TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP, CHALLENGING INJUSTICE
CARE’s approach to achieving women’s equal voice and leadership in public life and decision-making

POSITION PAPER
CARE’s vision of gender justice

CARE’s collective vision of gender justice is a world where all people live in peace, are free from fear and the threat of violence, and enjoy equal rights, freedoms, and 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, recognised and supported.

CARE brings a social justice lens to this technical work by addressing power and privilege that is unjustly distributed by identities and geographies.

CARE seeks to change the rules that created disparities in the first place.

Strong social movements led by those most affected by injustices are one of the most potent forces for cultural and political change.

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.


Acknowledgements

This position paper was written by Tam O’Neil, CARE UK’s Senior Gender Advisor and Women’s Voice and Leadership lead for the Inclusive Governance Team, but it is very much a collective effort. The paper is made possible by CARE Country Office colleagues’ thoughtful and rich programming to advance the voice and leadership of women living through hardship, oppression and crises around the world. This frontline work is the heart of the paper.

The fine-tuning of the narrative and key messages to emerge from CARE and other organisations’ programming and learning has greatly benefitted from the ideas, inputs and encouragement of colleagues from around the CARE International confederation. Special thanks to the many colleagues who generously gave their time to advise on and review various drafts and/or provide content on CARE programmes, including Lindsay Alexander, Doris Bartel, Allison Burden, Lori Cajegas, Maria Christensen, Vindhya Fernando, Sarah Fuhrman, Jay Goulden, Rebecca Haines, Charlotte Heales, Emily Janoch, Hilary Mathews, Kassie McIlvaine, Howard Mollett, Thayaharan Nadarajah, Berlinda Nolles, Amy O’Toole, Isadora Quay, Francesca Rhodes, Joe Sutcliffe, Nicola Tobin, Emily Wiseman, Diana Wu, and Fatma Zennou. Deep gratitude also to the UK Gender and Development Network’s Working Group on Women’s Participation and Leadership, whose collaboration, ideas and support over many years has been essential to the author’s own thinking and development.

Front cover photo: Women from the Matu Masu Dubara Network of Tam (Diffa, Niger) © Olliver Girard/CARE 2019. Captions and credits for other photos used in this paper are given on the back page.
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CARE’s mission is to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. We put women and girls at the centre of our work because we cannot achieve this mission while gender inequality persists. CARE embarked on a journey in the mid-2000s to transform how we work with communities to advance gender equality. We began with a Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women’s Empowerment grounded in participatory learning with women and men across the world – both CARE staff and the communities we work with.

This gave us a deeper understanding of what empowerment means to different people and how to address gender inequality. We learned that in order to tackle unequal and harmful gender power dynamics sustainably, change must happen for women themselves – in their self-confidence, aspirations, knowledge and skills. But we also learnt that changes for individual women alone are not enough to tackle the root causes of inequality and women’s relative powerlessness. To do that, change is also required in the relationships that women have with others – their intimate relationships and social networks, their group membership and activism, their relationships with their governments as citizens. Change is also necessary in the broader structures that govern our lives – the formal and visible ones, such as policies, procedures and services, as well as the informal ones, like our customs and social norms, our values and our beliefs.

Women’s leadership in public life and in decision-making is part of this transformative change CARE seeks at the individual, relational and structural level. CARE has placed gender equality, including women’s voice and leadership, at the centre of our new Vision 2030. We have done this in recognition that women’s voice and leadership is both a right and necessary to achieve CARE’s mission within our confederation and across all our Impact Areas. Women’s collective voice, leadership and actions are impactful. The women who work with CARE in our programmes are constantly reinforcing this. Salimata Dagnoko sums it up when she talks about her work as President of a network of 200 savings and solidarity groups in Côte d’Ivoire: ‘They make women more autonomous over the long-term through trainings and information that help us to grow our businesses and use our voices…. When savings groups form networks, they become more powerful. For example, our village had a problem with drinking water. Our network of groups met with the mayor, and the problem was solved. Our savings group network was also invited by the Embassy of France and the Minister of Women to discuss and address issues of gender-based violence and women’s rights.’
Be inspired by Salimata and take the time to read this position paper and explore the concepts that lie within; do this with others – listen to the voices of the women we work with across the world. The paper outlines a vision of what equal voice and transformative leadership looks like. This vision can only become a reality when we demonstrate what this means in our own lives and work. The paper provides practical resources and approaches for all CARE staff to use to reflect on gender, power and leadership, and to take actions in their day-to-day work to realise this vision of equal voice and transformative leadership within CARE, with our partners and with communities. Transformative change will happen when you as an individual use your agency and voice to act; when we, collectively, work in solidarity and bring our own transformative leadership to challenge harmful informal and formal structures and create new norms. We have the privilege to bring our voices to this foreword. We encourage you all to bring your voices and leadership to achieve the changes outlined in this paper.

Allison Burden – Programme Director, CARE International Secretariat
Hilary Mathews – Senior Director, Gender Justice, CARE USA
Why CARE supports women’s voice and leadership in public life

CARE International’s mission is to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. CARE’s Vision 2030 puts gender equality – including women’s and girls’ voice and leadership and eliminating gender-based violence – at the heart of all our programming and advocacy. Why? Gender inequality is a key driver of poverty and one of the most widespread forms of injustice and rights violations in the world. Participation in public and political life and decision-making is a human right, and the over-representation of men in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society and government perpetuates gender injustice.

Women’s equal voice and leadership in public life means that everyone has the opportunity and ability to meaningfully participate – directly or indirectly – in public decisions that affect their lives at all levels of society and government. Meaningful participation requires that people not only have access to or are present within decision-making processes, but also are able to actively participate in and have influence over their format and outcomes. CARE’s equal voice and leadership programmes and advocacy focus on poor and marginalised women because they have the least influence in public life.

Women’s marginalisation in public life directly leads to law, policy, budgets, services and programmes that do not take account, adequately or at all, of different women’s experiences, needs and rights. Righting this injustice by supporting women and other marginalised groups to have a say in decisions that affect their lives is a strategy for achieving equitable and sustainable change in all of CARE’s Impact Areas, including women’s economic justice, the right to health, food, water and nutrition, climate justice, and humanitarian action.

What and who this position paper is for

This position paper provides guidance and resources for CARE leadership and staff to enable us to respond to women and marginalised groups’ aspirations for equal voice and social transformation. The position paper aims to help CARE to achieve Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goal on Gender Equality – and specifically Goal 5.5 on ‘women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
For CARE’s senior leadership, the paper provides a vision of what equal voice and transformative leadership looks like and milestones along the way (Section 2).

The medium-term objective is for CARE to contribute to:

- **Public and political institutions that are more inclusive of, and responsive and accountable to, all people,** regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or citizenship status.
- **Women having actual influence within decision-making processes** at all levels and in all aspects of political, economic and public life.
- **Strong and independent women-led organisations** acting to transform unequal and unjust power structures and advance the rights of all genders.
- **Male leaders who champion gender equality** and women’s rights to equal leadership and meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making.

The long-term objective is for CARE to contribute to:

- **Equitable societies and political systems** that work for the benefit of all people and for future generations, and where people of all genders are equally committed to and responsible for promoting justice and equality.
- **Equitable and inclusive organisations that promote transformative forms of leadership,** which advance human rights and social justice by challenging and transforming unjust social or political orders, and which mobilise power, resources and skills in ways that nurture and harness people’s diverse perspectives and talents.
- **Elected representatives, public officials and community leaders who actually represent and are accountable to all** and, in particular, people that are or have been oppressed or marginalised.

For CARE’s programming, advocacy and technical teams, the paper outlines the global evidence on the barriers to equal voice and leadership and the different pathways through which women can have influence in public life (Section 3). The four main pathways for participation and leadership in public life are women as leaders and activists within civil society, women holding office in government and the state, women leading or influencing customary or religious institutions and, in the private sector, women as business leaders and members of union/employee collectives.

Based on CARE’s and other organisations’ experience, the paper also provides a high-level theory of change and guidance on how CARE can progressively support the equal voice and leadership of women and other marginalised groups (Section 4).

Achieving equal voice and leadership requires social and political institutions that enable women, men and non-binary people, whatever their background, identity or circumstances, to have equal opportunities, status, visibility and influence in decision-making processes, and in all aspects of civic, public, political and economic life. Efforts to increase women’s agency and individual capabilities are essential for women’s meaningful participation and leadership but, on their own, are not a responsible strategy. Ignoring unequal structures and power relations does harm: it exposes women in public and political life to backlash and violence, adds to their existing reproductive and care burdens, and sends the message that women are solely responsible for gender transformation. Focusing only on women and their capabilities is also not an effective or sustainable strategy. Achieving equal voice and leadership require transforming unequal power relations and the structural conditions that limit women’s opportunities and meaningful participation and that incentivise not just most men but also most women in public life to behave in ways that reproduce the type of exclusionary governance that leaves most citizens behind.
Programme designers and implementers will need to translate this high-level theory of change into theories of action and programme activities relevant to the needs and priorities of particular groups of women and their context. To aid this, the paper outlines four programmatic approaches and related strategies and activities that CARE and other organisations have found to be important to bring about changes in agency, relations and structures and that can progressively support changes along the continuum within the theory of change (Section 4).

1. **Supporting women's voice within the household and community:** These programme activities seek to build the pre-conditions for women's participation in public decision-making by building marginalised women's individual and collective capabilities and power, and by shifting unequal power relations and gender norms in the home and community.

2. **Supporting women's presence in public life and decision-making:** These programme activities seek to address the barriers to women's access to community, government and other decision-making forums by building knowledge and capabilities for participation, by facilitating marginalised women to articulate and act on aspirations, and by working with community and public leaders to champion women's participation.

3. **Supporting women to be active and influential in public life and decision-making:** These activities seek to address barriers to women's *meaningful* participation – as citizens, civic activists or public officials – in public decision-making by facilitating horizontal and vertical networks between women's leaders and rights activists, by providing core funding and tailored support to women's organisations and movements, and by working to change rules, norms and cultures that discriminate against or harm women.

4. **Supporting transformative leadership and substantive representation of marginalised people:** These organisational activities aim to purposefully build inclusive and rights-based leadership, culture, structures and procedures within CARE and to enable us to fulfil our commitment to genuine partnership with women's rights and other social justice activists.
10 principles for supporting women’s voice and leadership

For all CARE staff, the paper outlines 10 principles for supporting women’s voice and leadership to guide organisational and programmatic decisions (Section 4). For each, the paper provides concrete examples of how CARE is already putting the principle into practice, and related resources.

1. **Be political but not partisan**: Challenging gender and other inequalities and promoting human rights is inherently political because it challenges vested interests and powerful groups. CARE can be political in being on the side of oppressed and marginalised people without being politically partisan.

2. **Reflect on and challenge barriers to women’s voice, leadership and representation within CARE**: For CARE to be a credible gender justice advocate, we must also ensure women and other under-represented groups have equal opportunities to lead and to meaningfully participate in decision-making within CARE.

3. **Support transformative leadership within CARE and with partners**: As an organisation committed to social and gender justice, CARE should purposively create a workplace culture and forms of leadership that model inclusion, collaboration and self-transformation, and partner with other leaders and organisations that intentionally use their power to create just and equitable societies, economies and governments.

4. **Recognise marginalised women as change agents**: Women are often overlooked as forces for change because they have less obvious forms of power than men. CARE needs to take actions, including internal/organisational changes, that enable us to identify, support and partner with marginalised women’s groups, organisations and movements.

5. ** Adopt an intersectional approach from the outset**: Marginalised women are subjected to discrimination based on characteristics and identities beyond their sex and gender. CARE can only support their journeys of empowerment if we integrate an intersectional approach into all our activities, including support to women’s leadership.

6. **Listen to women**: It is not empowering to tell women what they should think, want or do. CARE’s voice and leadership activities should respond to the specific conditions that women live in and to their own aspirations for engaging in community, public and political life.

7. **Focus on the quality of women’s participation**: Women can be present in decision-making forums but not able to actively participate or to influence decisions. CARE must support and monitor the changes necessary to improve the quality of women’s participation in public and political life.

8. **Invest in gender-transformative and multi-sectoral programmes**: To be transformative, CARE’s women’s voice and leadership programming must address inequalities in all three dimensions of CARE’s Gender Equality Framework (structures, relations and agency). Women’s voice and leadership activities should also be embedded in or implemented alongside sectoral programmes because women’s economic, social and political power are inter-dependent.

9. **Integrate activities and actions to increase women’s voice and leadership across different levels of society and state**: CARE programmes and advocacy contribute to societal change most effectively when they build alliances between different groups of people. CARE’s women’s voice and leadership work should seek to connect grassroots women activists and leaders to women’s rights organisations, and to build alliances between gender equality advocates across state and society and between people from different generations, classes and identity groups.

10. **Build relationships of partnership not paternalism**: CARE commits to equitable partnerships with women’s rights and other social justice organisations and movements, recognising the value that different organisations bring to a partnership and supporting the independence of local women’s rights organisations from CARE in the long-term. CARE needs to make changes to organisational processes, requirements and mindsets to achieve these ambitions.
Women’s voice and leadership in public life is where gender equality meets inclusive governance and accountability in CARE’s approach and work. CARE’s commitment to gender transformation means our support to women’s voice and leadership is not about helping individual women to be inserted in or to engage with political institutions that are designed by and for the benefit of privileged men. Strengthening the voice and leadership of women and other excluded groups is about transforming the structures that underlie hierarchical, oppressive and unjust distribution of power in society – between men, women and non-binary people, between women from different socio-economic groups, and between different citizens and power-holders. CARE’s support to equal voice and transformative leadership aims to enable people of all genders to change the way politics and society work, so that they are inclusive of and benefit everyone.
1. INTRODUCTION

CARE International’s mission is to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. As a dual-mandated development and humanitarian organisation, CARE works in low-income countries, fragile and conflict-affected settings and in rapid onset emergencies. CARE's Vision 2030 puts gender equality and women's and girls’ rights at the centre of our programming and advocacy because gender inequality is a key driver of poverty and one of the most widespread forms of injustice in the world.

