

# CARE International UK Strategy 2023 – 2026

## Putting women's leadership at the heart of humanitarian action

Focus: Humanitarian



When crisis hits, women and girls are often some of the first to respond: supporting themselves, their families and their communities. Yet they still have the least say in humanitarian decision-making. CARE International UK's new Strategy focuses on supporting women in the midst of humanitarian disasters, to respond, to keep themselves and others safe, and to lead their communities to a better future.



# Why do we prioritise humanitarian action?

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance globally is at unprecedented levels, made worse by the climate emergency and conflict. In 2023, the statistics are shocking:

**Around 339 million people now need life-saving aid, 65 million more than in the previous year.**

**More than 100 million have been forced from their homes by war and violence.<sup>1</sup>**

**As many as 828 million people worldwide are affected by hunger.<sup>2</sup>**

CARE has been supporting communities facing crisis since it was founded in 1945, when CARE responded to millions of people in need of food and relief supplies at the end of World War II. CARE recognises that humanitarian emergencies, whether caused by extreme weather events, earthquakes, conflicts, or other complex situations, have the potential to devastate communities and erode basic human rights. Timely and effective humanitarian response lays the groundwork for longer-term recovery and resilience-building. By addressing immediate needs and laying the foundation for sustainable development, CARE's humanitarian efforts contribute to communities' ability to recover, rebuild, and ultimately thrive in the aftermath of crises.

<sup>1</sup> UNOCHA <https://humanitarianaction.info/article/glance-0>

<sup>2</sup> WHO <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2022-un-report--global-hunger-numbers-rose-to-as-many-as-828-million-in-2021>

# Putting women's voice and leadership at the centre of our humanitarian response

Women and girls are often most vulnerable during crises. More than half of all displaced people are women and girls, and in some contexts the percentage is much higher – e.g., in Somalia it is over 80%. Women and girls also face increased rates of gender-based violence and a lack of access to reproductive healthcare: 60% of preventable maternal mortality deaths take place in conflict, displacement and disaster settings.<sup>3</sup> Other forms of diversity such as race, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability also impact women and girls' experiences in emergencies.

Gender in emergencies is at the centre of CARE's approach to humanitarian action. Humanitarian action that is inclusive of different groups of the affected population is more likely to save lives, reduce harm, and promote dignity and wellbeing.

Furthermore, gender equality in humanitarian programming can only be achieved when women and girls are empowered to participate meaningfully in decisions on how to meet their needs. CARE International UK (CIUK)'s new Strategy prioritises working with women who have the least say in humanitarian decision-making but who are first to respond to support themselves, their families and their communities when crisis strikes. Our work aims to take a transformative approach to humanitarian action that goes beyond responding to women and girl's different needs, and puts them in the driving seat of the decisions and solutions that affect their lives.

The Women on the Move Impact Growth Strategy for West Africa and Women Lead in Emergencies have a shared goal of increasing women's collective voice and action.  
© CARE Niger

<sup>3</sup> UNOCHA <https://www.unocha.org/gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls>



# How does CARE work with communities on the frontline of humanitarian crisis?

CARE is recognised as one of the leading humanitarian INGOs worldwide, working to address the consequences of crisis since 1945. What sets CARE apart is its unwavering commitment to support grassroots women to lead in crisis. For example, working through village savings groups in the world's worst emergencies to enable communities to build assets for the future. CARE remains long after the cameras have gone, embodying a dual mandate that combines immediate relief with sustainable development.

