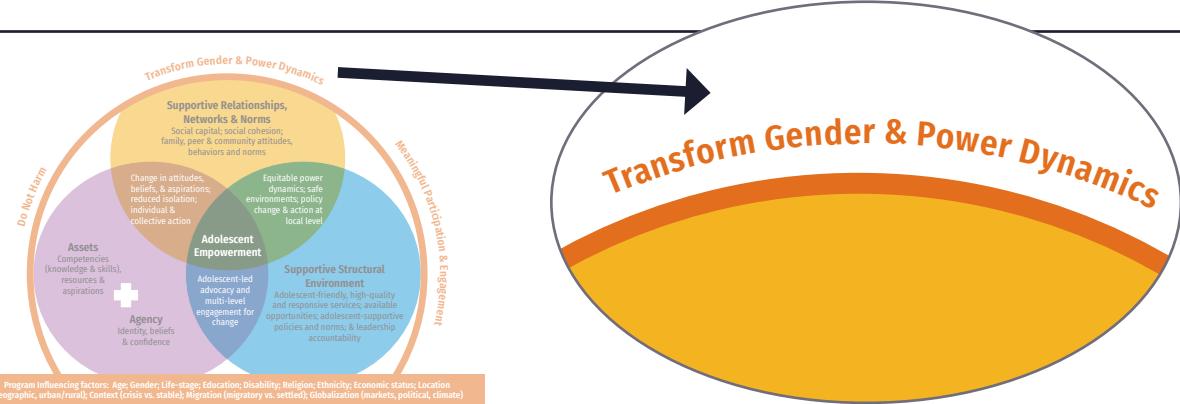
leaders and religious leaders. At national levels, CARE engages networks of social activists, experts and government agencies.²¹⁹ Within international arenas, CARE has developed strong relationships with a range of actors working on child marriage issues, including donors, policymakers, researchers, activists and international non-governmental organizations.²²⁰ CARE's influence and advocacy goes beyond a focus on formal policies – for example, a minimum age requirement for marriage – to also influence social and cultural institutions that drive child marriage.²²¹ CARE is using this learning and innovation to contribute to global understanding of the complex issues driving child marriage in order to articulate strategies that contribute to a “tipping point” of sustainable change that prevents child marriage and opens viable alternative paths for adolescent girls.²²²



CARE'S CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

CARE's cross-cutting principles frame the entire adolescent development model and influence how we carry out our work. These are core principles that are foundational to the ways we work with young people.

TRANSFORM GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS



CARE designs our projects with the direct intention of addressing gender and power imbalances.²²³ We challenge discriminatory social norms, customs, laws and policies, and work to transform the power relations through which young people must navigate their lives.²²⁴ To accomplish this, CARE's programming engages key reference groups and gatekeepers, including peers, parents, teachers, health providers, and religious and community leaders, as important power-holders with the ability to influence adolescent decision-making and access to services.²²⁵

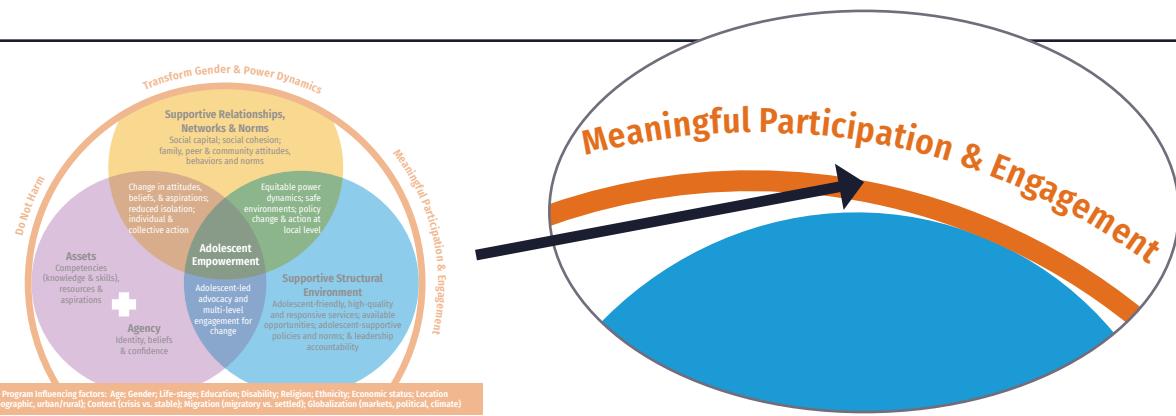
THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Nepal** and **Bangladesh**, through the *Tipping Point* project, CARE challenges social expectations and repressive norms at the root of early and forced marriage. The model has been carefully crafted using a participatory feminist approach and iterative developmental evaluation. First, CARE helps create protected, public spaces²²⁶ by engaging with key groups (adolescent girls, adolescent boys, mothers, fathers, community leaders, religious leaders)²²⁷ to address issues such as: menstruation, gendered division of labor, dowry, access to safe spaces, girls' mobility, girls' aspirations, family honor and sexual harassment. Local dialogues help to normalize sensitive conversations, combat ignorance and bring visibility to positive role models who demonstrate gender-equitable behaviors and attitudes in the home.²²⁸

Tipping Point facilitates connections and mentorship between activist girls and feminist movement actors so that girls' priorities are not sidelined or siloed, but rather are meaningfully incorporated in larger and more established movements.²²⁹ In this way, *Tipping Point* is transforming gender and power dynamics at a local level while incubating girl-driven movement-building and activism.



MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT



Meaningful Participation and Engagement

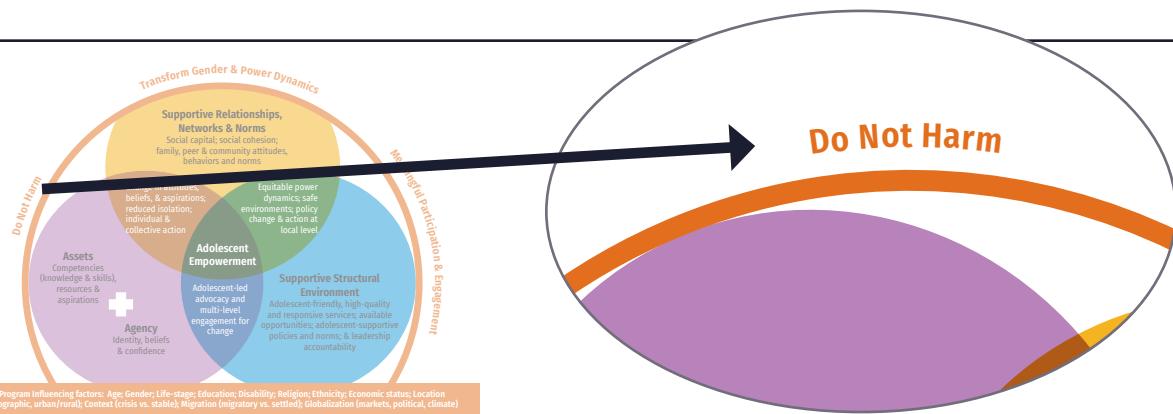
Recognizing the power of engaging adolescents as protagonists in their own development, CARE involves young people in program design, implementation and measurement.²³⁰ In many cases, young people have contributed directly to data collection efforts to help inform girl-responsive programming in response to COVID-19.²³¹ The development of leadership skills is a crucial prerequisite to the success of these efforts.²³² We also work closely with youth-led organizations to support capacity strengthening and joint programming to localize adolescent expertise across sectors.²³³ Amplifying the voices of girls and boys, and providing them with opportunities for meaningful engagement ensures that program, policy and research are relevant to their diverse needs and experiences, and carried out sustainably.²³⁴

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Burundi**, CARE organized a social innovation challenge for youth-led and civil society organizations to rapidly identify solutions to safeguard health and rights in refugee and internally displaced person camps during COVID-19.²³⁵ Among the winning ideas suggested by young people: using recycled plastic to build latrines to support environmentally friendly, sustainable solutions, and a digital campaign using art to share COVID-19 messages with IDPs.²³⁶ The young people behind those ideas were supported to develop, prototype and test their innovations with potential end users of the products. After piloting these new approaches, CARE is exploring opportunities to finance these initiatives at scale.²³⁷



DO NO HARM



CARE employs a “Do No Harm” approach across its work. We have seen incidents of backlash after girls and women have become empowered, sometimes leading to increased gender-based violence. CARE has incorporated this learning into our programs, as we work to empower both adolescent girls and boys, and creating strategies for “structured allyship” of various groups in the community.

THE NEXUS OF THE MODEL IN ACTION

In **Nepal** and **Bangladesh**, CARE’s *Tipping Point* initiative had to pivot rapidly in response to COVID-19. CARE already had been engaging adolescents and families through mobile platforms. But transitioning the majority of service delivery and implementation to mobile platforms required careful consideration of ethical and logistical issues in order to carry out activities with the “do no harm” principle in mind.²³⁸ CARE chose to revise the content of sessions, taking out references to violence, sexuality or other sensitive issues. Bringing up these issues, without the appropriate level of in-person support and follow-up care, could have exposed girls to potential harm.²³⁹



CONCLUSION

CARE's capacity and results in promoting adolescent and youth empowerment highlight the powerful potential of girls and boys – and of the critical importance of investing in them.²⁴⁰ When enhanced agency and assets are coupled with supportive relationships and supportive structural environments, CARE's programming has demonstrated that adolescent/youth-led action can become both impactful and cost-effective.²⁴¹ Young girls and boys can shape the future in powerful ways that benefit everyone.²⁴²

To learn more, visit: www.care.org



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