**Creating a work environment where women can flourish – reflections from the Gender Equity and Diversity Institutional working group October 2012**

“*Would women leaders wield power differently? Would they be more humane? Would they perhaps even usher in some gleaming, renascent era? And would men accept them? Now that we have this veritable club of women leaders across the globe -- ruling, scheming, changing the rules and the world -- we can begin to answer those questions. But the answers are no simpler than the questions themselves.”***Georgia Anne Geyer** (1935- ) quoted in the Seattle Times 1989.

There is wide research and shared understanding that working women face different challenges than working men because of the socially ascribed roles that they are expected to play in the domestic sphere. Research shows that the expectation that women to continue to play a prominent role in the domestic sphere even as they emerge in the public sphere constitutes one piece of the glass ceiling. In spite of huge strides in creating more equitable gender relationships in many parts of the world, when it comes to work the numbers speak for themselves; women still do the majority of the household work[[1]](#footnote-1) (whether they are in paid employment or not) and there are very few women at the top.[[2]](#footnote-2)

As CARE positions itself for 2020 as an organization with “a focus on empowering women and girls” and “successful approaches to addressing the underlying causes of poverty, in particular gender discrimination”, we face the challenge of attracting and retaining women in our own workforce particularly in developing countries. **So what are some simple things we can do to make CARE a better place for women to work?**

This was the question posed to the GED Institutional Working Group in September 2012. This paper summarizes the responses, there was a very high level of response and this summary could never do justice to the richness of the contributions.

A couple of things to note from the facilitator: first, an overriding issue for all respondents is workload (whether men or women); second, many of the suggested measures are already happening in CARE with great success; and lastly, there seems to be a call for more consistency and accountability for change. Over the past two years, more consistent and successful efforts[[3]](#footnote-3) have been made in the Asia region to increase women in leadership and an annex of policy changes that have been contributed to this change is provided in the annex.

**Political Will and Accountability**

First and foremost, respondents felt that there needs to be a strong and consistent message from leaders in CARE that making CARE a good place to work for women is a priority; the message should come not just in words but in clear targets and follow through to ensure that change happens quickly and is rewarded. Suggestions included ensuring minimum standards across human resource manuals and policies from HQ throughout the organization; putting targets in Annual Operating Plans; and ensuring that all job descriptions and APAA’s reflect our commitment to GED. Beyond this, respondents pointed to the need for consistency in our positioning on issues of gender equality and women’s empowerment organizationally and programmatically and as a partner of choice for women’s rights movements.

**Policy, practice and an environment that recognizes multiple roles**

A variety of policy changes were suggested including:

* Respect of work hours and reduction of workload
* Flexible working arrangements and hours (including part time options and special cover for breastfeeding mums)
* Maternity, parental and family leave beyond the minimum provision in law
* Child care cover for returning mums (including onsite day care)
* Enabling mobility for women with specific travel cover (such as accompaniers for single women in Afghanistan; travel with infants for nursing mums; travel with nannies)
* Compensatory time off

Another suggestion related to accountability and consistency. Most of these policies exist in some CARE offices, but they are not consistent even in our headquarters. Respondents wrote of the need to listen more carefully to women staff themselves and respond to their requests; they spoke of creating not only policies to enable working women, but also a conducive environment where individuals are able to surface their challenges and are supported. Some suggested that the GAP analysis tool should be used to track consistency, others felt a simply score card for annual tracking would be helpful.

**Recruit, retain and develop women**

Here respondents called for action and quickly. There was a strong call for us to get gender equitable representation in CARE to set targets and monitor them. Comments raised the need to be more proactive in recruitment (guidance exists for this) and retaining women (including through internship programs and mentoring), investing more in enabling women to develop in their careers in CARE and stay with the organization.

**Engage women, engage men, listen and act**

Here the ideas shared were that there should be mandatory gender equality and diversity training for all staff; platforms should be set up to enable women and men to discuss issues relating to their work environment and surface them to decision makers for response. There was a recognition of the differential needs of different staff (whether men, women, single, married, from diverse backgrounds and cultures, able-bodied or differently-abled), the key is to provide space for them to discuss their needs and respond to their needs positively.

1. Based on 2005 data, which have been compared to those from national time diaries, the research shows women, of all ages with no children, on average do 10 hours of housework a week before marriage and 17 hours of housework a week after marriage. Men of all ages with no children, on the other hand, do eight hours before marriage and seven hours afterwards. National Science Foundation, 2007 USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Women represent 14.1% of Executive Officer Positions in Fortune 500 companies, and 7.5% of Executive officer top earner positions. Catalyst Survey 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more information please contact Munmun Chowdhury at mchowdhury@care.org [↑](#footnote-ref-3)