CARE leads the sector in ensuring a gender responsive and transformative approach to humanitarian crisis. We pioneered the Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA), which allows teams responding to a crisis to quickly assess the gender norms and dynamics that will affect how women, men, girls and boys are affected differently by a crisis. We continue to push boundaries through our ground-breaking approaches to women's leadership in emergencies. We are committed to promoting community-led, participatory approaches to humanitarian action, and working in solidarity and partnership with local NGOs, in particular women-led NGOs. Our approach prioritises:

- **Local leadership:** Women are frequently the frontline responders within their communities when a crisis strikes, and they possess valuable knowledge, influence and expertise on what is needed. We prioritise working with local women's organisations to ensure our humanitarian response meets the specific needs of women and girls.
- **Gender at the centre:** At the start of any new crisis, we undertake an RGA that gathers information about different needs, risks, capacities, priorities, and coping strategies of people affected. RGAs prioritise hearing from people of different ages, sex and diversity groups. Since CARE developed this approach over a decade ago, it has become one of the preeminent tools of the humanitarian sector to support inclusive humanitarian response.
- **Quality, accountability and continuous improvement:** CARE is verified against the Core Humanitarian Standard, which places communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action. By measuring our performance against this standard, CARE can continually improve how our responses are designed and implemented to ensure that they are relevant, effective, participatory and responsive.

# What does the new Strategy mean for CIUK's work in practice?

CARE works with local partners to support communities to prepare for emergencies, meet basic needs following a crisis, build resilience and respond to specific needs related to protection and shelter. Across all areas, we support women to lead in their communities, and at national and global levels. **Over the strategy period, 2023-2026, CARE will work to:**

- 1 Promote women's leadership in emergencies:** CARE has pioneered a new approach to supporting grassroots women to lead in crises. [Women Lead in Emergencies](#) (WLiE) supports local women's groups to take a lead in responding to the crises that affect them and their communities. WLiE works with marginalised groups of women to build women's solidarity and collective influence over the decisions that affect their lives. To do this, CARE seeks out existing women's groups in the community, like refugee associations, church groups or savings groups.

For example, CARE works with the Women's Association of Tigray in Ethiopia to implement WLiE and strengthen women's participation in the humanitarian response around gender-based violence (GBV). Many cases of GBV and conflict-related sexual violence were reported during the recent conflict in Tigray, and the project works to increase the participation of vulnerable women and girls in decision-making around GBV service provision. This not only helps to ensure the needs of women and girls are met but also that service providers and duty-bearers remain accountable to them.

Over 50,000 people have now fled conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region and are being hosted in Um Raquba camp and Village 8 transit centre in Eastern Sudan where CARE is providing WASH services in Um Raquba and Health and Nutrition in village 8 transit center  
© Daw Mohammed/CARE



**2 Ensure communities can meet their basic needs when crisis hits:** In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, CARE responds to the basic needs created when people are suddenly displaced from their homes and/or lose their income. This includes providing people with clean water, toilets, soap and other hygiene items (WASH), as well as food and shelter, and sexual and reproductive healthcare. We do this through providing basic items and temporary infrastructure, as well as cash and voucher assistance where appropriate.

In contexts like Yemen and Syria, CARE is a major responder that supports more than 10% of the affected population to meet their immediate needs.

CARE has been on the ground in Syria for over a decade, providing emergency relief, recovery and resilience support such as through the Syria Resilience Project which ended in 2022. The SRP supported over two million people to become more resilient until the programme's end in 2022, including through Cash-for-Work opportunities, livelihood activities and psychosocial support services. We continue to work alongside Syrians to rebuild their lives and livelihoods through the Building Local Resilience in Syria project, part of the Syria Resilience Initiative.

**3 Support communities in protracted crises to build resilient livelihoods:** In protracted emergencies where people are unable to return to their homes or make a living, CARE works to support displaced people and the communities that host them to become more resilient to repeated shocks.

One innovative approach CARE has developed tailors our Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) model to emergency situations: VSLA in Emergencies (VSLAiE). In Yemen, a pilot of the VSLAiE model supported 300 women living in a highly challenging, crisis affected context to save on average US\$ 220 each over the course of the project. Negative coping strategies dropped from 39% to 28% during this time. Models such as this have the potential to support some of the most underserved and economically precarious people in the world to become financially resilient despite the contexts they live in.