Women’s voice and leadership is also at the centre of CARE’s Vision 2030 – as an essential component of gender equality. It is both a goal in its own right and a strategy for achieving equitable and sustainable change in all of CARE’s Impact Areas, including women’s economic justice, the right to health, food, water and nutrition, climate justice, and humanitarian action. To advance equal voice and leadership, CARE’s programming and advocacy must contribute to transforming unjust systems of governance and power that exclude and disadvantage women, girls and other marginalised groups and that deny their right to participate in all levels of public, government and community life and decision-making.

To support the operationalisation of Vision 2030, this position paper outlines and provides guidance on:

- Why CARE supports women’s voice and leadership in public life (Section 2)
- CARE’s vision for women’s equal voice and transformative leadership (Section 2)
- Different pathways to women having voice and influence in public life and decision-making (Section 3)
- Global evidence on the barriers to women’s meaningful participation and leadership in public life (Section 3)
- 10 principles to guide CARE’s work on women’s voice, participation and leadership (Section 4)
- A high-level theory of change, three programmatic approaches and one organisational approach for strengthening women’s voice and leadership (Section 4).
2. WHY CARE SUPPORTS WOMEN’S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC LIFE

Women’s participation in public life is a human right

Equal voice, participation, leadership and representation are a matter of rights, self-determination and fairness. As a human rights-based organisation, CARE supports women’s right to participation and leadership in public life as a goal in itself. Every person has the right to equal participation in the public and political life of their country — including the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to organise and protest, and to vote and stand as candidates in periodic and free and fair elections. UN Member States who have ratified the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights² or the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have a legal duty and obligation to respect, protect and guarantee these rights. Most countries also have constitutions or national laws that guarantee women’s right to equal public and political participation.³

Women’s participation in public life is necessary for sustainable development, peace and security

CARE believes that inequality, oppression and abuse of power in all forms are root causes of poverty, injustice and insecurity. One of these root causes is the over-representation in public life of men and other dominant groups (e.g. heterosexual, cis-gender, white, non-disabled, dominant ethnicities/caste/religion). Not being adequately represented in decision-making has a direct and negative impact on the well-being of excluded groups. The exclusion of women and marginalised groups from public and political decision-making leads to law, policy, public decisions, budget allocations, services, development programmes and humanitarian assistance that do not take account, adequately or at all, of different women’s experiences, needs and rights. The relative absence of women and marginalised groups from public life also reinforces beliefs and expectations that they are less competent leaders than dominant groups, and do not belong in the public sphere.⁴ The result is a vicious cycle of women’s expertise and priorities being left out of public deliberation and problem-solving, and development policy that leaves most people behind.

The negative impact of women’s exclusion from decision-making is perhaps most acute in the area of peace, security and humanitarian assistance. Gender and other structural inequalities affect how different people experience conflict and disaster. Women are more likely to be displaced than men, subject to sexual and gender-based violence and
suffer higher levels of malnutrition. During conflict, displacement, and public health emergencies, neglect of women’s maternal and reproductive health rights leads to increased rates of pregnancy and maternal mortality. Women are also likely to become solely responsible for looking after their family, are first responders during emergencies, and active peacebuilders within their communities. Despite this, men dominate the design and management of emergency response and disaster preparedness, with the result that the needs and contributions of women, non-binary people and other excluded people are an afterthought. In addition, a narrow conception of peace and security as ending military violence and restoring state monopoly of violence means that male leaders of warring parties conduct peace negotiations – even though including women increases the likelihood that peace agreements will last and protect the rights of women and other marginalised groups.

The international community has recognised the necessity of promoting women’s participation and leadership for sustainable development, peace and security. High-level commitments include UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), the G7 Whistler Declaration on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action (2018), and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), which commits members to ‘ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’ (Goal 5, Target 5.5).

**LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In a COVID-19 world, with multiple crises involving war, public health and natural disasters, women’s leadership at all levels is essential to building recovery and resilience, achieving the Global Goals and meeting the aims of CARE’s Vision 2030. The COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affects women and girls. They are more exposed to the disease as frontline workers and primary carers. Prevention measures that confine families to their homes are also exposing women to more domestic and intimate partner violence, limiting their access to sexual and reproductive health services and seriously affecting women’s livelihoods and economic opportunities. The direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 on women’s health and livelihoods makes it essential that women’s voices are equally heard in the decision-making spaces and processes where responses are formed.

Yet, in a survey of 30 countries, CARE’s research found that, on average, women made up only 24% of the national-level committees established to respond to COVID-19. In a quarter of countries, there was no evidence of government making funding or policy commitments for gender-based violence (GBV) or sexual and reproductive health services, or women-specific economic assistance, and over half of the countries had taken no action on GBV. Looking beyond national COVID-19 response committees, the report found that countries with more women in national leadership were more likely to have a gendered response to COVID-19. At the same time, and despite women being on the frontlines of COVID-19 as carers and first responders, local women’s rights and women-led organisations are not receiving their fair share of funding: less than 0.1% of tracked humanitarian funding for COVID-19 has reached local and national actors directly, despite the Grand Bargain commitment of 25%. This is further demonstrated by CARE’s Rapid Gender Analyses on COVID-19, which find that across the globe women are consistently being left out of response decision-making at the local and community levels, and that the crisis is only raising barriers to their participation.

**CARE’s vision for women’s equal voice and transformative leadership**

CARE’s vision is a world of hope, inclusion and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and all people live in dignity and security. We view both inclusive governance and gender equality as essential to progress in all areas of development and humanitarian assistance. CARE International’s Vision 2030 commits us to centre and advance gender equality, including women and girls’ rights to voice and leadership and a life free from violence, in all of our development, humanitarian and advocacy work and across all sectors. The CARE International Gender Equality Policy (updated 2018), CARE’s Global Gender Justice Vision and Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Voice...
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(2018-2020), and the CARE International Gender Network’s Position Paper on Supporting Women’s Social Movements (2019) commit us to partnership with organisations and movements who share our values and broader vision for gender equality and women’s voice, and especially with women-led and women’s rights organisations and networks, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ) communities.

Women’s voice and leadership in public life is where gender equality meets inclusive governance and accountability in CARE’s approach and work. CARE’s commitment to gender transformation means our support to women’s voice and leadership is not about helping individual women to be inserted in or to engage with political institutions that are designed by and for the benefit of privileged men. Equal voice and participation, and transformative leadership, are about enabling people of all genders to change the way politics and society work, so that they are inclusive of and benefit everyone. Strengthening the voice and leadership of women and other excluded groups is about transforming the structures that underlie hierarchical, oppressive and unjust distribution of power in society – between men, women and non-binary people, between women from different socio-economic groups, and between different citizens and power-holders.

What does success look like?

Transforming deep-rooted social and political structures that limit equal voice and leadership in public life for all takes the combined efforts of multiple communities and organisations working together across generations. Nevertheless, being clear on what success, and incremental progress towards it, looks like is an important compass to guide CARE’s decisions about partnerships, resourcing, programming and advocacy.

The medium-term objective is for CARE to contribute to:

- Public and political institutions that are more inclusive of, and responsive and accountable to, all people, regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or citizenship status.
- Women having actual influence within decision-making processes at all levels and in all aspects of political, economic and public life.
- Strong and independent women-led organisations acting to transform unequal and unjust power structures and advance the rights of all genders.
- Male leaders who champion gender equality and women’s rights to equal leadership and meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making.

The long-term objective is for CARE to contribute to:

- Equitable societies and political systems that work for the benefit of all people and for future generations, and where people of all genders are equally committed to and responsible for promoting justice and equality.
- Equitable and inclusive organisations that promote transformative forms of leadership, which advance human rights and social justice by challenging and transforming unjust social or political orders, and which mobilise power, resources and skills in ways that nurture and harness people’s diverse perspectives and talents.
- Elected representatives, public officials and community leaders who actually represent and are accountable to all and, in particular, people that are or have been oppressed or marginalised.
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MARGINALISED GROUPS?

Marginalised people are any group that have unequal power, opportunities and outcomes within a society because of systemic oppression or disadvantage. Oppression is the ‘systemic and institutional abuse of power by one group at the expense of others and the use of force to maintain this dynamic. An oppressive system is built around the ideology of superiority of some groups and inferiority of others ... [and] enables those in charge ... to control resources and choices ...’14 The specific groups who are or have been oppressed or marginalised is context-specific to communities, regions, countries and the international system.

Social systems of oppression and hierarchy are rarely based on one characteristic or identity but instead intersect in ways that accentuate unearned advantage for some groups and disadvantage and marginalisation for others. White, heterosexual, cis-gender, non-disabled, wealthy men are historically and typically the dominant group. However, context-specific markers of dominance also include particular ethnicities, castes, religions, languages and political affiliation/ideology. Citizenship status is also important: refugees and migrants are amongst the most marginalised groups.

Historical oppression and marginalisation must always be considered: groups who have won legal rights to equality and non-discrimination continue to face de facto social and economic marginalisation because of past denial of equal status and rights. This includes the ongoing economic and social effects of the colonisation of people and places.
This section provides an overview of:

- what equal voice and leadership means for CARE
- the different pathways to women having voice and influence in public life and decision-making
- a global snapshot of women’s representation and leadership in public life
- differences between women being present in public life and having actual influence
- common barriers to women’s meaningful voice and leadership in public life
- the relationship between women’s power in the private and public spheres.

What equal voice and leadership means

For CARE, women’s equal voice and leadership in public life means that everyone has the opportunity and ability to meaningfully participate – directly or indirectly – in public decisions that affect their lives at all levels of society and government. Meaningful participation requires that people not only have access to or are present within decision-making processes, but also are able to actively participate in and have influence over their format and outcomes. Our equal voice and leadership programmes and advocacy focus on poor and marginalised women because they have the least influence in public life.

Women need to have appropriate knowledge, experience and social capital to be influential in public life. More importantly, however, equal voice and leadership requires societies, institutions and organisations that enable women and marginalised groups to participate and lead, that accord equal respect to all in practice as well as on paper, and that are accountable to women’s human rights and gender equality.
WOMEN’S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE – KEY CONCEPTS

Voice is the act of making known one’s preferences, views, interests and demands and of having them heard, either individually or collectively. In many societies, women are (or have been) expected to remain silent in debate, denied the right of autonomy and consent (to marital sex, to vote, over property) and their opinions and experiences are/have been viewed as irrational or trivial. This diminishes the perceived validity and reliability of women’s voice – both in terms of its content and performance/delivery – even when these discriminatory norms and assumptions are changing.¹⁵

Participation is about when and how citizens are involved in public and political decision-making. Citizen participation is more or less meaningful, however, depending on how much power particular citizens have to set the agenda, access information, inform decisions and oversee their implementation. The commonly used ‘ladder of participation’¹⁶ distinguishes between levels of citizen participation from non-participation (where power-holders manipulate participation), to tokenistic participation (informing, consultation, placation) and citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) (see Annex 1).

Leadership is the mobilisation of people and resources towards a particular or common goal. Leadership can be exercised by individuals or groups and is not limited to formal positions or organisations. Ideas and theories of leadership have often focused on (stereotypically masculine) individual traits or behaviours but institutional/organisational conditions and relationships, as well as the broader environment that organisations are situated in, are as important in shaping and understanding the type, quality and objectives of leadership. Transformative leadership seeks to challenge and change prevailing unjust social or political orders.¹⁷

Feminist leadership is a form of transformative leadership that applies feminist analysis and practice to organising and collective action. This includes the importance of both self-reflection and transformation, and self-care; using intersectional gender and power analysis to understand how structural discrimination privileges or disadvantages different people of all genders; actively modelling inclusive, collaborative and consultative behaviours and enabling women who have traditionally had less power to participate equally in group/organisational leadership and decision-making; and focusing attention not on individual women leaders, but collective power to transform oppressive and exclusionary structures in order to fulfil the human rights of all, including women’s rights.¹⁸

Representation is when a person or body acts on behalf of another person or group of people – with or without their explicit consent (e.g. a vote). Descriptive representation is where the composition of a decision-making body, such as a parliament, better reflects the population it is acting on behalf of – such as where there is 50/50 representation of women and men. Substantive representation is when a representative actually acts to advance the known interests of their constituents or a particular group of constituents. There is intrinsic value/fairness in diverse representation. However, while it may be that a person with a shared background/lived experience is more likely to represent the interests and preferences of someone similar, there is no direct relationship between descriptive and substantive representation.¹⁹

Feminist leadership [is] … a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others … around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all.²⁰

Srilatha Batliwala, feminist scholar and activist
Senior Advisor, CREA (Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action) and Senior Associate, Gender at Work
Different pathways to women’s voice and influence in public life and decision-making

In international development and humanitarian action, women’s participation and leadership are often associated with their engagement in government and formal politics. However, this is not the only – or even the most important – way that people organise and act in public life in order to influence decisions about the use of public power and money.

Four major spheres of public life through which women can have voice and influence are:

- **Civil society**: Women can be leaders and activists within civil society, academia, professional associations, community organisations and social movements. As well as seeking to shape the working of their own organisations and communities, women civic leaders can work with other women and allies to influence the processes and decisions of public and private power-holders in relation to laws, entitlements, policy and services, as well as informal/social norms and practice.

- **State, government and political parties**: Women can hold office in bureaucracies, judiciaries and other oversight bodies, political parties, legislatures and executives, and at different levels of state and government. These positions give them the opportunity to directly influence decisions about the making and implementation of laws, policy, budgets and services.

