

**A place to grow, a time to learn:
Emerging lessons on women's empowerment and gender equality
in CARE's agricultural portfolio**

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A place to Grow...and a time to learn

CARE is a global humanitarian organization committed to overcoming poverty and to women's empowerment. The agriculture sector is the major livelihood of many poor people in the developing world, and CARE has a large portfolio of agriculture programs worldwide. CARE's programs engage women and men alike, but women represent the majority of smallholder farmers and farm labor in many developing country economies. In many such settings, farmers work plots of 1 hectare or less in size and earn less than \$2 per day for their efforts. Women farmers often earn less, control fewer resources, and face more barriers to participating in profitable value-added productive activities, than their male counterparts.

While gender equality is a primary consideration in CARE's overall strategy, its agricultural portfolio has not traditionally treated gender equality as a significant strategic focus. Given the central importance of both agriculture and women's empowerment to its mission, CARE is increasingly interested in understanding how its work in the agriculture sector is impacting women and girls and learning how it can maximize the benefits of its work for women's empowerment in the future.

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation has provided generous funding to CARE to explore these issues in a deeply analytical manner through an initiative called "*A Place to Grow*." *A Place to Grow* seeks to identify strategic programmatic shifts, policy advocacy messages, and funding opportunities with the greatest potential to benefit women and girls involved in agricultural systems. The initiative includes in-depth studies of country programs in Mozambique, Ghana, Uganda, and Honduras, "desk reviews" of programs in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America, and an organizational review of CARE's programs generally. The initiative has a significant (although not exclusive) focus on Conservation Agriculture, which is an area of interest and expertise for the H.G. Buffett Foundation.

This paper presents key findings from the sub-Saharan Africa desk review. It incorporates findings from 14 projects in 11 Sub-Saharan African countries and is supplemented by lessons from three CARE initiatives in Asia.

Analytical framework

A Place to Grow enabled CARE to develop an assessment framework, the *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture (WEA) Framework*, which draws heavily

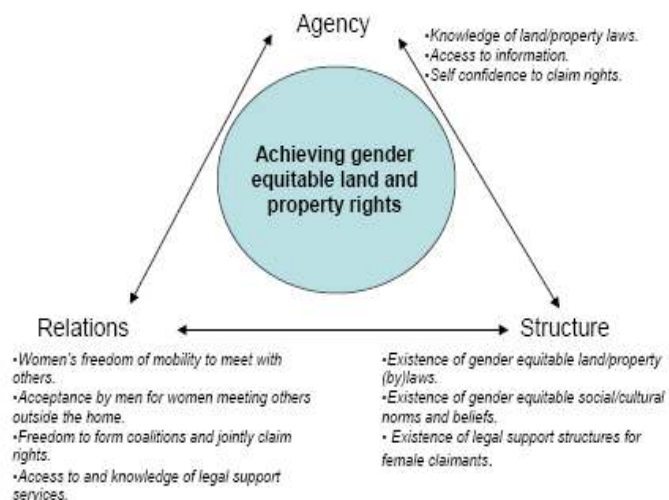
on concepts developed by CARE for its programs generally and from CARE's internal survey of gender conducted over a several year period.¹ The framework identifies how and where power and inequalities are currently configured in relation to women's agriculture-based livelihoods (e.g. in households, communities, institutions) and how this shapes the flow of resources and opportunities. It provides a basis for identifying suitable entry points to shift institutions and practices in ways that promote gender equality and opportunities for women, including, for example, shifting ingrained patriarchal beliefs and behaviors.

The WEA includes five “levers of change” that are pivotal for women's empowerment in the context of agriculture.² They are:

- Land and property rights and contractual rights;
- Gendered division of labor/time poverty;
- Gendered control over labor and product of labor;
- Access to and control of water, and;
- Attention to gender equality by institutional systems

In its analysis for *A Place to Grow*, CARE has examined how these levers of change can impact three key socio-economic factors it has found to be central to empowering women and girls:

- **Agency**—Women's capacities as individuals to take action;
- **Relations**—Building relationships, coalitions and mutual support to expand agency and alter structures; and
- **Structure**—Social norms and institutions that codify and reinforce gender relations at every level of society.³



¹ Adapted from the Women's Empowerment Framework developed under CARE's Strategic Impact Inquiry. For more on this framework, see Martinez, Elisa. (2005) *The Courage to Change: Confronting the limits and unleashing the potential of CARE's programming for women. Synthesis Report: Phase 2 CARE International Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women's Empowerment.*

² These levers were developed jointly with the [International Center for Research on Women \(ICRW\)](#).

³ The full definitions of these terms are provided in the [Women's Empowerment Global Research Framework](#).

