

## **Gender Equality Women's Voice**

### **Vision and new strategic directions for CARE**

#### **WHY NOW: The injustice of the world we live in today**

We live in a wealthier, smarter and more globally connected world, where immense advances have been achieved. Yet, growth and advancement remains inequitable – benefiting some, and not others. CARE's unique 'special sauce' is its focus on social justice alongside development outcomes. We seek not only to save lives and end poverty, but to create paths for more equitable and productive lives and communities. We do so with a fire for social justice, specifically for addressing systematic gender discrimination fortified by laws, policies, institutions, or more salient persistent practices made invisible by how normal they have become. The fire we talk about is one that lies within communities we work with and among our staff and partners. We seek to catalyze the fire within all of us – as individuals, communities, donors, policymakers, INGOs – not only because we can relate to a sense of fairness and justice, but also because the world needs this type of leadership today, now more so than ever.

CARE has set out bold and ambitious impact goals for 2020 – the right to a life free from violence, the right to sexual and reproductive health, the right to food, the right of women to have access and control over economic resources, and the right to life-saving support in the face of emergencies. The distinguishing feature of CARE's work is in its approach to these impact goals: advancing gender equality and women's voice, inclusive governance, and strengthening resilience. Over the past 20 years, CARE has been an industry leader in its gender programming work. In the midst of the current geopolitical context where space for civil society actors to convene and strategize is shrinking, we need to boldly pivot the way we lead in this work. The following **vision and strategic plan is a call to action across CARE**, one that encourages more external engagement with gender justice actors in the eco-system.

#### **Where are we today: Current state of affairs**

Consultations with over 60 colleagues, donors, and partners on CARE's role in advancing gender justice and rights demonstrate the clear value CARE holds in gender and development. CARE is recognized as a respected and legitimate actor in promoting gender inclusive development and emergency response. Our legitimacy stands on decades of commitment and proven effectiveness in this space; an enthusiastic base of gender expertise situated across the globe; a growing evidence base; and the positioning and size to influence donor and government priorities.

Within the field of international aid, stakeholders and colleagues affirm that CARE is clearly doing something right. However, these consultations have also illuminated our untapped potential to leverage our position and actively support and connect social movement actors to drive social and cultural change, and to advocate boldly for aligning our operations, programming, measurement and communications with our values for gender equality and justice.

CARE country offices and regions have highlighted immense enthusiasm and commitment from staff across the globe who are hungry to connect, learn, and do more together to advance gender equality; we have a wide cross section of staff who are deepening understanding of gender transformative programming, and have made progress in generating evidence and sharing it out. Yet, staff across the globe feel isolated. Demand for gender technical assistance is unmet, and there is inconsistent quality of results and programming due to mixed capacity to implement well-designed programs. While some areas of work – CARE’s child marriage programming, application of social norms theory to development practice –are gaining visibility, largely CARE’s best work lacks external exposure and recognition. CARE is still perceived as a large implementing organization trying out good approaches, but not seen or positioned as strong evidence generators or conveners around cutting-edge learning. One USG stakeholder aptly said, “*ICRW is a go-to for research, IWHC for advocacy, and CARE leads the implementers.*”

Our current global geopolitical context and this feedback are a **call to action**.

### Where we need to be: Gender Equality Women’s Voice vision

CARE’s collective vision for gender equality – with inputs from 440+ colleagues across 35+ countries - is:

A world where all people live in peace, are free from fear and the threat of violence, enjoy equal rights, freedoms, access to resources and opportunities.

In this world, **people across genders, ethnicities, abilities and ages** work together to dismantle systems of oppression and build a world of mutual-aid and accountability, acceptance, compassion and understanding. **Diverse women’s leadership** is visible, potent, recognized and supported. **Girls and boys** grow up **with a strong belief in justice and in themselves, with the confidence** to explore who they are and pursue their **aspirations**. Our **inter-connectedness and diversity** are uplifted and celebrated, and the actions of **every generation** are undertaken with the welfare of **future generations** in mind.

### Justice at the center of our work

**Framing CARE’s work around justice is central to be able to truly work in partnership with others around the world toward gaining power and realizing their rights.** We know that strong social movements led by those most affected by injustices are one of the most potent forces for cultural and political change. Movements for gender and justice have been central to passing legislation that protects individuals from domestic violence;<sup>i</sup> ensuring better working conditions, wages and hours for working people;<sup>ii</sup> and

**The Gender Justice team, a new name, fit for purpose.** While our peers are embracing gender equality by advancing rights to SRHR, education, livelihoods, a life free from violence, and meaningful participation in political and leadership spaces, **CARE’s ‘special sauce’ brings a social justice lens to this technical work by addressing power and privilege that is unjustly distributed by identities and geographies.** We care about *improving the social status of women and girls*; the diversity of choices that all individuals can make, regardless of their gender; equitable sharing of household responsibilities; the right to choose not to marry or not have kids and be seen as whole and successful. We not only seek to give communities a leg up, but to change the rules that created disparities in the first place.

affirming the worth and dignity of Dalit people, queer and trans people, poor people, indigenous people, incarcerated people and black people both in the US and the world over.