- **Kinship, customary and religious**: Women can be customary or religious leaders, including leaders of women’s groups attached to faith-based organisations, with influence over community and customary affairs. Even when excluded from customary leadership, women, especially in rural areas, may organise with others to influence the decisions of their local leaders as the form of authority with the most direct power over their lives.

- **Market and private sector**: Women can be business leaders and managers with influence over the running and direction of private firms. Businesswomen may also work with business associations to lobby government on economic policy and reform. Women employees, smallholders and informal workers can also organise in unions or cooperatives to influence employers and/or employment or market conditions.

Figure 1: Four spheres of public life and decision-making

Organisations and associations in all four spheres operate from community to international levels. These different spheres of public life can overlap in practice. These spheres are historically constructed and take on local meanings and expressions. Public organisations and associations can be formal, informal or a hybrid.
These four spheres of public life overlap in practice. For example, customary or religious authorities – such as chiefs or imams – may be officially recognised by the state and/or have formal political or administrative functions. Economic associations – such as village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), cooperatives or professional associations – may also take civic action, e.g. to lobby political or customary leaders on social policy and practice. Non-governmental organisations may deliver state services. Whatever the sphere, the interaction of formal, written rules – such as laws, regulations and codes of conduct – and informal, unwritten norms – such as custom, tradition and other unwritten practices – shape how organisations actually work and make decisions. These institutions (the rules of the game) are constructed over time, shaped by domestic and external forces, including colonialism, occupation, conflict and globalisation, and take on local meanings and expressions. As a result, while public organisations and institutions are present in all countries, operating from the community to international levels, and serving similar functions, the forms they take vary widely from place to place and across time.

**Global snapshot of women’s leadership and representation in public life**

These four spheres of public life provide potential pathways to women’s voice and leadership in public decision-making at the local, sub-national, national and international levels. However, in all spheres, women continue to be marginalised – both when we look at the global picture and more so when we look at particular regions, countries or groups discriminated against on the basis of gender and other identities or characteristics.

**CIVIL SOCIETY**

Grassroots activism and civil society are areas of public life and informal organising and decision-making. Women from all sections of society – including poor and marginalised women – have a long history of organising with other women and with allies to advance their own and others’ rights and to resist attacks on rights already won. Despite working against the odds of patriarchy, racism and other forms of systemic oppression, women’s rights organisations and movements have been a powerful force for progressive change.

**FEMINIST ORGANISING IS A POWERFUL ENGINE OF PROGRESSIVE GENDER REFORM**

Ground-breaking evidence on the role of women’s rights organisations in state action on gender equality: Feminist scholars Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon use comparative and mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods to explore when and why governments around the world take action to promote women’s rights. Their research finds that feminist mobilisation within civil society and international women’s rights conventions (e.g. CEDAW) are the two most significant factors when progress is made on rights for women as a group, such as policies to combat violence against women, women’s equal status at work or women’s equal representation. The presence and strength of feminist movements have also been important to progress in areas of women’s rights where religious groups have an interest, such as reproductive and health rights and family law. By contrast, Htun and Weldon find that, on its own, women’s increased parliamentary representation does not explain variations across countries in progress on women’s legal rights, but it does play a role in preventing retrenchment of legal rights already won and in normalising the equal status of women.

**Centenary Action Group, UK:** In 2018, the centenary of when the first women were given the vote in Britain, CARE worked with Helen Pankhurst to set up the Centenary Action Group. This is a women’s rights, non-partisan campaigning group focused on ensuring that women in the UK and beyond have the right to take part in the decisions that affect their lives, free from harassment and abuse. The Centenary Action Group consists of more than 100 women’s organisations, political parties and key individuals, campaigning for (1) greater women’s political participation and leadership, especially in local and national politics; (2) an end to violence and the abuse of women, including women in politics and leadership; and (3) targeted efforts to address economic inequalities that prevent women engaging in politics and decision-making. The Centenary Action Group is a clear example of organisations, including CARE, working together in a coalition to amplify the collective leadership and voice of women activists and organisations.
Yet even within civil society, women's organisations and associations are marginalised by lack of recognition and funding, especially women facing intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression. The global tide of populism and nationalism has seen women's organisations at the sharp end of the (re)assertion of patriarchy and paternalism. At the more formal end of civil society, such as non-government organisations, professional associations and unions, men dominate leadership positions. For example, in 2018, the International Trade Union Confederation reported that women's membership in 82 affiliated trade unions was 42% but only 14.4% of the top two positions in the unions were held by women. In higher education, in 2016-17, women led just 18% of the top 200 universities globally and, in the US in 2017, 68% of full professors and 70% of college presidents were men, even though women had earned more doctorates than men for the previous eight years. Men dominate leadership positions even in sectors where women are the majority of the workforce: on average, 70% of the staff of international NGOs are women but 70% of their leaders are men.

Women are also not a homogenous group with unified interests and solidarity. The distribution of power within national and transnational women's movements – which are typically dominated by older, wealthier, educated urban women from dominant ethnic, religious or caste groups – can itself replicate and reinforce power inequalities between different groups of women.

**STATE, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

Between 1995 and 2020, the number of women MPs rose globally from 11.3% to 24.9%. Women ministers increased from 9% in 1999 to 21.3% in 2020 but they continue to be more likely to hold less powerful ‘social’ ministerial portfolios, such as family affairs, women and children, employment and the environment. As of January 2020, only 6.6% of elected heads of state were women (10 of 152) and 6.2% of elected heads of government (12 of 193). These global figures hide important variations between regions and countries, however. In January 2020, women were the majority in national legislatures in two countries (Rwanda and Bolivia), held less than 10% of the seats in 30 countries and were completely absent from four (Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Yemen). The median for female representation in local government based on 103 countries is 26%, but ranges from 1% to 50%. The Women's Leader Index tracking women in senior civil service positions shows the mean for G20 countries is 27.7% in 2020 (8 points up from 2013), but this ranges from 48.1% in Canada to 4.9% and 1.6% in Japan and Saudi Arabia respectively.

Women's overall gains in state bodies also obscure that, even in countries where women have more political power than previously, there has been little or no progress in women's leadership and representation in the most powerful sectors, positions or negotiations. The regional average of women mayors in Latin America and the Caribbean is 15.5%, and in Europe it is 15%. Data on women party leaders is difficult to come by, but a study of gender and party leadership between 1964 and 2013 in 11 parliamentary democracies and 71 parties found 14% of all leaders had been women. Peace negotiations are critical in establishing the terms of post-conflict political settlements and distribution of rights and resources. Yet, in major peace processes tracked by the Council on Foreign Relations between 1992 and 2018, only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and 4% of signatories were women. Only a third of leadership positions in the UN system were held by women in 2015 and, in 2017, 16 out of 21 directors in the OECD, and 7 out of 8 heads of agencies and special entities, were men.

Global and country figures also direct attention away from the variation in opportunities for different groups of women: new openings for women in public life invariably benefit wealthier and more educated women from dominant socio-economic groups. The advantage conferred by wealth and other forms of group privilege is one reason for this. Another reason is that state power is often oppressive and marginalised groups may actively avoid contact with the state and social justice activists may choose to organise outside state structures.
KINSHIP, CUSTOMARY AND RELIGIOUS

In many parts of the world, people with informal authority are closest to the lives of poor and marginised people – such as religious, customary and kinship leaders and bodies, or gangs, militias and warlords. Traditional and religious institutions are often important sources of solidarity and social welfare, and they also vary in terms of women’s status – for example, inheritance through the father’s kinship line in patrilineal systems and the mother’s in matrilineal systems. At the same time, most customary and religious institutions exhibit patriarchal forms of authority and power, with women routinely marginalised or formally excluded from leadership and decision-making. Informal authority is often extended in fragile and conflict-affected settings where state authority is contested or its reach is limited.

MARKET AND PRIVATE SECTOR

In 2018, global (paid) labour force participation for women over the age of 15 was 48.5%, compared to 75% for men. Women and men’s labour force participation varies considerably across regions, however, with the gender gap smallest in sub-Saharan Africa (9.3%), Europe, Northern America (12.1%) and Eastern Asia (15.6%) and largest in the Arab States (58.3%), Southern Asia (51.4%) and Northern Africa (50%).

Despite the growing evidence that gender-balanced management teams perform better, men remain over-represented in leadership in the private sector. In January 2020, in the top 500 companies listed on the US stock exchange, women made up 44.7% of employees but only 26.5% of senior management and a meagre 5.5% of chief executive officers. A survey of 5,000 ‘mid-market’ businesses in 35 countries in 2020 found that women hold 29% of senior roles, ranging from 27% in Asia-Pacific to 38% in Africa.

GAPS IN THE DATA ON WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Across all spheres of public life, the absence of comprehensive and reliable global data clouds our understanding of gender representation – and skews it towards the experience of higher-income countries. In 2015, for example, only 49 countries, 57% of which were European, reported the percentage of female police officers (the average was 19%). Data on the percentage of female judges and magistrates suffer from similar shortcomings: the average for female judges and magistrates was 47% in the 46 countries who reported but again, the majority of these were European, with only four in Asia. In many areas of public life – including the trade union movement, higher education, non-government organisations, local government, customary and faith-based institutions, business and much more – longitudinal global datasets (and, in some cases, even regional datasets) are either extremely difficult to find and access, or do not exist at all.

Inclusion without influence or representation: unpacking women’s political participation

Statistics on women’s representation in different areas of public life only tell us about the numbers of women in decision-making positions or processes, but not how much power and influence those women have in practice or what they do with it and why. Thinking through what affects women’s political effectiveness, Anne Marie Goetz unpacks the ways in which women might engage, or be engaged by, civil society associations, political parties and state bureaucracies from:

1. women having access to or being consulted by these organisations, to
2. women having presence and representation in these organisations, to
3. women being able to actually influence the agenda, ways of working and outcomes of these organisations in ways that advance their interests and preferences.
Goetz and Shireen Hassim’s work on women in politics in Africa shows that there is no automatic relationship between women’s political access, presence and influence. Instead, the quality and outcomes of women’s political engagement depends on the institutional qualities of civil society, the political system and the state, and the degree to which they are responsive and accountable to women and marginalised groups.

The expansion of civil and political rights and affirmative action measures (e.g. quotas), through democratic and post-conflict transitions, and women’s ongoing activism have expanded women’s access to and presence in political and public life. The academic evidence also indicates that the presence of women has and is changing what parliaments and executives debate and act on. In a comprehensive review of the literature on women in formal politics, Minna Cowper-Coles finds that elected women do tend to have different policy preferences to elected men. They are more likely to prioritise and champion not only women’s interests, such as equal rights, reproductive rights and sexual health, families and childcare, and eliminating violence against women, but also broader areas of social concern that benefit people of all genders, such as welfare, education, healthcare, international aid and, in low-income countries, water and sanitation. Cowper-Coles also finds overwhelming evidence that, on average, female elected representatives do more constituency work than men. Evidence from India also finds that an increase in female representation at the local government level induced a large and significant rise in crimes against women being reported and documented, as a result of women having more faith in their communities’ accountability structures (but the same effect was not seen from women in higher-level leadership positions).

At the same time, many elected women do not identify as feminists, they choose to align with class, racial/ethnic or other group identities rather than marginalised women, and/or behave in ways that conform to the masculinised political culture. Debunking critical mass theory, Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook argue that what is needed to achieve law and policy that advances women’s rights is the presence of ‘critical actors’ – women and men who champion gender equality. Whatever their politics, women in public positions rarely have the same opportunities, respect or influence as their male peers because of sexism, harassment and violence, prejudice, and exclusionary patronage networks. These structural and institutional barriers to meaningful public and political participation are even higher for women who are poor and/or belong to groups who face both sex/gender and other forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Party and electoral systems within representative democracy also make it difficult for women to substantively represent other women’s interests. Based on research across Latin America, Mala Htun describes how inclusion and representation in politics are parallel not linear processes. The presence of women and minorities in public life – often achieved through quotas and other forms of affirmative action – has been important to provide role models and challenge social hierarchies that reinforce ideas that some groups have less status than others. However, especially in countries with single-member constituencies, it is difficult for women and feminists to use their vote to incentivise their parliamentarians/legislators to advance their priorities and substantively represent them. This is because women do not have unitary interests and feminists do not form a significant voting bloc in any single constituency. Drawing on her research with Laurel Weldon, Htun finds that women’s organisations have been a more significant force for the substantive representation of women’s interests, with alliances between feminists across political and civic sectors critical for political and social transformation.

In sum, there is no single solution or blueprint to ensuring that elected representatives and other leaders will substantively represent and be accountable for the rights, needs and priorities of poor and marginalised people. To fulfil human rights and to achieve gender equality, we must progress the equal representation and participation of decision-making of women in all spheres of public and private life, and we must recognise and support the critical role that feminist activism plays in challenging an unjust status quo and championing fairer and more sustainable ways of living together.

