



FIVE YEARS OF

WOMEN RESPOND

Insights from women at the forefront of crises



DECEMBER 2025

WOMEN RESPOND

Executive summary

The increasing number of complex and long-lasting crises is severely affecting the lives and futures of the world's most at-risk people. Conflicts, natural disasters, food shortages and disease outbreaks are destroying security and causing humanitarian needs to reach unprecedented levels. According to the [Global Humanitarian Overview](#), by the end of September 2025, almost 300 million people urgently needed help and protection, even as new crises emerged. At the same time, humanitarian support is shrinking, widening the gap between urgent needs and the resources available to meet them.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by crisis. Compared to men, they face greater restrictions on mobility, higher risks of violence, and more limited access to food, healthcare, and livelihoods. Despite these challenges, women are at the frontline in every crisis. In every context, women use their knowledge, networks, and leadership to help communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

CARE's [Women Respond](#) initiative centers this leadership by systematically listening to women in crisis settings and ensuring their voices and solutions inform and drive humanitarian action. Since 2020, the Women Respond initiative has elevated the voices of 38,000 people including 28,000 women, across 28 countries. From the early days of COVID-19 to the compounding impacts of conflict, climate change, and economic shocks, the findings have been consistent: when women speak, they not only describe the realities of crisis, they articulate practical, actionable pathways for more effective and accountable humanitarian response.

What follows reflects what women have been telling us over the past five years.

Women are responding

Over the past five years, the story has not only been one of impact, but also a story of foresight, leadership, and resilience.

Despite limited support and mounting challenges, women have demonstrated unwavering determination, acting both individually and collectively to support their families and communities. Women are not passive victims of crises; they are active agents of change, consistently taking initiative to protect and strengthen their households and communities. Yet their leadership too often remains underrecognized and underfunded.

Women and men are taking action, but they need support. Across countries, they are diversifying their income, changing how they grow food, utilizing their savings, and mobilizing their communities. This section highlights how people are leading, even with limited resources and opportunities.



Women and men are trying to make ends meet by diversifying their income. In 2025, 53% of women and 47% of men are trying to restore their livelihood by diversifying their income.



Women and men are taking the lead in local advocacy efforts. In 2025, data from seven countries with 3,560 members of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) shows that 40% of women and 47% of men are engaging in local advocacy, both individually and as a group, to ask their local governments to improve policies and services. The top three issues they focus on are similar for both women and men: food, nutrition, and agriculture; income-generating activities; and infrastructure, including housing, water, sanitation and roads.



Community leadership remain strong. In the last five years 79% of women and 45% of men said they are **supporting community groups** to lead community response to crises.



Using social funds to support members and the community. VSLA members have adapted the use of their social funds — usually reserved for social events and activities — to respond to crisis-related needs. In 2025, 75% of women and 60% of men reported using social funds to provide direct financial support to members and to purchase food and non-food items. Additionally, 47% of women and 36% of men said they used the funds to provide loans to members. Beyond their groups, 24% of women and 11% of men reported using social funds to support people in their communities. Overall, women VSLA members are much more likely than men to use social funds to support both their members and their communities.



Women in savings groups are also playing a key role in sharing practical, life-saving information. They are supporting households, group members, and communities by disseminating guidance on seasonal change, planting cycles, and water management in conditions of scarcity. In Niger, VSLAs are sharing weather information with their communities to anticipate and adapt to changing conditions. In Ethiopia, households borrow seeds and food to help struggling neighbors avoid selling big household assets.



Concerns about family well-being remain high, particularly related to children's health and education. Many members are **contributing what they can to sustain local health and education services.** However, consecutive years of crises — both natural and manmade — have significantly reduced household and community coping capacity, limiting recovery and increasing the need for sustained, targeted support.