**Justice is a core value that ensures CARE remains on the right side of history – and helps to move toward the world it envisions.** This commitment requires that we consider how programming, partnerships and international aid interact with systems of global imperialism, state repression, racial and ethnic hierarchy and gender oppression. These systems are pertinent in the lived experiences and material conditions of the poor and marginalized groups with whom CARE works. Thus a clear analysis and strategy to engage these forces is central to ensure that CARE’s work is both relevant to its impact groups, and positioned for true impact and sustainability. It is important for CARE to center its commitment to justice to ensure its words and actions. Even before this time, this has been true as poor families and individuals (especially women and girls) bore the brunt of neoliberal reform and expanding global capitalism that has not fairly benefitted them and often exposed them to greater risk, harm and death. It remains true now.

### **HOW do we get there: GEVW Strategic Directions**

These five areas summarized below reflect key roles that CARE should play to maximize its assets for deeper impact. It is not the C/US Gender Justice team’s work plan... it’s **a call to action for all of CARE** - for different parts of CARE to take leadership on different threads of work that will push us as an organization into the future role we need to play for advancing gender equality. If we do not pivot towards these directions, CARE will not remain relevant, innovative, or seen as a leader in its gender work.

**1. CONNECT:** *strengthen the community for the courageous pursuit of equality.*

Connect people, knowledge, and passion within and outside of CARE towards impact in gender equality and social justice. WHY? There is an urgent need to connect externally and join others in this global movement; we believe we are greater when we work with others, and commit to working on other actors’ agendas that align with our values and broader vision for GEVW.

Within CARE, there is a huge thirst for connection and learning together around gender. Priority areas of work include: meaningfully convene and support social movement actors, and organizing a large-scale global gender conference for gender practitioners.

**2. AMPLIFY:** *knowledge and influence is a powerful mechanism for multiplying impact.*

Curate and share best practices, evidence, and failures to influence major systems players (e.g. media, private sector) and connect with voices and agendas set forward by movements. WHY? Without doing so, CARE will not effectively influence practice and policy at large scale (thus losing relevance and credibility and impact). We must build on solid, open and accessible platforms for sharing across and outside of CARE. This direction invests time into identifying key tools and programming practices, and utilizing different media to socialize these ideas. Priority areas of work: 1. CARE Gender Primer prioritizing CI program outcome areas

(www.genderinpractice.care.org); 2. External thought leadership (e.g. technical working groups, panels, conferences); 3. Global Gender Justice Conference (as above).

**3. ILLUMINATE:** *because people are at the core of our business.*

Walking the talk as an organization, raising issues of inequity and misalignment across departments with CARE's values and impact goals. WHY? CARE's legitimacy and performance capacity rests on its internal commitment and practice around promoting gender equality and diversity, flattening hierarchies and advancing justice. This strategic direction enhances clarity and commitment to ensure CARE's work on gender is as robust internally as it is externally. Priority areas of work: 1. Accountability mechanisms globally; 2. Enhanced gender equity and diversity (GED) efforts internally; and 3. Alignment of core values in the way departments work across CARE.

**4. XCHANGE:** *an innovative way to tap potential across CARE and fill unmet demand for TA.*

To meet demands for technical assistance, learning and professional development with a ready supply of gender resource individuals globally. WHY? One persistent gap and challenge in CARE has been the ability to fill the high demand for gender TA in our programming, while latent expertise sits dormant in countries and regions across CARE. The current expectation of a single team based in a single CMP to support gender across 90 countries is not only set up to fall short, but also misses an opportunity to connect demands systematically with a global cohort of gender resource individuals across CARE who represent the diversity of geographies of our organization. In part, these challenges are rooted in high demand for gender TA combined with country and regional gender staff time limited to restricted project requirements. This strategic direction offers a meaningful avenue for CARE to meet TA demands through a cohort of gender resource people that will create peer-to-peer learning through sequenced remote-based gender training, be certified and matched (via a global gender roster) with opportunities to provide TA. Working more as a global network will enable an agile, vibrant, diverse, global cohort of gender experts with the passion and skills for gender justice to work across countries and regions when there is a demand for TA.

**5. CATALYZE:** *strive and adapt new strategies.*

Bringing cutting edge thinking, resources and practice to CARE's work. WHY? This is critical for fostering innovation and to incubate catalytic solutions to gender injustice. This final strategic direction focuses on creating space to examine the challenges and contradictions in our work, and experiment to test breakthrough tools and ways of working to address them. This has proven to be points of inspiration in the Gender Justice team's work to date – from advancing thinking and learning on social norms change, to masculinities and gender, and developmental evaluation. This process will enable gender impact at CARE to continue to foster innovation and incubate catalytic solutions to gender injustice.

### Asks of the organization

We are creating an enabling environment for gender justice champions and are confident we will have enthusiastic support from organizational leadership. To ensure the success of these strategic intentions

we rely on an organization that lives and breathes our values, and holds itself accountable to and invests in them. The strategic areas will require financial backing and commitments, for example investment in Peer to Peer TA and for open Knowledge Management Platforms that match our aspirations.

The Gender Justice team is truly excited about these new directions and confident these are the areas that will position CARE more robustly as a leader in the field. These bold strategic directions require the unwavering commitment and leadership of colleagues across the organization to ensure gender, power and justice are interwoven into the fabric of all CARE does as an organization. We simple cannot afford to not advance in these directions.

---

<sup>i</sup> *Wheldon and Htun*

<sup>ii</sup> *1909 New York shirtwaist strike /National Women's Trade Union League of America:*  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_shirtwaist\\_strike\\_of\\_1909](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_shirtwaist_strike_of_1909)