**Barriers to equal voice and leadership**

Why is participation and leadership in all spheres of public life not fairer and more representative of wider populations? Why do the women who manage to gain collective or individual power not have the same influence as equivalent men? Why do women leaders tend to come from privileged, dominant socio-economic groups?
The evidence on women’s voice and leadership shows that the obstacles that work to keep women from having equal access and influence within public decision-making are higher and harder to surmount in some countries and for some groups – but are remarkably consistent globally. Using CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, Figure 2 below gives an overview of the most common barriers to women’s equal participation and leadership in public life from the global literature.64

**Figure 2: Common barriers to women’s voice and leadership in public life**

**AGENCY**
Women have unequal access to:
- education
- economic resources
- political skills, experience and capital

Women have less:
- political consciousness
- self-esteem, confidence and aspirations

**STRUCTURES**
Women’s choices and opportunities are limited by:
- denial or restrictions on civil and political rights, and/or on women’s equal rights
- customary, religious or social norms that limit women’s voice and participation
- patriarchal and sexist political cultures
- government, state and civic organisations that are unrepresentative of, or unaccountable to, women’s rights and priorities
- normalisation of violence and harassment as a means to control women in public life
- elite male domination of public life, with few role models for women and minority/marginalised groups
- class, race/ethnic, age, sexual and gender identity, and other hierarchies that further limit the opportunities of specific groups of women
- colonial histories and institutions that created/reinforced gender and ethnic/racial hierarchies
- global neoliberal economics, including exploitation of women’s unpaid labour

**RELATIONS**
Unequal power relations between women, men, and non-binary people, or different groups of women, men, and non-binary people, in:
- the household
- communities
- civic organisations
- state institutions
- customary and religious institutions
- markets and work
- international relations
These barriers to equal voice and leadership work together to (re)create unequal power relations in households, society, politics and the economy in ways that curtail the choices and capabilities of women and marginalised groups, silence them and keep them out of public life, and minimise their influence once there. Because of the constant interaction between agency, structures and relations, change is needed in all three dimensions of the CARE Gender Equality Framework to transform gender and other forms of inequality, including unequal voice and leadership in public life.65

DEFINITIONS: AGENCY, STRUCTURES, RELATIONS AND POWER

Agency is a person’s ability to be able to make choices and to act on them to achieve their goals and to shape the world around them. Every person has agency, but they do not have equal agency because their choices and ability to act on them are shaped by their access to and control of resources of different kinds – psychological, legal, socio-cultural, political, organisational, productive/material and human. Agency can also be thought of in terms of a person’s power within – their sense of self-worth and self-confidence – and their power to shape their own life, relationships and environment based on their control of different resources.

Structures are routines, patterns of relationships and interactions, and conventions. These patterns are based on written or unwritten rules (institutions) that establish agreed-upon meanings and (often) taken-for-granted behaviours, accepted (‘normal’) forms of domination (who ‘naturally’ has power over what or whom), agreed criteria for legitimising the social order, and sanctions for those who transgress the rules. Structures can be both tangible – behaviour patterns that can be observed and counted – and intangible – the ideologies that underpin why some thoughts or behaviours are deemed socially acceptable by the majority. Structures can also be thought of in terms of exerting power over people’s lives and/or enabling their power to live together and achieve things. They are not inherently good or bad, therefore; structures can be enabling or limiting.

Relations refers to the social relationships through which individuals or groups negotiate their needs and rights with other social actors, and the quality of these relationships, including how power is distributed and exercised. Relationships can be equalitarian or hierarchical, cooperative or oppressive, productive or destructive, and so on. Relations can also be thought of in terms of a person’s or group’s power over another and/or collective power with others.

There is a constant interplay between agency, structures and relations. Social, political and economic structures affect women’s access to/control of resources and therefore their choices and actions (agency). However, structures are not fixed. Through their actions and interactions, individual agents contribute to producing, reinforcing or changing structures. Similarly, both agency and structure are mediated through relationships between and among social groups. This interplay between agency, structures and relations has important consequences for whether and how women – and different groups of women – participate in public life.

The relationship between women’s power in the private and public spheres

This position paper focuses on women’s voice and participation in public life. However, women’s status and decision-making power in the private sphere – the family and household – has significant and direct implications for their ability to participate in public life and for their increased risk of violence when they do. Women – both poor and wealthy and across all areas of public life – frequently report that the support of their family is a critical factor in their public participation.66 This includes significant male relatives (e.g. fathers and husbands, or uncles or elder brother in their absence) and, in societies where multi-generational households are the norm, also mothers-in-law.
Structural gender inequality makes family support for women’s participation essential. Many women need by custom or law the permission of their husband or other male relatives to leave the house and/or participate in public life. Many women are also either economically dependent on their male relatives and/or do not have equal say in the use of household income or assets – because their care and domestic work is not economically rewarded or recognised; because they are paid less than men and/or do not have equal access to higher-paid sectors or positions; and because they often do not have equal (or any) inheritance rights. Women’s primary responsibility for unpaid labour in the family and household means that their public participation depends on being able to pay others to do this work or for other household members to be willing to do it in their place, most often other women or girls. Finally, women who participate in public life are frequently subject to stigma, harassment and violence, either inside or outside the home, because they are seen to transgress gendered expectations about how women should behave. Women’s safety therefore depends on their families’ acceptance and support for their right to participate in civil society, politics and business – and for their family members to also be willing to withstand social disapproval from their communities.

More fundamentally, research by Valerie Hudson and colleagues finds a direct relationship between the subordination and insecurity of women – what they term the ‘first political order’ – and state-level violence and insecurity. Their large quantitative and longitudinal dataset finds a strong and statistically significant association between proxy variables for unequal gender relations and women’s subordination, on the one hand, and different dimensions of state stability, security and resilience, on the other. Countries where women’s subordination at household level is more severe – measured by the increased prevalence of men’s violence against women, patrilocal and cousin marriage, bride-price/dowry and polygyny, and women’s lack of rights in personal/family law (e.g. divorce, child custody, property and inheritance) – are significantly more likely to experience autocracy, state fragility, political violence and terrorism, hunger and environmental degradation.
Too often, international efforts to increase women’s political or public participation and leadership do not respond to the structural causes of women’s exclusion. They focus on women as individuals and measure success by counting the number of women in government and state institutions. This obscures how people with power – regardless of their sex or gender identity – often behave in ways that recreate unjust patriarchal social, political and economic systems. International assistance to women’s participation and political empowerment also tends to focus on formal politics – and therefore mostly women from more privileged socio-economic groups – rather than nurturing and supporting civic activists and social movements who challenge oppression and fight for gender justice.

By contrast, CARE’s approach to women’s voice and leadership across development and humanitarian action supports:

- the different pathways through which women can be influential in public life (see Figure 1 above)
- poor and marginalised women’s voice, participation and leadership in public life
- the quality of women’s participation and their actual power and influence in public decision-making
- the responsibility of men, and not just women and non-binary people, to challenge and change structural barriers to gender equality and fulfilment of the human rights of all.

How does CARE achieve this in practice? There is no single blueprint that can effectively advance equal voice and leadership for all individuals or groups of women and in all contexts. However, the experience and learning of CARE and other organisations does provide guidance for designing programmes that support poor and marginalised women’s chosen pathways to voice and leadership in public life. This section outlines:

- 10 principles to guide organisational and programmatic decisions
- an overarching theory of change of women’s equal voice and leadership in public life
- four approaches and associated strategies to support women’s agency and collective action in public life, and to transform the structures and unequal power relations that inhibit women’s voice and leadership.
10 principles to guide CARE’s approach to women’s voice and leadership in public and political life

Below, each principle is described and illustrative examples of how CARE is putting the principles into practice are provided, along with associated resources.

**Principle 1. Be political but not partisan**

Transforming gender and other unjust hierarchies and promoting human rights, including women’s rights, is necessarily a political project because it challenges vested interests and powerful groups. CARE can be political in being on the side of, and working with, oppressed and marginalised people, without being politically partisan in aligning with a particular political party or grouping. The humanitarian ethics of Impartiality and Neutrality are useful examples of how this works in CARE’s humanitarian programming. CARE can also work with multi-party platforms, including women’s caucuses, or with partners to support systemic change and women’s aspirations for political office.

**PUTTING PRINCIPLE 1 INTO PRACTICE**

*Network Empower Transform (NET), Sri Lanka (2016-2018)*

Through the NET project, Chrysalis – a CARE affiliate – worked in partnership with local civil society organisations and networks to promote women’s voice and meaningful political representation to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts in the north of Sri Lanka. The project provided practical training, for 434 women and 193 men, in leadership skills, including negotiation, mediation, gender sensitivity, active non-violent communication, teambuilding, conflict resolution and transformation, and communication. Local and national government officials and parliamentarians from the women’s caucus were brought in as resource persons for sessions on the workings of the various levels of government, and policy- and law-making. Networks and alliances were also strengthened to address sexual and gender-based violence in the two districts. The project evaluation concluded that the project ‘contributed to a change in perceptions about women taking up leadership roles including those in political authorities’ and found that ‘even though there are some cultural barriers, politicians have influenced the nomination process in the local government elections and absorbed a few women leaders to their party’. Twenty-six women (and 10 men) were selected as candidates in the local government elections in February 2018, with five women (and three men) elected as council members across the two project districts.

*Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Programme (GEWEP), multi-country (2009-2024)*

CARE’s GEWEP project is based on a ‘village savings and loan association (VSLA) plus’ model, where the VSLAs are used as a platform for women to pursue their economic, social and political rights in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, and Rwanda. Supporting women’s meaningful participation in decision-making processes is a fundamental aspect of GEWEP and a key component of CARE’s gender-transformative programming. The VSLAs provide a platform for peer discussion and support, leadership training and civic education, which has been shown to lead women to develop aspirations to influence their societies, including through formal politics. GEWEP facilitates dialogue between VSLA networks and the politicians at the commune level, while also working with political parties to enhance awareness on gender issues and the importance of gender balance in political representation. Women are also supported to present themselves as candidates for local elections. In Mali, the percentage of women that were members of a political party increased from 30% to 75.4% between 2014 and 2018 and, during the 2016 elections, 475 VSLA women were elected as municipal councillors, three to district councils and one to a regional council. In Niger, one woman out of every two elected to a local council in the programme’s intervention area during the 2011 election reported they were a member of a VSLA group or network, and the percentage of women that were members of a decision-making body went up from 56% in 2014 to 91% in 2018.
Principle 2. Reflect on and challenge barriers to women’s voice, leadership and representation within CARE

Everyone is influenced by norms and expectations about gender and participation and women’s role in public life, including CARE staff and partners. It is important for staff and partners involved in projects with women’s voice and leadership activities to also reflect on their own beliefs, values and biases. For CARE to be a credible gender equality advocate, we must also ensure women and other under-represented groups have equal opportunities to lead and to meaningfully participate in decision-making within CARE.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 2 INTO PRACTICE

Social Analysis and Action
Social Analysis and Action is one of CARE’s models for gender transformation. It is a community-led social change process through which individuals and communities – and also CARE staff and partners – use participatory tools to explore and challenge social norms, beliefs and practices around gender and sexuality that shape their lives. Social Analysis and Action – and its predecessor Inner Faces, Outer Spaces – was first developed for use in CARE’s sexual and reproductive health rights programming. CARE staff recognised that they also needed safe spaces for critical reflection and dialogue about gender and social norms that undermine healthy sexual and reproductive behaviour and outcomes in order to effectively facilitate change in communities. CARE’s Women Lead in Emergencies programme (see also under Principle 6) adapts the Social Analysis and Action approach and tools to support staff, partners and crisis-affected women and communities to explore and challenge social norms that prevent women’s equal participation and leadership in public life.

CARE’s Gender Equity and Diversity Curriculum
CARE recognises that we need to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion within our federation to live up to our mission, to be effective in promoting gender equality through our programmes and to be credible gender equality and social justice advocates. Also recognising that we are all products of our cultures, CARE uses its Gender Equity and Diversity Curriculum to create opportunities for staff to reflect together in a safe environment on their experiences of diversity, power and privilege in their workplaces and everyday lives. The highly participatory curriculum enables staff to explore their own identities, to challenge and change biases and assumptions in a safe environment and to build skills necessary to work more respectfully, inclusively and productively with people of different backgrounds and perspectives.

CARE’s Learning for Change (L4C) project (2016-2019)
This regional programme in East Africa promoted the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at the household, community, local and national levels in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda. The project focused on building the capacities for gender-transformative programming within CARE offices and partners in order to support their broader work around women’s leadership. Through ‘learning packages’ and ongoing technical backstopping and coaching, CARE worked with NGOs and government partners to help them develop their organisational and programmatic capacities in gender equality and women’s empowerment, to apply them in their day-to-day work, and to cascade new skills and knowledge to other colleagues and to communities. Findings indicate that facilitation of regional collaboration and cross-country exchanges between CARE offices successfully leveraged local and regional staff capacities and provided individuals, organisations and networks with tools and the opportunity for learning around gender equality and women’s empowerment.
Principle 3. Support transformative leadership

As an organisation committed to social and gender justice, CARE should model and support transformative – or feminist – forms of leadership where individuals, collectives and organisations explicitly aim to use their power to create just and equitable social and political structures and institutions. In our programmes and advocacy, CARE commits to partner with gender equality advocates and feminist, women-led and other social justice organisations who share CARE’s values and mission and who are trying to build more equitable and collaborative organisations as well as societies. Internally, transformative leadership is about CARE modelling feminist principles and ‘walking the talk’ by enabling diverse and diffuse leadership, embedding inclusive and collaborative ways of working within our federation and partnerships, and making the changes to resourcing and operations that are necessary to achieve this over time.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 3 INTO PRACTICE

Matu Masa Dubara (Women on the Move), CARE Niger (1991-present)

CARE’s Women’s Empowerment Programme has been supporting village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) called Matu Masu Dubara (MMD) in Niger for more than 25 years. Through the work of the women and communities, the MMD model has been adopted, adapted and has flourished. Around 13% of rural women in Niger are now MMD members, and MMD solidarity groups have linked up to form a multi-tiered structure of 245 MMD networks and, at the municipal level, 24 MMD federations. The MMD model has also evolved from a focus primarily on financial inclusion and savings to also become a platform for women’s solidarity, collective action and voice and leadership within community decision-making, civil society and formal politics. Only members of MMD groups – poor rural women – can take up leadership roles within the MMD structures. To promote diverse leadership and diffusion of power and opportunities, MMD rules state that, at any one point in time, women can only take on leadership roles at either group, network or federation level. Networks and federations have had notable results in many areas for women and girls, such as the promotion of girls’ education, combatting child marriage, leveraging investments to alleviate domestic chores, access to land, collective income-generating activities and being elected to political offices.