This camp is inhabited by about 350 families from villages and towns in Hama and Idlib. They are in urgent need of food, warm clothes and cash assistance to meet some of their most immediate needs.  
© Violet Organization



**4 Further support shelter self-recovery:** CARE's Global Shelter Team, hosted by CIUK, supports CARE country offices and partners to implement humanitarian shelter responses. Construction is traditionally a male domain, but the Shelter Team challenges this by promoting women's leadership, and recognising that women and girls are disproportionately affected by inadequate living conditions. We have pioneered an approach to shelter programming known as 'self-recovery', which recognises that most people recovering from a crisis receive no humanitarian support and, by definition, will self-recover. Supporting self-recovery implies that affected households are responsible for making key decisions about their shelter design, materials and timescales so that their informed choices and priorities are respected.

The self-recovery approach is now recognised across the sector as a strategic approach to humanitarian shelter. Self-recovery was at the heart of the CARE response to Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, in which CARE Philippines and local partners supported affected communities in their efforts to recover their homes and livelihoods, while encouraging them to rebuild their homes in a way that promotes protection, health, well-being and livelihoods while also reducing pre-disaster vulnerabilities. This innovative humanitarian response won a World Habitat Award in 2017.

**5 Protect people at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV):** GBV takes many forms in times of crisis, both in private and public life. Emergencies can increase gender inequality and exacerbate GBV risks. This can be due to the chaos and tensions within households, communities and society during times of crisis. Evidence and research show that GBV occurs in all emergencies worldwide, and therefore CARE aims to address GBViE across its humanitarian programming.

For example, CIUK leads a programme which strengthens the delivery of protection and health services in Northeast Nigeria, where the decade-long insurgency has increased the risk of violence towards women and girls. The programme - which also uses the WLiE approach - works to increase women's voice and participation within the humanitarian response cycle through a coordinated, integrated and locally led approach.

**6 Support communities to better anticipate and prepare for disasters:** Humanitarian preparedness saves lives, reduces suffering, and minimises the economic impact of disasters. Investing in understanding risks and building preparedness capacities for pre-emptive and early action increases the likelihood of effective humanitarian response when an emergency hits, and reduces the costs of humanitarian response.

CARE acts as the 'host agency' for START Fund Nepal, a nationalised fund for humanitarian response which is led by local and national NGOs. This ensures resources reach affected communities quickly, efficiently and through locally informed decision-making.

## Who do we work with?

- We are signatories to the Charter for Change and Pledge for Change, commitments that enshrine partnership with local actors as a core principle of our programmes. Over this strategy period, CIUK aims to work in solidarity with local partners, particularly women-led organisations, and increasingly ensure they drive decision-making in our joint programming. We will also support them to become more sustainable by covering their organisational costs when they work with CIUK.
- CIUK is a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee, a collective of 15 leading UK-based humanitarian agencies that work together to launch nationwide appeals to respond to crises overseas.
- CIUK is a member of the START Network, a network of more than 80 non-governmental organisations across five continents. It allows members to respond quickly to under-the-radar crises, and is working to change the way the humanitarian system works to enable locally led action, innovation and early and rapid financing.

## Where does CARE do its humanitarian work?

In our most recent financial year (to June 2023) CARE provided humanitarian assistance to 20.5 million people in 67 countries.





## What We Stand For

### Vision

A world of hope, inclusion, and social justice, where poverty is overcome, and all people live in dignity and security.

### Mission

Save lives. Defeat poverty. Achieve social justice.

### Focus

We cannot overcome poverty until everyone, everywhere has equal rights and opportunities – that's why women and girls are central to our work.

Above photo: Women from the Matu Masu Dubara Network of Tam in Diffa, Niger, with Aminatou Galadima, manager of one of our Women Lead in Emergencies pilot projects. Photo © Olliver Girard/CARE 2019

Font cover photo: Rebecca Nyirongo 37 standing in front of her group members Malawi. Photo © Jorja Currington/CARE



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