



## CASE STUDY 1

### CARE AUSTRALIA: TACKLING POVERTY AND GENDER INEQUALITY

**Country:** 23 countries across the Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa

**Focus:** Poverty and gender inequality

**Donor(s):** Multiple, including DFAT and public fundraising

**Organisation(s):** Varied partners

**Budget:** AUD 72m (2015-16)

**Timeframe:** 1987-



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#### KEY POINTS

- Working with the most marginalised women, men, girls and boys
- Local staff help map power and develop innovative strategies
- Having the right partners on board at all levels has been the most critical factor for success

#### OVERVIEW

CARE Australia works in 23 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East and Africa, and manages CARE International's country offices in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Vietnam. The key issues addressed by CARE include gender equality, education, health, hunger, poverty, and crisis response. The program's diverse activities include the provision of: "education for girls as well as boys; training in vocational and life skills such as literacy and financial management; access to health services and understanding of reproductive health; HIV prevention and maternal care; discussions with men and women around their roles in the community; access to income-earning assets like livestock and microfinance; education for women about their legal rights and working with employers to ensure women's rights are respected".<sup>1</sup>

#### GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

CARE's approach to gender equality includes a focus on gender parity within the organisation, the use of gender as a lens to understand power relationships throughout society, and a commitment to working with some of the poorest and most marginalised women in the regions in which it operates.

Within CARE Australia, women make up 69% of Australian staff, 54% of overseas-based staff and 43% of local staff in Country Offices.<sup>2</sup> In addition to ensuring gender balance among employees, the approach to gender within the organisation also addresses the ways in which gender intersects with other aspects of identity. For example, "the Gender Equality and Diversity Working Group organised for country office staff to attend information sessions on disability rights, gender in emergencies, preventing violence against women and policy and advocacy for LGBTIQ people in international development".<sup>3</sup>

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## POLITICALLY INFORMED

Being politically informed is a way of working that recognises that development outcomes are determined by the dynamics of power and politics. It is not about formal governance reforms, such as elections or civil service reforms. It involves analysing stakeholder interests and incentives to understand what is politically feasible.

The program conceives of gender more widely than ensuring gender balance among staff and beneficiaries, however: “We say that you have to tackle structures, relations and agency in everything we are doing. That means working with individuals (for example, increasing confidence or skills) as well as relationships (for example, immediate family or people who have influence).” This is demonstrated by CARE’s disaster risk reduction work in Vanuatu, which has involved establishing community committees which are then trained in disaster awareness: “We made sure that there were 50% women at both the agency and the committee level [...] Because it was a community structure their spouses and family could then see what they were doing. Fantastically it had flow-on effects: women who had been in the program could see that [family members] were recognising work that they could do outside the home.”<sup>4</sup> Further, this had positive effects for the whole community in limiting the effects of disaster: “When aid arrived in Vanuatu, committees where there had been women were better at deciding where the aid was distributed ... for example, female-headed households and vulnerable groups that needed the aid most. Not only were women

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*“If you give a woman skills but don’t work with those around her you can do more harm than good.”*

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## GENDER AWARE

Being gender aware is a way of working that analyses how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally, and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. A robust analysis also looks at how gender intersects with other forms of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability, and non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

empowered, all of the agencies that came in said that in the areas where women [were involved] community organisation was much better and it was simpler to work.”<sup>5</sup>

CARE’s attention to the gendered effects of disasters is also exemplified by the program’s work in “providing lifesaving services to Syrian refugees and host communities in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.”<sup>6</sup> For example, in Jordan: “CARE Australia supported research into how the conflict is affecting men, women, boys and girls. We also worked with local women’s organisations to improve their coordination with community leaders, and established saving and loan groups and access to business training.”<sup>7</sup>

The program’s engagement at multiple societal and administrative levels includes working with women in rural areas who are often among the most marginalised. For example, in Laos: “CARE Australia’s Women Organised for Rural Development (WORD) project is funded by the Australian Aid Program and works directly with more than 15,300 of the poorest, most vulnerable men, women, boys and girls in Phongsaly and Sekong provinces. The project strengthens farmers’ and women’s groups, provides small business grants and fosters demand for items produced through the businesses, such as coffee and

cardamom.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly in Vanuatu: “We work on the outer islands, which don’t have road infrastructure and are only accessible by boat. We are working now on Tana island where communities are affected by an active volcano.”<sup>9</sup>

## POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

CARE Australia’s work embodies the principles of politically informed programming in various ways. Firstly, 94% program staff are citizens of the country they work in<sup>10</sup> and are therefore able to bring local knowledge to program development and implementation. This local knowledge is crucial to “fully understand the political, structural and cultural issues that are impacting on gender equality. It’s important to make sure that gender analysis isn’t just a tick box and you’re targeting the right issue or area”.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the program demonstrates a politically informed approach by mapping power and gaining influence through relationships. For example: “A lot of the work that we do is working alongside government. This plays two roles. One is strengthening them to deliver services. The second is influencing. For example, with National Disaster Management Office in Vanuatu, we have worked with them on gender balancing their committees while also working on disaster planning.”<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, CARE Australia has focused on developing an ‘agile’ organisation which “seeks to engender a culture of innovation where staff are empowered to identify new ways of working.”<sup>13</sup> This includes relationships beyond obvious allies in order to challenge gender norms. For example, in Laos the program is “working with companies to secure long-term contracts between farmers and producers like the coffee industry, and to negotiate fairer prices and a more sustainable income for farmers. While women are usually excluded from this kind of business activity, their inclusion and the development of their skills is transforming their traditional roles in the community”.<sup>14</sup>

1. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.14
2. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.13
3. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.27
4. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
5. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
6. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.22
7. Ibid
8. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.14
9. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
10. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.26
11. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
12. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
13. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.13
14. Ibid
15. CARE Australia 2015/16 Annual Report, p.12
16. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
17. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
18. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017
19. Key informant interview, 23.03.2017

This case study was written by **Orlanda Siow** of UCL as part of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project. It is one of 14 short case studies focusing on development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware. See *From Silos to Synergy* for a synthesis of the lessons that emerge. Explore all GAPP publications at [dlprog.org/gapp](http://dlprog.org/gapp).

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## CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

In this case, there is little evidence of tensions between the use of a gender lens and the principles of politically informed programming. Instead, program documentation states: "We put women and girls in the centre of our work because they face the biggest burden of poverty, as well as the greatest opportunity to overcome it."<sup>15</sup> Therefore working on gender equality is both an end in itself and a strategic, politically informed route to addressing other issues.

Interviewees also highlight the specific benefits of integrating politically informed and gender aware approaches: "If you really want to make a difference you have to use both [...] What CARE does well is having a Gender Equality Framework as the framework for every program. That means we're not just working at a level that may make a difference to one community but doesn't have the flow-on effect that can be scaled up. Instead, our work at the community level can help us gain influence at the national level."<sup>16</sup>

## EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Interviewees cite the right partnerships as the most crucial enabling factor: "Having the right partners (NGOs, donors, private sectors and government) all on board and at all levels – that's how you win."<sup>17</sup> In the Pacific, this has been particularly true for building trust with government, given that there is a less active civil society than in the other regions in which CARE Australia works.

Cover  
CARE Australia Cambodia Agriculture Project:  
Josh Estey/CARE



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*"By putting ourselves in influential positions we can mainstream gender in many sectors."*

This case exemplifies both the challenges and opportunities associated with working at the local level. In the poorest and most marginalised rural communities, "it takes a long time and it's expensive, so we are always having to justify the costs to donors, but it's part of our brand and ethos".<sup>18</sup> However, "it is actually sometimes easier to advocate at the local rather than the national level [...] because at the community level there is a practical common sense case to be made, whereas at the national level you are lobbying for funds".<sup>19</sup>

## METHODS

A rapid review of select program documentation, combined with confidential interviews with at least two key informants per case. These include project staff, independent reviewers, donors and other stakeholders. Identifying and listening to local and/or female informants has been prioritised. For this case study, key informant interviews took place on 23.03.2017 and 16.05.2017.

## SELECTED RESOURCES

[Care Australia 2015/16 Annual Report](#)

[Care Guidance Note – Gender Equality and Women's Voice \(2016\)](#)

[Care Good Practices Framework – Gender Analysis \(2012\)](#)