CARE International’s Gender Equality Policy and accountability framework

CARE’s Gender Equality Policy commits CARE members to report on the gender and diversity balance in staffing and governance structures along with average pay levels, and to implement targeted strategies to redress any evidence of inequality (Commitment 7). The Gender Equality Policy has an accountability framework with a standard set of indicators that all CARE members must report against every two years to monitor its implementation and encourage peer-to-peer learning, beginning in April 2019.

Creating a gender-balanced organisation, CARE Ethiopia

CARE Ethiopia undertook an institutional reform process to embody its values of gender equity and diversity. After seeing troubling disparities in gender representation, CARE Ethiopia reformed its human resource systems, established safe spaces for women staff, invested in prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) training, and rolled out reflective dialogues with all staff on topics of gender, diversity and power. As documented, these institutional changes enabled CARE Ethiopia to make advancements in gender parity of staff across all levels, to host a female internship programme that offers pathways to employment, and to consolidate an organisational culture that affirms equity as a core value.

The power of women to change the rules and not replicate exclusion is the heart of transformative leadership.

Allison Burden, Program Director, CARE International Secretariat
Principle 4. Recognise marginalised women as change agents

Women are often not seen as people who create and lead progressive change because they do not have access to obvious forms of power (e.g. official authority, economic resources). But history shows that women have or can build other forms of power (e.g. power with others) and can be a force for progressive change in their communities and societies. CARE needs to take actions, including internal/organisational changes, that enable us to see, hear and get behind the agendas and actions of marginalised women.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 4 INTO PRACTICE

Churia Livelihood Improvement Programme (CHULI), CARE Nepal (2007-2013)

The CHULI project in the Terai region of post-conflict Nepal brought together groups of the poorest, lower caste women and helped them to critically analyse the problems they faced and identify priorities for action as a group. CARE facilitated the formation of Popular Education Centres (PECs) within poverty pockets, identified through Underlying Causes of Poverty and Vulnerability Analysis (see under Principle 5) and composed exclusively of poor, vulnerable and socially excluded women. Groups elected facilitators and social mobilisers to coordinate and lead the PECs and networked with each other through federations at the level of Village Development Committees (VDCs). PECs were also linked to Women’s Rights Forums (originally developed by Action Aid) at the district and national levels to organise campaigns. These groups of poor and excluded women successfully led strike actions for equal and fair wages for agricultural day workers of all genders, securing a substantial rise in wages for unskilled agricultural labour in nearly all VDCs in which they were active (26 out of 30 secured wage rises of between 20% and 50%).

Gendered political economy or power analysis

A participatory gender and power (or political economy) analysis is a useful tool for working with marginalised women to understand how power influences the distribution of rights and resources in society, shapes people’s incentives and behaviour, and affects potential pathways of change. The UK Gender and Development Network’s Putting Gender in Political Economy Analysis is a step-by-step guide for practitioners on how to apply a gender lens to the four steps of a typical political economy analysis, including: ensuring women participate in producing analysis; purposefully mapping people with less obvious or official sources of power and looking at how invisible sources of power, such as gender norms, affect different stakeholders and their ability to act; considering the effect of social, political and economic factors on different groups of women and men; and thinking about women as change agents when identifying entry points and realistic pathways of change.

Feminist Open Government Initiative, CARE Philippines

With funding from the Feminist Open Government Initiative, CARE Philippines and CARE UK piloted the use of a political economy toolkit with women’s rights organisations during the development of the Fifth National Action Plan of the Philippines Open Government Partnership (OGP). The action research contributed to greater and more meaningful participation of women’s rights organisations in the co-creation of the Philippines Fifth National Action Plan, and an increase in gender-responsive commitments (OGP research paper and toolkit forthcoming).

We want to design programmes along the lines of the challenges we are facing, not the challenges that you imagine we are facing.

Daisy Amdany, Executive Director, CRAWN Trust, Kenya
Principle 5. Adopt an intersectional approach from the outset

CARE can only support the empowerment journeys of marginalised women if we integrate an intersectional approach into all our activities, including support to women’s leadership. This means being aware of intra- as well as inter-group power dynamics and responding to the particular barriers and discrimination poor and marginalised women face because of their socio-economic status, identity or other characteristics. Examples of how this might be achieved in practice include targeting the most marginalised women, taking action to ensure that project activities are not co-opted or dominated by women with relatively more power, holding meetings at times, places and in languages and formats to enable marginalised women to participate, and partnering with organisations representing groups subject to multiple forms of discrimination.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 5 INTO PRACTICE

Underlying Causes of Poverty and Vulnerability Analysis, Nepal

Following a decision to become a rights-based organisation, CARE Nepal began developing and using a social analysis tool – Understanding Causes of Poverty and Vulnerability Analysis (UCPVA) – in 2008 to inform its strategy, programme and projects. The UCPVA is a set of participatory tools to identify the most marginalised populations and to work with them to understand conditions and dynamics of inequality and injustice in a geographical area. Based on the work and activism of Paolo Freire, CARE Nepal uses UCPVA at project level alongside the facilitation of solidarity/ self-help groups among poor and excluded people (see under Principle 6), such as the landless and marginalised ethnic and caste groups, often with a focus on women within these groups. The approach stimulates discussion, analysis, self-reflection and problem-solving as a foundation for both consciousness raising and action on the part of the poorest and most marginalised people. CARE’s experience shows UCPVA tools, such as social and resource maps, wage matrices, or exploitation and discrimination analysis, are effective methods to reduce elite capture of projects, to stimulate the formation of interest groups among marginalised people, to support them to engage community elites and authorities in discussion about unequal distribution of rights and resources, and, ultimately, to increase marginalised groups’ access to and control of public entitlements and resources.


CARE’s Nâng Quyên project aimed to empower women sex workers to influence the policies and decisions that affect their lives and have equitable access to opportunities and services. The project was implemented at a time when sex work was illegal in Vietnam. CARE supported sex workers to establish peer self-help clubs to, among other things, increase their access to health, legal and vocational services, and also their interactions with authorities in order to advocate for their rights. Female sex workers were able to share their stories and speak out about their issues and concerns at both national and local levels. These dialogues helped ensure that the issue of responding to gender-based violence was included as an action point in the National Action Plan on Sex Work. By centring the voices of sex workers and taking a partnership approach with the Department of Social Vice Prevention, it was possible to shift perceptions of sex work within the department towards recognising a rights-based approach to sex work.
Principle 6. Listen to women and support their chosen pathways of participation and leadership

It is not empowering to tell women what they should think, want or do. Different women will have different needs and aspirations. CARE’s voice and leadership activities must respond to the specific conditions the women we work with live in and to their own aspirations for engaging in community, public and political life, at whatever levels of state and society, and whether from outside or inside formal politics. An important part of this is facilitating conversations with women that explore gender, power and inequality and that raise their critical consciousness, and working with women’s existing groups and organisations to identify governance processes in their setting that provide opportunities for women to have more influence over decisions and resources that are important to them.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 6 INTO PRACTICE

Facilitating women’s solidarity, critical consciousness and collective action

Solidarity and self-help groups are at the centre of many of CARE’s empowerment programming for women and adolescent girls. In some regions these build on traditional institutions, such as the village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) that have become a platform for social and political empowerment in Niger,88 in others, they have explicitly built on Paolo Freire’s teaching and practice on popular education for poor and marginalised populations – such as REFLECT groups in Nepal89 and Yemen90 and the EKATA (Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action)91 groups in Bangladesh.92 A common thread in these approaches is trust in the agency, knowledge and common sense of poor and oppressed women, and in the potential for peer discussion of shared conditions and problems to ignite self-reflection and transformative action, on terms determined by the women themselves.

Curiosity Collective, CARE West Africa

In 2018, CARE’s West Africa regional team embarked on an initiative called the ‘Curiosity Collective’. The Curiosity Collective is a group of peers from across CARE with an interest in exploring the impact that VSLAs have on women’s lives, their ability to act collectively and the social fabric of their communities. The Collective undertook a review of 48 CARE evaluations to understand what existing qualitative and quantitative evidence tell us about whether and how VSLA programming can be transformative for women beyond the act of saving and the ability to increase access to credit and incomes. The review found evidence of VSLA programming contributing to positive changes in all three dimensions of the CARE Gender Equality Framework – agency, relations and structures – and confirmed the need to purposefully link together activities to increase women’s social and political, as well as economic, power. Since many of the successes were not part of the original plans for VSLAs, the review also confirmed the importance of listening to women and enabling them to use groups to set and meet their own goals.

Women Lead in Emergencies

Women Lead in Emergencies94 is a global CARE programme to enable women directly affected by crisis to collectively influence decisions that affect their lives. At the core of the initiative is the Women Lead in Emergencies model. The model has five components and the toolkit provides practical guidance for CARE staff and partners on how to work with marginalised women in emergency settings to strengthen their voice and leadership in public decision-making and humanitarian programming. Beyond the five components, the Women Lead in Emergencies model is fully flexible so that decision-making power is in the hands of women, including in setting project goals and activities. Unlike most humanitarian programming, therefore, all Women Lead projects have an unrestricted budget to fund activities that women collectively decide on and which they can adapt based on participatory learning through the programme cycle.

The only reason we’re talking about VSLA today is because we finally listened to what those women were telling us. But the conversation isn’t over yet. Lots of projects today still treat VSLA like it’s only about finance and banking. That’s why they are still called savings and loan associations. But the groups go beyond just savings and credit. They become solidarity associations.

Dr Fatma Zennou, Women on the Move Manager, CARE West Africa
Principle 7. Focus on the quality of women’s participation

Women can be present in governance, service provision and other decision-making processes, but not actively participate, be heard by those making decisions or have influence over decisions. The obstacles women face to having influence within decision-making – whether about individual capabilities, unequal power relations or exclusionary structures – are often different to the ones that prevent them from being present. CARE must move beyond only counting the numbers of women in decision-making to also support and monitor the changes necessary to improve the quality of women’s participation in public and political life.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 7 INTO PRACTICE

OIKKO (Unity), Bangladesh (2015-2018)

In OIKKO, CARE and partners supported women’s collective action to claim their labour rights in garment factories. In communities around garment factories, OIKKO facilitated women workers to form EKATA groups (see under Principle 6) and community workers’ associations, provided gender-sensitisation training for trade union leaders and conducted worker outreach to organise more women into trade unions. OIKKO demonstrated that EKATA groups, in combination with support to trade unions, were more effective in supporting the empowerment and meaningful participation of women workers than training in rights and life skills alone. Project results included increased membership in trade unions (11.5% compared to 21% in the comparison group, and with one union increasing female membership by 20%), women gaining leadership positions in executive committees of trade unions or federations (in one union women became the majority on the committee), EKATA groups successfully negotiating fulfilment of their legal rights with employers (e.g. sick leave, improved pay, compensation and workplace conditions), and two community workers’ associations working towards legal registration as trade unions to continue to advocate for the rights of their members.


The SAFE Justice Project promoted more active justice-seeking behaviours among marginalised populations, and women and girls in particular. The project focused both on breaking cultures of silence linked to social norms such as patriarchal family values, gender discrimination and caste-based social orders, and on the responsiveness of justice service providers and the provision of effective and gender-sensitive services. Through use of tools such as Community Score Cards the project offered routes and tools for marginalised people to use to improve their access to justice. The Interface Dialogues within the Community Score Card process appear to have been particularly productive for relationship-building between communities and the police. Police reported that in those spaces, they began to see that marginalised community members had capacity and were ready to speak about sensitive issues. Similarly, community members began to feel that police were more approachable and well-intentioned than they initially believed. Both reporting of gender-based violence through formal channels and responsiveness of police to these cases increased in programme areas.

Measuring the quality of women’s participation

Since 2014, CARE has worked to ensure we are more effectively measuring the impact of women’s participation. This includes global impact indicators, including an indicator designed to capture how many women are ‘meaningfully participating’ in public forums. It also includes approaches designed to broaden our understanding of the quality of participation. For example, in the WE-RISE project in Tanzania, CARE went beyond just understanding the number of women participating in groups in order to understand the kinds of groups that women were part of, whether women spoke, the extent to which women took on leadership positions within those groups, why women valued certain groups and their perceptions of the benefits of participation to them. CARE has also worked to trial and embed methods which can help to account for complexity and behavioural change, such as outcome mapping and process tracing. These methods help us to understand how participation, membership and issues raised change over time. CARE’s Advocacy and Influencing Impact Reporting (AIIR) Tool is an example of where we have built on theory-based methods to create a more scalable approach to understanding how change has occurred, the quality of that change and the contribution that CARE has made – including with respect to women’s voice and influence over policy and other reform processes.
Principle 8. Invest in gender-transformative and multi-sectoral programmes

Women’s voice and leadership programming must include activities across all three dimensions of the Gender Equality Framework to be transformative. This includes engaging men and boys in the social and behavioural changes necessary to reduce gender inequalities in economic and political life. CARE should also embed women’s voice and leadership activities into all our sector programmes because women’s economic, social and political empowerment are inter-dependent. Women’s political status and agency is tied to their economic status and agency. Women’s social rights and freedoms shape their control of economic resources and their opportunities to participate in public life. Women’s meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels means that economic and social decisions take account of their needs and priorities. Multi-dimensional or -sectoral programmes are therefore needed that support women’s practical needs (e.g. for health, education, livelihoods and assets, life free from violence, shared care and domestic responsibilities) and economic power, alongside activities to support their social and political consciousness and action. Women’s voice and leadership is a critical pathway to realising CARE’s goals across all of our sectors and impact areas.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 8 INTO PRACTICE

CARE Gender Marker

The CARE Gender Marker, released in 2016, helps the organisation to deliver on its commitment to mainstream Gender Equality and Women’s Voice in all our activities, and to continuously improve programming to better meet the needs of women, men, boys and girls. The Marker is a self-assessment programme quality and learning tool that measures the integration of gender throughout the programming cycle using the CARE Gender Continuum from harmful to transformative. A transformative programme is one with the ambition and resources to be transformative in the lives of the women. To achieve this, programmes must include activities in three dimensions of the CARE Gender Equality Framework, which includes seeking change in power relations and social structures, and not only in women’s individual or collective capabilities and agency. The Gender Marker is designed to be used in combination with monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems to help teams reflect on the integration of gender in order to learn from and improve the gendered approach of their work. It is also an important resource for federation-wide learning and documenting of best practice.

