



Women Lead in Emergencies – Guidance Note

Act: Supporting the actions of women's groups

This guidance note explains what Act means within Women Lead in Emergencies programming, and how CARE staff and partners can manage it. Once women affected by crisis have decided what their goals and strategies are for participation and leadership, CARE plays a supporting role to put their plan into action.

What does Act mean in the context of Women Lead?

Women Lead recognises that women affected by crisis rarely have opportunities to lead humanitarian response or to meaningfully participate in decision-making. Act is one part of the Women Lead process where actions are taken to change this.

The **activities that comprise Act are not pre-determined** by donors, experts, civil society, government, or CARE. How to act to improve women's leadership and meaningful participation through the Women Lead process must be **decided by groups of women affected by crisis themselves**.

Women Lead project include a **dedicated and unrestricted budget line** to provide financial support to women's groups to put their actions into practice. CARE's role in Women Lead is to support these actions by helping women's groups to access resources, people and the places where humanitarian decisions take place.

Why Act as part of Women Lead?

Action to challenge and change the status quo is critical to altering the unequal distribution of power that consistently favours men's participation and men's needs over those of women. Action is often blocked by a lack of resources to put plans into place or undermined because **decisions about funding are not in the hands of women affected by crisis themselves**. Women Lead in Emergencies is based on the idea that a ring-fenced activity budget, collectively controlled by participating women's groups, is essential to **shifting power from humanitarian actors to women directly affected by crisis**.

What principles guide Act?

Women Lead is a **rights-based and empowerment approach**. The design and implementation of Act – and all parts of the Women Lead Model and projects – should be guided by the following **six principles**:

1. Women's leadership and **participation in decision-making is a right** and necessary for equitable and sustainable peace, security and development.
2. Women must be **in control of their pathways to leadership** and public power. This includes deciding on what actions should be taken.
3. **CARE must listen to women** and facilitate and support their actions from behind.

4. Equal participation and leadership requires changes in discriminatory structures and power relations, as well as women's individual and collective agency and capabilities. Women Lead **works directly with several stakeholders to change structural barriers to gender inequality** and women's participation: women's groups and collectives, men and community leaders, government, and international/humanitarian agencies.
5. **Gender-based violence risk mitigation and actions are necessary** because women who act to challenge existing power structures are often subject to stigma and violence. Awareness raising and change behaviour activities with male relatives and leaders is essential to reduce risk of harm.
6. Women Lead must **be inquisitive and learn through doing with women** directly affected by crisis.

Who Acts?

Who acts **depends on what the changes women groups want to see** and what activities they want to happen.

Actions are decided by women affected by crisis to improve their leadership and meaningful participation. But Act in Women Lead does not place the burden or responsibility for change solely on women affected by crisis.

The **changes women want to see may require others to reflect and act** to change biased social norms and organisational or political cultures that prevent women from gaining leadership positions and meaningfully participating in decision-making. Women's action plans can be used to make humanitarian agencies, government and community leaders aware of women's priorities and ability to lead. This has the potential to **change misperceptions that crisis-affected women are victims** and recipients of aid rather than as leaders and problem-solvers able to contribute to meeting their own needs and aspirations.

The actions are also likely to include **what women affected by crisis want to do themselves** and need something to help enable them to do so. These actions may focus on the foundational capabilities for women's participation, such as confidence, access to information, functional literacy, time safety and healing, or building solidarity with other women. Other actions may focus on women's interaction with powerholders and participation in different decision-making forums, such as meeting with government officials or humanitarian agencies, or standing for leadership positions.

CARE's role in Act is to be a supporter, enabler, listener and ally. CARE helps to help make women's leadership and participation happen but always on the terms of women affected by crisis.

This means the **design of a Women Lead project is radically different from other projects**. CARE staff are placed in positions of power as experts on what to do. This is often expressed through CARE staff designing interventions on behalf of affected populations and controlling spending decisions. Please refer to the Reflect guidance note on how to do individual reflections for yourself on power and gender.

CARE staff working on the Women Lead in Emergencies project may find that women's groups ask them for advice on what to do. Staff can offer guidance and suggestions if requested to do so, especially at the start of a project. But **CARE should not make decisions on behalf of women's groups**.

When does Act happen within Women Lead?

