The economic empowerment of women is, fundamentally, an issue of social and economic justice. Achieving substantial change in the area of women’s economic empowerment is a crucial part CARE’s global strategy to overcome social injustice and reduce poverty.

CARE aims to promote gender equality and one of the key ways in which this is achieved is by empowering women economically. Gender equality will never be achieved while women have fewer economic rights, less control over economic resources, and less access to economic opportunities, than men.

Women’s economic empowerment is imperative for poverty reduction. At its most basic, the economic contribution of women in low income households is vital for the survival of everyone in that household – women, men, girls and boys.

CARE seeks to strengthen women’s position as economic actors and to address their exclusion from economic processes and structures (informal as well as formal). This will reduce women’s exploitation, marginalisation and vulnerability; enable them to participate in and reap the benefits of economic opportunities; and build prosperity for themselves, their families and their communities.

CARE’s work on women’s economic empowerment in Cambodia contributes to CARE’s 2020 program strategy:

**THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN CAMBODIA**

Many of the challenges experienced by women all over the world are particularly evident in Cambodia. In addition, women have to contend with specific social and cultural norms which may limit or threaten their economic opportunities.

Girls have less overall access to education and often drop out earlier. Curricula can be irrelevant to girls’ needs and interests, leaving girls with limited economic opportunities.

Women and girls bear the burden of unpaid work and care. This can particularly be the case in remote ethnic minority communities, where girls are disproportionately tasked with housework and caring for younger siblings.

Women and girls are often excluded from owning assets and accessing financial services. Within families, women may not have decision-making power and where they do have this, they may lack the skills to manage their income effectively.

Women with few skills have limited job prospects. This may force them into vulnerable and unsafe activities for their livelihoods. Many female-oriented roles in Cambodia – such as those in entertainment and hospitality – carry social stigma which places women at additional risk.

Jobs held by women are concentrated in the lowest paying sectors. Where women do work in similar jobs to men, they typically still earn less and their contributions are less valued. They often have limited ability to voice their concerns or improve their situation.
CARE’S FOCUS IN CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, CARE’s approach is to empower women as individuals while simultaneously addressing the relationships and structures within which they live and work. CARE focuses on a number of key areas to achieve women’s economic empowerment—financial inclusion, dignified work and women in agricultural value chains—with the aim of ensuring that women have a voice within their homes, their workplaces and their communities.

CARE acknowledges that in order for women to succeed in all of these areas they require a quality education, which includes not only basic literacy skills, but higher skills in subjects such as science, maths and technology which are required to succeed in the 21st century.

CARE’S APPROACH TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT GLOBALLY

CARE defines women’s economic empowerment as the process by which women increase their right to economic resources and power to make decisions that benefit themselves, their families and their communities. This requires equal access to and control over economic resources, assets and opportunities as well as long-term changes in social norms and economic structures that benefit women and men equally.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

CARE’s Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) make us a recognised leader and innovator within savings-led financial inclusion. These informal savings groups have proved very successful in Cambodia in enabling women to build their financial skills and assets. When combined with financial education they have even greater impact and also provide opportunities for linkages with the formal financial sector.

DIGNIFIED WORK

CARE has growing experience of improving working conditions in a number of key sectors in Cambodia, including the garment and construction industries.

Working with both women and employers, CARE supports women to gain equal access to quality work which is safe, fairly rewarded and does not discriminate against them.

WOMEN IN VALUE CHAINS

CARE Cambodia has a particular emphasis on female small-scale producers in rural agricultural value chains. Developing community-based resources and increasing the voice of local female leaders promotes gender inclusive value chains where women can increase their income, control their own resources and advocate for their own specific needs within their communities.

EDUCATION

CARE Cambodia works to ensure that particularly marginalised and vulnerable girls, such as those from ethnic minority communities, have equal opportunities to learn and grow without discrimination.

www.care-cambodia.org