Sisi Vijana (We The Youth), CARE Burundi and CARE DRC (2014-2018)

CARE adopts a synchronised approach to gender equality that engages men and boys in women’s rights and gender equality, alongside women’s empowerment activities. The responsibility for gender equality is not women’s alone. Focusing solely on women and their empowerment is insufficient to shift the power relations and social structures that maintain injustice and rigid gender roles and norms. It also increases the risk of backlash and violence for women – and particularly so in crisis-affected settings, where both men and women are traumatised and where violence and aggression may be used to affirm traditional masculinities. The Sisi Vijani project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi from 2014 to 2018 developed a gender training manual for youth facilitators to use in school and non-school settings to promote attitudes and behaviours supportive of equal rights for boys and girls and to address sexual and gender-based violence. Formative participatory research on the attitudes of young people towards gender equality, masculinity, sexuality and violence informed the programme approach and manual, and the project has contributed to regional learning on what works to engage young boys in gender equality. Recognising the efficacy of the approach, provincial education authorities in North Kivu have approved use of the gender training manual with adolescents in school and non-school settings. The Abatangamuco movement in Burundi, consisting of poor rural men committed to change the way they live in their families and with their wives, is another successful example of CARE’s gender-synchronised approach.

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Programme (GEWEP), multi-country (2009-2019)

CARE’s GEWEP programme seeks to strengthen gender equality and women’s human rights in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, and Rwanda. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation’s long-
term support for GEWEP has enabled the programme to develop and embed a multi-dimensional and gender-transformative design. GEWEP has an overarching theory of change, with three domains of change (agency, relations and structures) and four pathways of change that encompass women’s economic, social and political power:

(1) women are economically empowered;
(2) men and boys are engaged in gender equality and committed to women’s rights;
(3) civil society is strengthened; and
(4) women can meaningfully participate in decision-making. Each GEWEP CARE office tailors the theory of change to the specificities of their own context and programming, but all maintain the multi-dimensional design and a focus on the rights and empowerment of poor and vulnerable women.

**Principle 9. Integrate activities and actions across different levels of society and state**

Systemic change happens when the agendas and actions of reformers and activists at different levels of civil society, state and government are connected. CARE programmes and advocacy can contribute to societal change by connecting grassroots activists and groups to women’s organisations, creating networks of women officials at different levels, building alliances between gender equality advocates across state and society, and facilitating broad-based coalitions that include people from different generations, classes and identity groups.

**PUTTING PRINCIPLE 9 INTO PRACTICE**

**CARE Inclusive Governance Marker**

The CARE Inclusive Governance Marker is an internal accountability and programme quality tool used by project designers and implementers to ensure CARE delivers on its commitments to embed inclusive governance in all programming. Similar to CARE’s Gender Marker, the Inclusive Governance Marker is a self-assessment tool to encourage project teams to reflect on how well they are integrating inclusive governance into their programme cycle. Drawing on global evidence on the characteristics of effective governance programming, project teams are asked to consider and mark whether or not they are: incorporating power or political economy analyses into programme development and implementation; working across the three dimensions of the Governance Programming Framework (organised and empowered citizens, responsive power holders, and inclusive and effective spaces for negotiation); and are working with an appropriate mix of stakeholders (civil society, state and private sector) and at different levels of state and society. Projects are given marks based on the Governance Continuum, from 0 (unaware of governance) to 4 (transformational for inclusive governance). Used together, the Gender Marker and Inclusive Governance Marker are important tools for project teams to explore whether their design and implementation are likely to respond to or transform the root causes of gender inequality, including women’s exclusion from public life and decision-making.

**Every Voice Counts, multi-country (2016-2020)**

Every Voice Counts (EVC) seeks to promote inclusive and effective governance processes in fragile settings. The programme theory of change is based on the CARE Governance Programming Framework and global evidence and learning on how best to support the participation, leadership and influence of marginalised women in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The six participating CARE offices – Afghanistan, Burundi, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan – have adapted the theory of change to the specificities of their context and programme strategies, but all retain an emphasis on strengthening women’s voice and influence by building linkages between women leaders and civic organisations at different levels of society. In Burundi, for example, EVC advocates for the respect of the 30% quota of women’s participation at community level and works for inclusion of women and girls in community development planning. In addition, it supports women advocates working for the completion and implementation of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) law, specifically looking at the quality of legal and health services offered to GBV victims and strengthening municipal marriage registration. Midway through the project, the EVC programme activities have induced observable change in Burundi. Evaluation highlighted that community, advocacy and lobbying networks have become more active in fighting against GBV. They have mobilised around registration of children and especially girls, as well as mobilising women to participate in the local development planning 2018-2023 design process.
Great Lakes Making Advocacy Count Initiative, multi-country (2019-2020)
The Making Advocacy Count learning initiative aimed to explore how, why, to what extent and for whom advocacy and influencing activities were contributing to the impacts and scale-up of CARE’s programming for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response in the region. The initiative involved a participatory process of analysis and reflection by programme staff from the four country offices of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, based on the piloting of the CARE Advocacy and Influencing Impact Reporting (AIIR) tool to develop a set of seven case studies documenting selected advocacy wins relating to gender-based violence programming by CARE and partners. Most cases found that CARE’s influencing had been carried out within and through alliances and networks. Facilitating networks was found to be a critical strategy to ensure broad ownership and commitment by civil society to the advocacy issue being raised, and to be particularly important in contexts where international NGOs were sometimes seen as representing foreign interests and values. For example, in the DRC, CARE has played a lead role in facilitating advocacy by the Coalition Against Unwanted Pregnancies on the very sensitive issue of safe abortion care. In Rwanda, CARE established and supports a coalition of 25 civil society organisations working to promote women’s rights, led by a regionally based umbrella organisation, Pro-Femme, in advocating for changes in local government planning and budgeting processes to address gender-based violence.

Principle 10. Build relationships of partnership not paternalism
International assistance should complement and support the agenda and sustainability of local activists – not divert funds, time and energy away from them. CARE champions localisation and commits to equitable partnerships with women’s rights and social justice organisations, based on an accompaniment model that supports their objectives and builds their independence from CARE in the long term. CARE needs to make changes to organisational processes, requirements and mindsets to achieve these ambitions.

PUTTING PRINCIPLE 10 INTO PRACTICE
CARE Social Movement Position Paper
In 2019, the CARE International Gender Network developed a position paper on supporting women’s social movements and collective action. Building on previous CARE learning on working with social movements, the paper provides guidance on how to operationalise CARE’s commitment to partner with women’s rights organisations. It outlines four critical roles CARE can play to support social movements – convener, ally, resource partner, and amplifier – as well as five principles to adhere to when engaging with social movements – such as the importance of listening and recognising power dynamics. The paper – and a subsequent paper based on discussions with 10 leading feminist activists about how CARE can be a better supporter of feminist social movements – aims to stimulate debate within the federation on the changes in mindsets, ways of working and internal operating systems needed for CARE to be an ally to feminist movements; work that is being taken forward by the CARE Social Movements Community of Practice. An example of the approach in practice is CARE Canada’s new Women’s Voice and Leadership Programme (2019-2024). Working with CARE Kenya and CARE South Sudan, this project will collaborate with 140 women’s rights organisations in Kenya and South Sudan, applying feminist principles to funding, capacity building, networking, mentorship and advocacy.

CARE Latin America Gender Programme (2009-present)
In the early 2000s, CARE’s staff in Latin America adopted a new strategy that shifted some of CARE’s work in the region from direct aid and assistance to accompaniment of social movements and positioned gender justice at the centre of its work. As described in CARE’s Failing Forward podcast series by (then) Deputy Regional Programme Director, Sofia Sprechmann, the women’s movement was rightly suspicious of CARE, viewing the organisation as coming late to its struggles. This initiated a year of listening and building trust and a decade of learning for CARE Latin America on how to be an ally to the women’s movement, eventually taking the programme in an unexpected direction of accompanying domestic workers’ associations in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, and Mexico. Over the past decade, CARE has continued to listen to and accompany domestic workers’ associations. The programme has contributed to the emergence of a vibrant Latin American domestic worker movement, enabling leaders from...
different associations and countries to come together to strategise and amplifying their voice in national and global policy debates and campaigns, including the new 2019 International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention to end workplace harassment and violence.

Partnerships with women’s organisations in emergency response
As documented in CARE’s She is a Humanitarian and Women Responders reports, women and women’s organisations already are first responders in emergencies. In disaster and conflicts, they play a critical role in their communities, including organising to respond to community basic needs (food, water, shelter) and to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, providing psychosocial support, and advocating for the rights and needs of vulnerable community members. What is missing is for humanitarian actors to value and to engage in meaningful ways with women responders. This requires a shift in mindsets and in operating systems of humanitarian agencies to remove the current barriers to collaboration with grassroots women’s organisations. Based on global evidence and primary research in Jordan, the Philippines, Malawi, and Vanuatu, these two research reports provide recommendations and practical guidance for humanitarian agencies, donors and international NGOs on what is needed to improve humanitarian response by increasing the participation and leadership of women responders.

I’ve learnt to change the pathway to designing programmes. In the past, we looked for the problem and crafted the solution in-house. Instead, we should look for the most transformational actors in society. They have already crafted solutions in their dialogues, networks and movements. It’s about helping those voices to rise. It’s about truly adding our voice to theirs rather than coming up with our own song.
Sofia Sprechmann, CARE International Secretary General

Transforming leadership, challenging injustice: a high-level theory of change for equal voice and leadership
The 10 principles act as a guide to organisational and programmatic decisions about how CARE supports women’s rights to equal voice, participation and leadership. To guide the design of programmes, Figure 3 (see next page) provides a high-level theory of change for women’s equal voice and leadership. Based on CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, it shows the changes in agency, relations and structures necessary for all women to meaningful participate in decision-making in all aspects of political, economic and public life and to promote transformative forms of leadership.

Civil and political rights, rule of law and functioning democratic checks and balances are all important to fulfilling any citizen’s right to participate in public life. However, additional measures need to be taken to advance the equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women specifically, including working with women and men to challenge discriminatory gender stereotypes, share domestic, reproductive and care work fairly, end violence against women in public life, reduce women’s economic dependence on male relatives, reform laws that discriminate against women, and create political and bureaucratic institutions and cultures that are responsive and accountable to women’s rights and gender equality. Further measures still need to be taken to advance the voice and leadership of poor, marginalised and conflict-affected women, including supporting women’s livelihoods, access to information, literacy, healing, peace and reconciliation.
**Figure 3: CARE’s continuum of changes for women’s equal voice and leadership**

The continuum is not linear in practice; each step is necessary but not sufficient, changes in different dimensions often do not happen in parallel or at the same speed, and regression/backlash is common.

**Four approaches to supporting women’s voice and leadership**

Programme designers and implementers need to translate this high-level theory of change into theories of action and programme activities relevant to the needs and priorities of particular groups of women and their context. The sections below outline four broad approaches to supporting women’s equal voice, participation and leadership in public life, in relation to:

1. Women’s voice within the **household and community**
2. Women’s **presence** in public life and decision-making
3. The **quality** of women’s public and political participation
4. **Transformative leadership** within CARE and with partners

Each approach outlines strategies and activities that CARE and other organisations have found to be important to bring about changes in agency, relations and structures. For each approach, a diagram plots activities against CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, and a table shows the relationship between activities and desired changes. The approaches are intended to progressively support changes along the continuum within the theory of change. But the approaches can and should be used in combination and tailored to the needs of the context and the women, communities and organisations involved.
Approach 1: Support women’s voice within the household and community

Power and gender relations within households and communities are fundamental in shaping women’s ability to influence decisions that affect their lives and to be active in public life. Women cannot exercise their right to equal decision-making and participation when unfair sharing of household and caring responsibilities leave them with no time for community activities, when they have not had the same educational opportunities as men, when they do not have a say over family planning or over where they go and who they associate with, when they are subject to violence and harassment, and when they do not have access to or control over income and assets. As such, activities within this first approach to equal voice and leadership establish the pre-conditions for women’s voice and leadership by supporting:

- households and communities to challenge and change harmful gender norms and stereotypes that limit women’s aspirations, capabilities, opportunities and safety, and build men’s support for women’s voice and leadership (structures: power to)
- collectives of women to build peer support, solidarity, critical consciousness, financial independence and status within the community (relations: power with)
- marginalised women to develop knowledge and life skills that enable them to be more confident in their community activities (agency: power within/to)