Act **can take place at any point** in the Women Lead in Emergencies project

Act should **follow some version of the Women Lead steps**: women's groups reflect, analyse, co-create and then act. **But the Women Lead Model is iterative not linear**. Experience from the piloting shows that **actions take place throughout** the project cycle. Women's groups may be inspired to take an action after a Reflect session or during a validation of the analysis findings, they may hold several Co-Create sessions as their

confidence grows and their collective plan unfolds, and/or they may decide on a more comprehensive action plan to guide their actions. **Reflection is also an action** in itself: where CARE staff, partners and women's groups practice self-reflection and self-development, and consider how they can challenge and transform discriminatory or harmful structures and practices.

How to Act in Women Lead?

The **guiding principle** of how to support Act within Women Lead is **to ensure women's groups decide on the activities for themselves**. Activities should share a common aim of advancing women's voice, meaningful participation and decision-making and/or leadership. Women's groups are best placed to determine what activities will advance this cause in their communities.

Groups may decide to fund a range of activities, almost all of which are possible within the Act budget line. Examples include adult literacy classes, counselling, market gardens, mock-election campaigns, childcare, peer exchanges between women's groups, women's forums, transport to meet with decisionmakers, peace and reconciliation activities, leadership training, and much more.

Many activities do not incur a cost or have only very limited expenditure. This is fine too. Successful activities without a specific attached cost include talking to local leaders or humanitarian actors. It can include small expenditures on drinks for meetings for women's groups or banners as needed and requested by the groups themselves.

Income generating activities are a frequent topic that comes up in Act and for Women Lead. In many settings, Women Lead is working with Village Savings and Loan Groups who already have a way of addressing income-related concerns. In other settings, it has been necessary to link Women Lead with VSLA or livelihoods programming. Women's groups participating in Women Lead often identify generating individual income as necessary for them to be able to continue meeting as a group. However, it is not the primary purpose of Women Lead in Emergencies and **should be considered as a way of addressing a barrier to women's participation** – or as a means for women to develop or practice leadership skills, such as negotiating with power-holder for land – **rather than as an end goal**.

Putting in place **gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation strategies** is an important part of Women Lead. Activities can draw on other GBV prevention and risk mitigation work like Engaging Men and Boys activities, linkages to women- and girl-friendly safe spaces and more. These activities **can and should be funded as part of the Women Lead budget**. They reduce the risk of harm to women directly and indirectly participating in Women Lead projects.

CARE has made a commitment to **partner with women's rights organisations** and to do so in ways that support their own agendas and financial independence. Where women's rights organisations are present in the project location, CARE should consider whether we should be directly implementing Women Lead activities or partnering with a women's rights organisation. Factors to consider may include: How familiar is the prospective partner with the affected community? How does Women Lead align with the agenda of the prospective partner? Who does the women's rights organisation represent?

Activities and budgets can be directly allocated to women's rights organisations.

How to manage the Act budget line?

Women Lead projects have **two different types of budget lines for activities**: one for CARE-related activities and one for women's groups activities. These budget lines need to be **managed differently**, although they are both managed by the National Women Lead Programme Manager/Coordinator.

CARE-related budget lines include funding to do and update a Rapid Gender Analysis on Power, activities to support Women Lead Reflect/Gender Equality and Diversity work, staffing, travel, GBV risk mitigation, etc. These budget lines require project management practices be established to monitor and report on spending.

Each Women Lead project is designed to *also* have a dedicated **unrestricted funding line for activities decided on by women** affected by crisis. This budget should be used to support activities decided by the participating women's groups. The budget may be managed by CARE or in some cases it may be disbursed to the groups themselves.

It is critical that decisions about this budget line are not made by the Women Lead Programme Manager/Coordinator without consultation and agreement from the women's groups.

CARE Niger have developed a practical guidance note on how to share money with women's groups based on their extensive experience with Village Savings and Loans Associations.

Key resources

- Women Lead budget and activity templates
- CARE Niger: Budget Transfers to Groups
- **CARE Framework for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies**

The Women Lead Toolkit is available for CARE staff on the Women Lead in Emergencies CARE Shares page.

Want more information?

Women Lead in Emergencies is a joint initiative of the CARE Global Gender in Emergencies Team and the Global Inclusive Governance Team. Email the Global Women Lead Coordinators for more information:

- Tam O'Neil oneil@careinternational.org
- Isadora Quay quay@careinternational.org

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