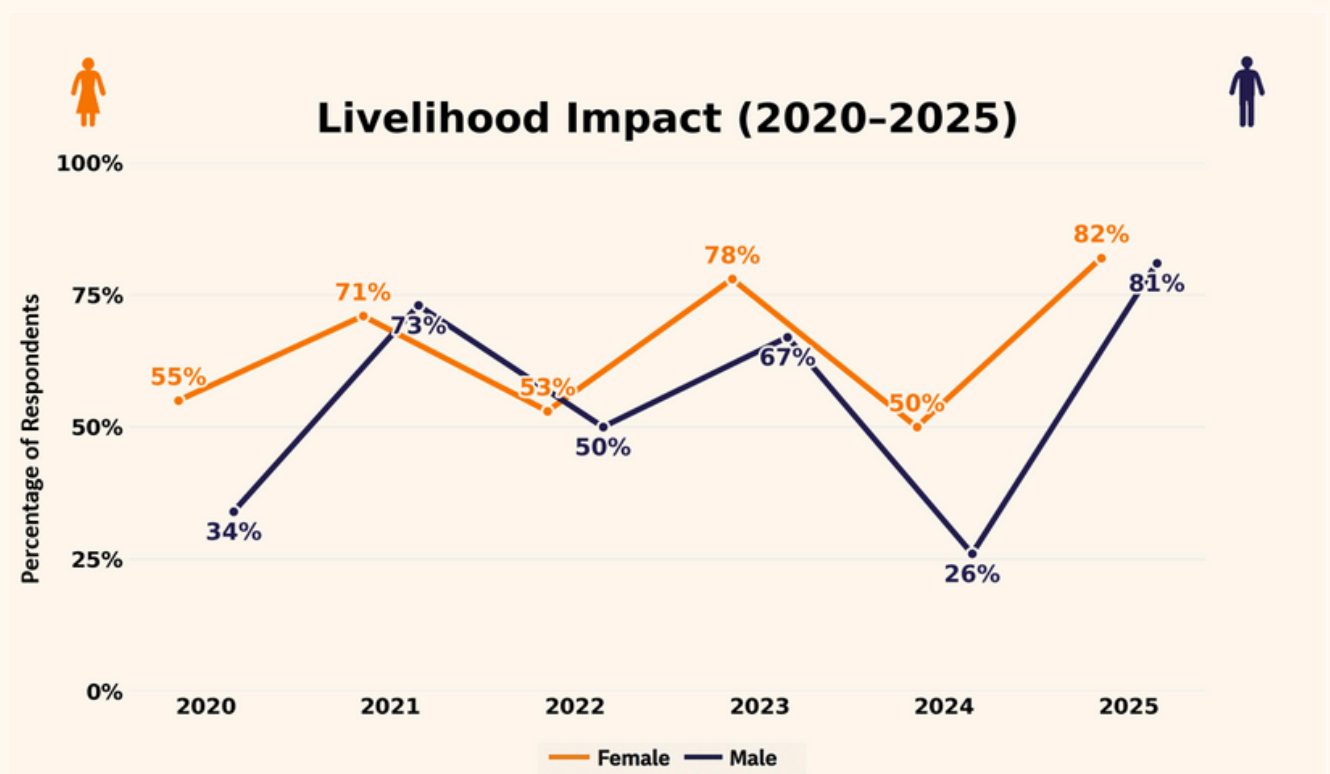
"The school was very far away, and the children were starting to drop out. All the VSLAs came together with other village decision-makers to build the village school. As a result of these efforts, the community is now seeing more children going back to school."

– Yolande Ebah Kouassi, Côte d'Ivoire



Crises are worsening and reshaping women's lives.

Five years of Women Respond data show that crises have not only disrupted routines but also reshaped women's economic security, food security, health, and safety. When women warned in 2020 that COVID-19 would devastate livelihoods, food systems, and mental health, they were identifying real, structural risks. These warnings often went unheard. Since then, additional crises, including climate shocks, conflict, and inflation, have compounded these pressures, deepening their impact on women's daily lives.



Livelihoods are under unprecedented strain. In 2025, 82% of women and 81% of men reported that their livelihoods were affected, the highest level recorded since Women Respond began collecting data. This reflects a sharp increase over time: in 2020, 55% of women reported income loss, compared to 82% in 2025.

Falling incomes combined with soaring inflation have made it increasingly difficult for households to meet basic needs and invest in recovery. In many contexts, this has all but eliminated pathways out of crisis. For example, in Nigeria in 2024, both women and men reported that inflation has forced them to reduce engagement in farming and agri-business activities. In Ethiopia, respondents highlighted limited access to agricultural products due to rising market prices. They also noted that the drought worsened the situation by reducing their ability to produce food and support their families.