Approach 1: Programme strategies to support women’s voice within the household and community
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Intended change(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase women’s access to non-formal education, life skills and critical reflection of their social conditions</td>
<td>Women gain literacy skills and knowledge of their rights&lt;br&gt;Women gain confidence, explore their aspirations and question inequality and injustice&lt;br&gt;Women practise soft skills, including public speaking, problem-solving and negotiation&lt;br&gt;Women discuss their lived experiences and reflect on gender and other social norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support women to organise with other women to achieve common goals, through savings groups, livelihood co-operatives, faith-based groups, self-help and solidarity groups</td>
<td>Women practise/gain confidence in leadership and group management&lt;br&gt;Women gain financial literacy and savings&lt;br&gt;Women increase their income, assets and resilience to shocks&lt;br&gt;Women build solidarity, social capital and collective power&lt;br&gt;Women have increased status in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create/support safe spaces for women and girls, and provide psychosocial and protection services</td>
<td>Women have a place where they can meet, exchange experiences, and access information and training&lt;br&gt;Women are supported to heal from trauma and violence&lt;br&gt;Women build solidarity and social capital&lt;br&gt;Women have access to protection services and instances of gender-based violence can be monitored – including any increase as a result of men's/community backlash to women becoming more organised and present in public life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate household and community dialogues on gender and power</td>
<td>Sensitise male relatives and leaders to unequal gender/power relations and their harmful effects&lt;br&gt;Communities and households examine, challenge and shift norms in relation to: women's mobility, household and community decision-making, household division of unpaid labour, gender-based violence, gender roles in public sphere/community&lt;br&gt;Mitigate risk of an increase in men's violence towards women as they become more active in their community and decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Approach 2: Support women’s presence in public life and decision-making**

Women can have formal rights to participate in public life and decision-making – as citizens, community organisers, economic actors, civil society activists and public officials – but may not be aware of their rights or be able to act on them. Women’s presence in public life is critical to challenge and shift widespread beliefs and expectations that women – and especially women who face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression – are, or will be, less competent or valid leaders and problem-solvers than men. Increasing women’s presence in public life requires working with them to identify and remove the specific barriers they face. Strategies will vary according to the context and women involved, but common ones include:

- educating community and public leaders about women’s rights and their responsibilities as duty-bearers to uphold them; creating or supporting opportunities for interactions between women and decision-makers; ensuring governance and accountability initiatives are gender responsive; and facilitating opportunities for communities to see and value the contribution of women’s voices and experiences (structures: power to)
- facilitating women’s leaders, groups and organisations to identify the changes they wish to see in their communities and societies and providing the financial, technical, logistical and emotional support to act on their aspirations (relations: power with)
- providing tailored support to build the knowledge and capabilities women need to be present and confident in public life in their context, such as: increasing access to information about their rights, who is making decisions about the distribution of rights and resources in their community/society, and ways they can engage them; provision of adult education/literacy classes; and supporting women to build and practise leadership, problem-solving and influencing skills (agency: power within)

**Approach 2: Programme strategies to support women’s presence in public life and decision-making**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Intended change(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tailored training and coaching for women’s groups</td>
<td>Women understand governance structures and opportunities to engage with formal and informal power-holders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women gain leadership, advocacy, influencing and other political skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women analyse their social and economic conditions and how to improve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women develop collective vision and action plans to achieve the changes they want to see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of literacy classes / non-formal education for women and</td>
<td>Women have increased access to information and more confidence in public speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and training for individual women leaders</td>
<td>Women leaders gain confidence and skills to be more effective in their roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women have knowledge and skills to compete for elected positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household and community dialogues focused on social exclusion and inclusion</td>
<td>More family and community members recognise (marginalised) women’s rights to participate in public life, and value and support women’s contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Household and community dialogues focused on women’s role in public life and decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for power-holders on women’s civic and political rights and</td>
<td>More power-holders and decision-makers recognise women’s rights to participate in public life and take steps to increase women’s participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate or support forums/ opportunities for women to engage with power-holders and</td>
<td>More women are present in governance and social accountability bodies and processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake legal empowerment activities and support women to access complaints, feedback and redress mechanisms and Quotas for poor and marginalised women’s representation</td>
<td>Women understand their rights and options for legal recourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s groups and leaders champion marginalised women’s priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women collectively campaign for equal rights, equitable social norms, and gender-responsive law, policy and services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approach 3: Support women to be active and influential in public life and decision-making

Women may be present in public and governance forums – both as public officials and civic actors – but still not be able to actively participate or have the same respect and influence as their male counterparts. This is because the barriers to women’s meaningful participation are often different to those that limit their access to or presence in public decision-making. These include organisational cultures, informal norms and behaviours that exclude, oppress, discriminate against or harm women, women having less access to formal and informal networks, and women’s leaders and organisations having less access to funding and technical advice, as well as legal redress. To overcome these and other structural barriers to women’s meaningful participation, strategies include:

- working with reformers in state/government agencies, political parties and other public institutions to challenge sexist and other discriminatory cultures and practices, to provide equal opportunities for women to progress and thrive, and to strengthen responsiveness and accountability to human rights, including women’s rights; and supporting media and civic education campaigns that socialise the role and achievements of women leaders and activists (structures: power to)
- increasing women’s collective power, solidarity and legitimacy by strengthening networks between women rights/social justice activists, both horizontal alliances between peers (e.g. between grassroots women’s organisations or between women leaders in civil society, public sector and business) and vertical alliances (e.g. between grassroots and national women’s organisations or between public and elected officials in local and national government); accompanying women leaders and organisations and brokering opportunities for them to engage in/with strategic forums and decision-makers (relations: power with)
- providing core/unrestricted funding for women’s organisations/networks to strengthen their organisations and pursue their own agendas; and coaching and technical advice tailored to the specific needs of women’s organisations/leaders – often in increasingly strategic areas such as advocacy campaigns beyond ‘traditional’ women’s issues or domains, women gaining or retaining political office or senior positions, and strategic litigation on landmark women’s rights cases (agency: power within/to)
Approach 3: Programme strategies to support women to be active and influential in public life and decision-making

- **AGENCY**: Power within
  - Flexible Funding: Accompaniment and flexible funding for women's groups/organisations
  - Tailored Coaching: Tailored coaching and flexible funds for women leaders
  - Technical Support: Provision of specialist technical support and resources
- **STRUCTURES**: Power to
  - Strategic Litigation: Support strategic litigation on women's and minority rights landmark cases
  - Brokerage: Broker engagement between women activists/reformers and male power-holders and gatekeepers
  - Incentivise Power-Holders: Educate and incentivise key power-holders in state, business and civic society around women's rights and participation
  - Civic Education: Support media campaigns and civic education on gender equality and women's rights; profile positive stories of women's leadership and role models
  - Political Parties: Incentivise and support political parties and leaders to attract and support women members, candidates and representatives
- **RELATIONS**: Power with
  - Networking: Facilitate networking and coalitions (horizontal and vertical) between women's groups and organisations
  - Membership Networks: Strengthen membership-based networks
  - Issue-Based Advocacy: Support issue-based advocacy beyond traditional women's domains/issues
  - Peer Exchange: Facilitate peer exchange between women in positions of power and across different sectors
  - Brokering: Broker engagement between women activists/reformers and male power-holders and gatekeepers
  - Peers Exchange: Facilitate peer exchange between women in positions of power and across different sectors

Transforming leadership, challenging injustice 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Intended change(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment and flexible funding for women’s groups/organisations and</td>
<td>Women gain knowledge, skills, networks and unrestricted funds they need to be more effective activists and leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailored coaching and flexible funds for women leaders and</td>
<td>Women gain knowledge/skills/money to compete for and retain elected office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of specialist technical support and resources</td>
<td>Women’s rights campaigners and leaders have technical knowledge and resources to be credible and effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate networking and peer exchange between women in positions of</td>
<td>Women in civil society/business/formal politics build solidarity and social capital, articulate shared objectives, and share information and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power and across sectors</td>
<td>AGENT + RELATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support issue-based advocacy beyond traditional women’s domains and</td>
<td>Women’s coalitions exchange knowledge, skills and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate networking and coalitions (horizontal and vertical) between</td>
<td>Broad-based women’s coalitions that connect women from different identity groups and classes build social capital and social/political legitimacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women’s groups and organisations and</td>
<td>Women’s organisations champion marginalised women’s priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen membership-based networks</td>
<td>Women’s rights coalitions/movements campaign for a wider range of gender-responsive law, policy, services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support strategic litigation on women’s and minority rights landmark cases</td>
<td>Justice and redress mechanisms for women and marginalised groups are strengthened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Brokeer engagement between women activists/reformers and male power-holders and gatekeepers</td>
<td>Greater traction for women’s rights campaigns and around a wider range of gender-responsive law, policy, services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate and incentivise key power-holders in state, business and civic</td>
<td>Gender equality and women’s rights are better integrated in government, institutions, business, value chains, services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>society around women’s rights and participation</td>
<td>AGENT + RELATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support media campaigns and civic education on gender equality and women’s</td>
<td>More people in society see women in public life as normal and equal to men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rights, and profile positive stories of women’s leadership and role models</td>
<td>Parties reform misogynistic and patronage-based political cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Support and incentivise political parties and leaders to</td>
<td>Parties select women for winnable seats, and support their promotion pathways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attract and support women members, candidates and representatives</td>
<td>AGENT + RELATIONS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Approach 4: Support transformative leadership within CARE and with partners

Women and marginalised groups are invariably expected to fit into institutions and organisations that were built by and for men from dominant groups in that community or society and that are governed by formal and informal rules that work to maintain an unjust status quo. Transformative leadership is about disrupting this pattern by purposefully crafting organisational cultures and structures that facilitate equitable, inclusive and collaborative ways of working, both internally and externally, and by purposefully centring human rights and justice, with a focus on historically oppressed and marginalised people. Organisational strategies for CARE to move towards this goal include:

- regularly using participatory Gender, Equity and Diversity tools/approaches to understand power, equity and inclusion within the organisation, to identify gaps in practice and operations (e.g. in values, culture, resourcing, procurement) and to establish clear measures and accountabilities to address/reform them (structures: power to)
- supporting strong and active employees’ unions, collectives and solidarity groups; prioritising partnership with other activists, leaders and organisations that are intentional about social justice; and building within CARE the organisational priorities, mindsets and procedures that make authentic partnership possible (relations: power with)
- encouraging staff to educate themselves about people’s histories/experience of oppression and marginalisation; enabling staff to practise self-care and self-reflection; and coach and mentor marginalised and oppressed groups within and outside CARE (agency: power within)

**Approach 4: Organisational strategies to support transformative leadership and substantive representation of marginalised people**

- **Dialogues on Diversity and Inclusion**: Engage staff and partners with political education, and gender, equity and diversity dialogues.
- **Mentoring and Connecting**: Coach, mentor and connect leaders from marginalised groups, inside and outside the organisation.
- **Partnerships**: Create partnerships that recognise mutual value and contributions, and build in partnership reviews.
- **Shared Values**: Prioritise working with feminist activists and leaders who are intentional about social justice.
- **Gender and Diversity Audits**: Undertake a gender and diversity audit of organisations to understand issues of equity and inclusion.
- **Resource Organisational Change**: Provide/seek technical and financial support for organisational changes.
- **Accountability**: Support mechanisms for dialogue with and accountability to social justice movements and people most impacted by marginalisation.
- **Collective Power**: Support workers, members and constituents, particularly marginalised individuals, to build collective support and power to claim their rights and hold power-holders to account.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Intended change(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage staff and partners with political education, and gender, equity and diversity dialogues</td>
<td>Women and institutional actors strengthen their intersectional lens to understand and act to respond to oppression and discrimination. Leadership style models equity and inclusion and awareness of systemic power and its impact. Organisations promote self-care, community-care and reflexive practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support workers, members and constituents, particularly marginalised individuals, to build collective support and power to claim their rights and hold power-holders to account and Coach, mentor and connect leaders from marginalised groups, inside and outside the organisation</td>
<td>Workers of the organisation unite to build collective power for equal and fair labour practices. Leaders from marginalised groups are connected and accountable to the communities impacted by oppression, marginalisation and/or exclusion. Equity and diversity within the leadership and decision-making, and leaders of marginalised groups are connected and accountable to the communities impacted by their actions. Affinity groups of leaders from marginalised groups connect, support one another and strategise to leverage their voice and influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake a gender and diversity audit of organisations to understand issues of equity and inclusion and Provide/seek technical and financial support for organisational changes and Support mechanisms for dialogue with and accountability to social justice movements and people most impacted by marginalisation and Create partnerships that recognise mutual value and contributions, and build in partnership reviews</td>
<td>Shift organisational culture. Organisations create and support diversity within leadership and decision-making. Organisations adopt gender, equity and inclusion as an explicit part of organisational values and objectives to which all people are accountable. Shift how organisations budget, operate and partner. Support and resource equitable, democratic, collaborative, accessible and inclusive organisational cultures and systems. Organisational leadership puts in place mechanisms for and culture of accountability for human rights, centring historically oppressed or under-represented people, Reform systems to enable and foster collaboration with movements and grassroots groups representing those most affected or marginalised. Strong feedback and accountability mechanisms to communities and partners are part of an organisation’s way of working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritise working with feminist activists and leaders who are intentional about social justice and Create partnerships that recognise mutual value and contributions, and build in partnership reviews</td>
<td>Organisation partners with social movements/feminist and equality activists. Partners are independent and equal but also differences in power between INGO and grassroots organisations/movements are a topic for ongoing reflection in partnership reviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. CONCLUSION

Achieving equal voice and leadership requires social and political institutions that enable women, men and non-binary people, whatever their background, identity or circumstances, to have equal opportunities, status, visibility and influence in decision-making processes, and in all aspects of civic, public, political and economic life.

Efforts to increase women’s individual capabilities are essential for women’s leadership and representation but, on their own, are not a responsible strategy. Ignoring unequal structures and power relations does harm: it exposes women in public and political life to backlash and violence, adds to their existing reproductive and care burdens, and sends the message that women are solely responsible for gender transformation.