Analysis conducted under *A Place to Grow* has focused on understanding how to activate the levers of change in ways that address gender inequality and empower women. Specifically, CARE has examined linkages among the levers and how they apply within these three key domains of empowerment. The desk review has also enabled CARE to test the “levers of change” and the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Framework as conceptual tools.

Assessing the Agriculture Portfolio: Key Findings

- **How did CARE do overall?** CARE developed a detailed list of criteria and a rating scale based on its WEA framework. Among the 14 projects assessed for the desk review, three (21%) rated high, two (14%) rated moderate, four (29%) rated low, and five (36%) rated very low in terms of their likelihood to lead to and demonstrate gender equality and women’s empowerment impacts.
- **What were key ingredients for a high rating on empowerment?** All projects that rated “high” included a gender-focused goal or objectives, disaggregated the target populations by sex, gender-sensitive indicators, and a gender and/or power analysis. None of the five rated very low included any of these aspects in project design.
- **What is CARE providing to women in the sector?** The most commonly addressed interventions focused on women’s access to agricultural information and skills, participation in groups and committees, access to informal or formal agricultural education, and access to assets.
- **What is CARE not providing?** Consistent with CARE’s broader organizational gender analysis, the desk review showed that CARE’s agricultural projects have tended to emphasize women’s “agency” over “structure” and “relations” factors. For example, projects tended to lack interventions focused on forming new ways of organizing or strengthening larger alliances. To date, there also appears to have been limited effort to engage men in promoting women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Implications for CARE’s agriculture portfolio

The study points to a number of areas where CARE can build on what it is learning in *A Place to Grow* and strengthen its current agricultural projects. These include:

- **Considering gender from the beginning.** The desk review suggests the value of actively engaging project participants—both women and men—in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of agricultural projects, particularly in undertaking gender or power analysis.
- **Gender: not just an add-on.** The study results show that projects are more likely to empower women if they incorporate specific high-level project goals or objectives focused on gender, rather than merely in lower-level project activities.

- **Defining empowerment – who decides?** There has been much work done recently on the participatory development of indicators; women should be involved in defining their own perspectives and measurements of empowerment. This may also open CARE's boundaries to new or different definitions of "empowerment."
- **Following through—warts and all.** Projects must give priority to reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment. It is also crucial for knowledge-sharing on gender equality to be included in project design, along with the resources to follow through. Staff must be encouraged to report negative results, as well as the positive, to promote learning and improved project design.
- **Budgeting for gender.** Gender factors can only be addressed meaningfully if staff time and resources are in place to do so. Managers must not forget to budget for gender. Empowerment is a long-term process. CARE must sensitize donors and partners to the need for longer-term commitments to achieve meaningful progress on gender in agriculture initiatives.
- **Continuous learning.** Gender must be part of developing learning agendas and capacity building with staff and partners at all levels of the development continuum—from field-based workers to M&E officers to management.

Defining empowerment and equality: Where are women's perspectives?

Few projects under the study systematically conceptualized operational definitions of "gender equality" and "power." Little project documentation provided an idea of how women *themselves* define "empowerment" and how they identify whether they're on the track to empowerment or equality.

Nonetheless, through the desk review, it was possible to gain a sense of the way projects thought about these concerns through the nature of objectives included, the kinds of target populations involved, and the types of gender-sensitive indicators they included. At least three projects undertook some kind of "appreciative inquiry," including one in India.

Only a handful of projects involved seem to have involved project participants directly in the design of the agricultural project – this process of involvement would certainly present opportunities for women (and men) to frame their outlooks and define their own parameters of "what constitutes empowerment."

Questions for the future

Can addressing one "lever of change" lead to meaningful gender equality and women's empowerment impacts in the context of CARE's agricultural portfolio? What about two? How many levers need to be engaged to make meaningful impact? Are these levers enough?

This desk review points to the complexities of addressing equality and empowerment and found that a comprehensive approach is needed across CARE's agricultural portfolio. Overall, it is not yet clear that focusing on one or more levers of change is enough to achieve long-term, measurable impacts on women's benefits from agricultural interventions.

At the same time, it is clear that CARE has made improvements in women's lives through its agricultural initiatives. It is also evident that there remains a gap between what is actually happening on the ground and what is often documented. If in-country reviews in Ghana and Mozambique are indicative of other countries, then CARE may be doing much more under its agricultural portfolio to advance gender equality and empower women than what appears on paper.

The desk review demonstrated that when CARE's agricultural projects include goals that promote gender equality and women's empowerment, disaggregate needs, interests, and constraints by gender; include gender-sensitive indicators; and incorporate gender and/or power analysis, they establish a stronger foundation upon which they can begin to address the need for change. These findings are valuable lessons and will serve CARE well as it strives to have an ever greater impact on empowering women and promoting gender equality in agriculture.

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