For communities with limited or no safety nets, repeated shocks and insufficient external support have created cycles of risk. When livelihoods fail, households lose not only income but their ability to secure food, education, and healthcare. Many respondents expressed that without the ability to earn, they cannot provide for or feed their families



Frederic Courbet/CARE

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"My whole life changed into destitution and displacement after losing all my precious property (livestock). I was a wealthy man who eventually became poor. Yes, I am concerned about this change because I cannot feed or meet my family's needs."

– Male respondent, Goldogob, Somalia.

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"I have been growing rice for 12 years. Because of the flood last season, I lost all my crops. This season, I needed to urgently sell what I produced to provide for the family. I had to make a deal with a local trader to buy all my harvest. He gave me a very low price, but I didn't have any other option to pay my debts and feed my family. I didn't make the profit I expected."

– Female respondent, Burundi.



Food insecurity remains widespread and intensified in 2025. Reduced agricultural production, declining incomes, and rising food prices continue to limit access to sufficient and nutritious food for both men and women. In the last five years, 53% of women and 52% of men reported a significant impact on their food security.

A 2024 survey across Benin, Nigeria, Uganda, and Mozambique, shows that nearly half or more women classified their households as 'severely food insecure': 53% in Benin, 51% in both Nigeria and Mozambique and 49% in Uganda.

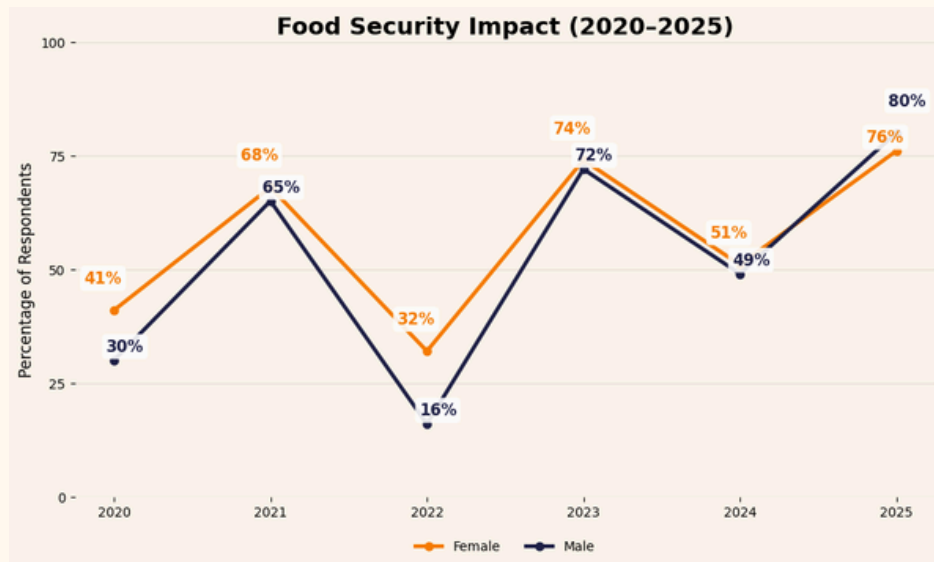
While food insecurity affects all household members, qualitative findings show that women often eat less than men. Both men and women reported that women often reduce their own food intake to prioritize children and other family members. As primary caregivers, women consistently put household and family needs first, leaving themselves with little or no food during periods of scarcity.



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"When a woman cooks food, her thought is of her husband and children. Sometimes, after serving them, what will be left will not be enough for her. The culture expects her to put others before herself."

- Male community leader in Bunza, Nigeria.



In 2025, quantitative data from 3,560 respondents from Burundi, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Northwest Syria, and Vietnam, shows 56% of women reported reducing their food intake during times of lower income and food insecurity. Women were slightly more likely than men (53%) to report reducing their food intake. Many are resorting to negative coping mechanisms that affect their household economy and wellbeing, including eating fewer meals per day, selling assets, and borrowing money or in-kind.

Over the past three years, both women and men have reported growing concerns about safety. As conflict intensifies in many contexts, communities increasingly feel unsafe in their daily lives.