Focusing only on women and their capabilities is also not an effective or sustainable strategy. Achieving equal voice and leadership require transforming the structural conditions that limit women’s opportunities and meaningful participation, and that incentivise not just most men but also most women in public life to behave in ways that reproduce the type of exclusionary governance that leaves most citizens behind.

CARE has a solid and growing portfolio of programming and advocacy to support women’s voice, leadership and meaningful participation in social, economic, political and public life at all levels. This is testament both to the centrality of women’s political and social empowerment and collective action to achieving CARE’s mission and objectives across all our Vision 2030 Impact Areas, and to the aspirations of the women we work with to act together to claim their rights and reshape their communities and societies for the better. This position paper provides guidance and resources for CARE leadership and staff to enable us to respond to women and marginalised groups’ aspirations for equal voice and social transformation.
Annex 1: What is meaningful participation in public decision-making?

The 2015 UN General Assembly Resolution Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits UN member governments to implement 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’ (Goal 5). Target 5.5 commits UN member governments to ‘ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

But what does ‘effective’ or – another term often used – ‘meaningful’ participation mean?

**Participation** is about when and how citizens are involved in public and political decision-making. Citizen participation can be more or less meaningful, however, depending on how much power particular citizens have to set the agenda, access information, inform decisions, oversee their implementation and, ultimately, to hold authorities to account for fulfilment of their responsibilities. This means that the opportunity for, and quality of, participation is as much, if not more, about the incentives and behaviour of public institutions and power-holders (formal and informal) as it is about the actions of citizens and civil society organisations. The quality of participation is therefore closely tied to the strength of accountability and redress mechanisms, and to the institutional arrangements and norms that inform both. This is the case whatever the specific participation and accountability relationship is – such as between government and citizens, public sector and service users, elected representatives and voters, employers and employees, civil society organisations and their members, community elders and their community, aid projects and their participants, etc.

Below are three frameworks that can be used for thinking about and assessing the quality of citizen engagement and participation in public institutions and decision-making.

**LADDER OF PARTICIPATION**

Still commonly used in the development sector, Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (1969) distinguishes between levels of citizen participation, from non-participation and tokenistic participation to citizen power.

![Ladder of Participation](image)

These types of participation involve decision-making power being increasingly transferred to citizens. Partnership enables citizens ‘to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power-holders’, while at the top-most rungs ‘have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power’.

Under this type of participation, ‘citizens may indeed hear and be heard [but] they lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by the powerful … there is no follow through … hence no assurance of changing the status quo’. Under Placation, ‘the ground rules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the power-holders the continued right to decide’.

These types of participation are ‘contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to “educate” or “cure” the participant.

**SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The International Association for Public Participation developed the ‘Spectrum of Public Participation’ (2014) to help organisations to define the public’s role in any public engagement process. The Spectrum is one of the Association’s three pillars for effective public participation, along with its Core Values, and Ethics. Like Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’, it features a continuum through which citizens have increasingly more influence over decisions, but it uses much more neutral language, making it popular with public institutions.

*Figure 5: Spectrum of Public Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORM</th>
<th>CONSULT</th>
<th>INVOLVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATE</th>
<th>EMPOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</strong></td>
<td><strong>TO INFORM</strong></td>
<td><strong>TO COLLABORATE</strong></td>
<td><strong>TO EMPOWER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands of the public.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: © IAP2 International Federation 2018

**FRAMEWORK FOR LINKING CITIZEN VOICE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT**

Anne Marie Goetz and John Gaventa’s framework also considers the depth of citizen engagement. However, their framework is more explicitly designed to link and examine the relationship between ‘demand-side’ (citizen voice) and ‘supply-side’ (public sector behaviour), and how the quality of interaction between citizens and state depends on the broader socio-political and institutional context it takes place within.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>‘Opening arenas for dialogue and information sharing’ including one-off exercises and/or ongoing mechanisms for collecting feedback from citizens, e.g. community meeting, participatory assessments, citizen juries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence (representation)</td>
<td>‘Institutionalising regular access for certain social groups in decision-making’, e.g. through quotas, or participatory planning and budgeting mechanisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence (accountability)</td>
<td>Citizens/social groups ‘can translate access and presence into a tangible impact … This can happen when accountability mechanisms incorporate citizen concerns and preferences’, e.g. legal rights for citizens to litigate in the case of non-delivery of services; performance indicators that include client satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three factors that influence strength and quality of citizen voice and state responsiveness in practice:
1. Social, cultural and economic power of the citizen group
2. Nature of the political system and the organisation of political competition
3. Nature and power of the state and its bureaucracies

Annex 2: Types of power

This Annex is a reproduction of the Annex on ‘Thinking about power differently’ in the UK Gender and Development Network’s Practitioner’s Guidance Note on Putting Gender in Political Economy Analysis: Why it Matters and How to Do it, written by Rebecca Haines and Tam O’Neil.133

Power has an important role in how our societies work but it can be very difficult to identify and to explain. This is because power is not a thing – like trees or chairs – that exists independently of people, their actions and interactions. One way that academics have tried to understand power is by looking at more and less visible and tangible forms of power and how these work in different ways to maintain inequality and injustice.

THREE FORMS OF POWER:134

- **Visible power:** This form of power is typically held by people with official positions or well-recognised authority that enable them to directly influence significant decisions that affect others. Often these refer to official political bodies like elected politicians or appointed heads of ministries/departments, but can also refer to elites within militaries, de-facto heads of non-government armed groups, religious leaders, traditional elders and even the leaders of social movements and civil society.

- **Hidden power:** This form of power describes how people protect their interests and privilege by tactics that are tangible but are less public or accepted by many (and sometimes even illegal). For example, politicians may commit publicly to act on an issue but make a private agreement to not progress it. A consultation may be held that is open to all but in a location or language that makes it impossible for many people to participate. Businesspeople may pay for a politician’s campaign to buy political favours. A village head might be seen as the local leader but is quietly influenced by religious leaders in the community and relies on them for support. People use hidden power to control agendas and decision-making in many contexts outside of political processes as well, including workplaces, NGOs or community-based organisations.

- **Invisible power:** This form of power describes how dominant ideologies, values and social norms shape people’s attitudes, expectations and behaviour in ways that perpetuate inequalities and injustice. For example, people who live in a monarchy may never question why some people have wealth and entitlements by birth that others do not have. Women and men may not question why women do all or most of the household tasks or why women do not inherit land. Even when it harms or disadvantages them, people may not see invisible power or question and challenge it. This can be because they simply accept the way society works as the natural order of things or do not believe that they will be able to change it.

Visible, hidden and invisible power tends to work together to maintain the position of privileged groups by, for example, allowing them to control rules and norms in society. How then does change ever happen? Thinking about the different ways that people can exercise power can help to understand how disadvantaged groups are sometimes able to press for fairer distribution of rights and resources.

FIVE WAYS TO EXERCISE POWER:135

- **‘Power over’** is controlling others and making them do something. Even where this type of power is official (e.g. the power to legally sanction or punish, hierarchical relationships within an organisation), it can involve repression, force, discrimination, corruption and abuse. Power over sees power as a win-lose kind of relationship, where having power involves taking it from someone else and using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.

- **‘Power from within’** is a person’s sense of self-worth and self-confidence. It involves the belief that I deserve the same respect and treatment as other people and that I have influence over my own life and environment. Developing power within is a critical part of a person’s ability to recognise and challenge invisible power, such as social norms that say that some people are automatically better or have more rights than others (whether this is because they were born male, of parents from a particular religion or caste, are able bodied, have a particular sexual preference, etc.).
• ‘Power to’ refers to the unique potential of every person to shape their own life and environment, and their acting on this potential. Both the power to and the power within are also referred to as ‘agency’ – the ability to make choices and act on them – and together they enable people to challenge all forms of power (visible, hidden and invisible) that are unequal or discriminatory.

• ‘Power with’ is collective power and involves people coming together around shared interests to build a common cause. Power with others is an important source of power for marginalised or disadvantaged people. The process of organising with others around shared interests can help people to see the world in different ways and build trust and solidarity. When people have strong bonds and clear objectives, this can make them a force to be reckoned with, even if they have few rights or material resources.

• ‘Power under’ is the acts of resistance and subversion by people who are subject to domination and control because others exercise power over them. The exercise of power under can be constructive (e.g. civil rights sit-ins or peaceful acts of sabotage) or destructive (e.g. violent acts of sabotage or protest, or officials who steal state resources as an act of defiance or resistance to poor working conditions). Power under also helps us to understand why people who have experienced abuse, oppression and trauma may themselves become abusive, authoritarian or oppressive if they gain power, particularly power to and power over.
Annex 3: CARE resources on women’s participation and leadership in public life

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Advocacy and Influencing Impact Reporting (AIR) Tool
CARE 2030: Our Shared Vision
CARE 2020 Program Strategy: The 25 Global Indicators for Measuring Change towards the 2020 Program Strategy
CARE International Gender Equality Policy
Engaging Men and Boys (online collection of resources)
Gender Equality and Women’s Voice (online collection of resources)
Gender Equality Women’s Voice: Strategic Directions for CARE
Gender Marker
Inclusive Governance Marker
Inclusive Governance Guidance Note
Putting Gender in Political Economy Analysis: Why it matters and how to do it
Social Analysis and Action: Global Implementation Manual
Supporting Women’s Social Movements and Collective Actions: Position Paper and Guidance Note

RESEARCH

CARE Bangladesh (2014) Women’s Empowerment: The Journey So Far
CARE International (2014) Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women’s Empowerment
CARE International (2017) She is a Humanitarian: Women’s participation in humanitarian action drawing on global trends and evidence from Jordan and the Philippines
CARE International (2017) Gender & Localising Aid: The potential of partnerships to deliver
CARE International (2018) Women Responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming
CARE International (2020) Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19
CARE Yemen (2008) Taking Empowerment in Our Own Hands: Yemeni Women and Men Tell Their Stories
Drucza, K. (2018) CARE Ethiopia’s Institutional Gender Reform


Wayfair Associates (2014) SiSi Vijana (“We the Youth”) Initiative: Exploring Dimensions of Masculinity and Violence in Burundi and the DRC

PROGRAMME REPORTS AND EVALUATIONS


CARE Evaluations (2018) Making Advocacy Count Case Study 6: Influencing local government development planning and budgeting processes to address GBV in Rwanda


CARE International (2007) Inner Spaces Outer Faces Initiative

CARE International (2016) Regional Learning Workshop Engaging Young Boys


CARE International (2020) Women Lead in Emergencies

CARE Latin America and the Caribbean (2018) Multiplying Impact Report: Equal value, equal rights program to advance domestic workers’ rights


Downen, J. and Banwart, L. (2016) CARE WE-RISE Final Evaluation Tanzania


Loose, S. and Vasquez, P. (2017) CARE and the Latin America Domestic Workers’ Movement


References

1 CARE 2030: Our Shared Vision’ is CARE International’s collective vision to guide our strategies and decision-making for the coming decade – as a confederation, for CARE Offices, Affiliates, Regions and Members and for our global Impact Areas. This new set of 2030 strategies, currently under development, will replace the CARE International Programme Strategy 2015-2020.

2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), incl. Art. 2 (enjoyment of all rights without distinction of any kind, incl. sex and race), Art. 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), Art. 19 (freedom of expression), Art. 21 (peaceful assembly), Art. 22 (freedom of association), Art. 25 (right to take part in conduct of public affairs, and to vote and be elected in periodic and secret ballots).

3 In 2017, 80% of countries had constitutional provisions that specifically promote women’s participation in decision making, see https://www.unwomen.org/en/executive-board/strategic-plan-review/impact-area-1 (accessed 26/06/2020)


7 For example, peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 were 35% more likely to be sustained for 15 years when women were involved. See O’Reilly, M., Sülleabahán, A. Ó. and Paffenholz, T. (2015) ‘Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes’. New York: International Peace Institute.

8 https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5


24 https://www.centenaryaction.org.uk/
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29 The Guardian (2017) ‘We don’t see women as leaders – and it’s holding them back in our universities’, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/dec/22/we-dont-see-women-as-leaders-thats-why-so-few-are-university-chiefs


48 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) country data, available at: https://genderstats.un.org/#/downloads

49 Ibid.


55 Critical mass theory hypothesizes that when the number of women in a business, parliament or other body reaches a certain number – often put at 30% – there will be a qualitative difference in terms of women working together and their ability to effect change in ways of working, decisions taken and outcomes.


60 See International IDEA Global Gender Quotas Database, available at: https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas

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65 This was a key finding of CARE International’s Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women’s Empowerment, see Martínez, E. (2016) ‘Confronting the Limits and Unleashing the Potential of CARE’s Programming for Women’, Synthesis Report Phase 2: CARE International’s Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women’s Empowerment.


67 See Annex 2 for two frameworks of types of power.


77 https://www.care.at/strengthening-womens-voices/learning-for-change/


84 Feminist Open Government Initiative, available at: https://fogo.od4d.net/


91 EKATA (2016) ‘The Space for Empowering Women and Girls’, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLiOljG7sTg


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105 Wayfair Associates (undated) ‘SiSi Vijana (“We the Youth”) Initiative: Exploring Dimensions of Masculinity and Violence in Burundi and the DRC’.

117 CARE Nederland (undated) ‘The political participation and influence of marginalised women in fragile and conflict affected settings: Global study report’.


119 CARE International, ‘Making Advocacy Count Case Study 6: Influencing local government development planning and budgeting processes to address GBV in Rwanda’.


121 Ibid.


127 Ibid.


130 International Association for Public Participation, ‘Spectrum of Public Participation’, available at: https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars (downloaded, 02/07/20)


133 The Three Forms of Power were developed by John Gaventa, see http://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/what-is-the-powercube/.

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