Nearly half of men (48%) and about a third of women (32%) identified safety concerns as a critical issue in the last five years. Increasing rates of violence and armed conflict are the primary drivers of these safety concerns.

While men report safety concerns at higher rates – particularly related to risks of killing, injury, and mobility restrictions in active conflict zones – women and girls face unique and compounding threats. In addition to general insecurity, violence against women and girls poses a significant and growing risk. Safety concerns are closely linked to livelihood and food security. On one hand, conflict and insecurity restrict access to land, markets, and income-generating opportunities, undermining household economic stability. On the other hand, reduced livelihoods and food scarcity increase stress and competition over limited resources, heightening tensions within households and communities. In this way, insecurity both drives and is reinforced by economic and food vulnerability.

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"We lost the entire harvest last season due to insecurity in the area. Armed conflict and violence made it too dangerous to access our fields. As farmers, we were forced to stay away, fearing for our safety and lives. As a result, our crops withered, and our livelihoods suffered greatly."
– FGD participant, South Kordofan, Sudan.



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"When there is no harvest, there is no food in the house, psychological problems and couple problems start. The man, seeing no harvest, gets frustrated, starts a fight at home [...] In the last quarter of last year, almost every week there were cases of violence"
– Key informant interview, Female, Honduras.

What women continue to call for

Over the past five years, priorities have remained consistent. What has changed is the urgency and scale of those needs, as crises compound and recovery becomes increasingly difficult. Livelihoods and food security remain the most urgent needs. Women and men are not asking for short-term assistance alone; they are asking for sustained support and opportunities to rebuild, provide for their families, and strengthen their resilience.

Across five years of data, 61% of women and 55% men identified livelihoods support as a priority, while 44% of women and 45% men prioritized food security. Respondents also consistently called for stronger support to address social cohesion, safety, and mobility, as well as improved access to basic services such as education, health, and water.

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"Right now, for me and my VSLA group, what I need most is access to finance to help us grow our business. This support will help us to improve our income and strengthen our groups' future. This year, (2025), our community faced drought and an outbreak of diarrhea. With continued effort and support, I believe my community and I can recover from all this and have a better future."

- Kima Abraham Mumed, Ethiopia

Women Respond is designed to systematically collect and elevate women's voices and experiences to improve programs, influence decisions, and strengthen accountability. Sharing findings, internally within CARE and externally with national and local governments, donors, NGOs, and community stakeholders is a core component of the initiative.



Gedam Tsegaye / CARE Ethiopia

Women community and VSLA leaders play a central role in using the data to advocate for their priorities, both directly with local authorities, and communities, and through local media.



Over the past five years, sharing this data has already brought positive impacts. For example, in Ethiopia, Women Respond data helped support increased cash assistance for at-risk communities, particularly women. Sharing the data prompted mayor's offices of three municipalities in Colombia to establish dedicated office to address women's livelihoods and safety. In Niger, the data inspired a radio program where women call in to discuss various issues and solutions. It motivated women in Mali to collect money and clothes for affected community members.

CARE regularly uses Women Respond findings to guide its VSLA scaling strategy, identify women's digital needs and advocacy priorities, and strengthen community feedback mechanisms. Lessons from the past five years are guiding how CARE engages with women and communities. As part of CARE's core priorities, Women Respond is helping us expand our feedback systems by working with partners to build a system that provides real-time, actionable input from communities. This ensures that decision-makers at all levels are informed by the voices of those most affected and best positioned to define effective, locally grounded solutions.





Conclusion

Five years of Women Respond evidence clearly shows that crises are intensifying, women are bearing disproportionate impacts, and yet they continue to respond with resilience and leadership. Women are supporting their families and communities, even as livelihoods, food security, and safety come under increasing strain.

The priorities women continue to articulate are consistent and urgent. They point to the need for fundamental shift in how global systems recognize, engage with, and invest in women — not as passive recipients of assistance, but as frontline leaders and decision-makers. When women's voices are overlooked, responses risk critical gaps and ineffective programming. When those voices are centered and acted upon, they provide practical guidance for more responsive, equal, and lasting interventions.

See the Women Respond dashboard at: www.care.org/womenrespond

To find out how you can support or collaborate on Women Respond, please contact:

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