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## CARE's Approach to Adaptation: Prioritising People and Community-based Action

### Background

The world's poorest people are being hurt most by climate change despite contributing least to its causes. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) acknowledges this poignant and potentially devastating irony.<sup>1</sup> CARE also understands the urgent need for action if poor people are to survive the consequences of climate change.

Climate change poses substantial challenges to the fight against poverty. Increasingly severe and frequent storms, droughts, etc. are washing away hard-won development gains. Meanwhile, changes in timing and total amount of rainfall are destroying rural economies dependent on simple farming and livestock herding.

Poor people are especially vulnerable to climate change due to the sensitivity of their livelihoods and the extensive constraints – such as low levels of formal schooling and political marginalisation – that frame their adaptive capacity. Therefore, the world's response to climate change has to challenge entrenched inequities and discriminatory power structures if we are to ensure that everyone can access the information, resources and support necessary for adaptation. But this hasn't happened. Instead, the international community has focused on building capacity within poor countries to integrate climate change in national policy frameworks.

Though helpful, this is wholly insufficient because vulnerability to climate change varies within countries, communities and even households. National-level efforts must be complemented by action at the grassroots that understands, targets and reduces the poorest people's vulnerability to climate change. In recognition of this principle, community-based adaptation is finally emerging as a critical part of the global response to climate change.

### CARE's Approach

CARE's approach to community-based adaptation is people-centred. It fosters more resilient livelihoods, strengthens local capacity through training and the promotion of appropriate traditional knowledge, supports social change and engages in advocacy to address the underlying causes of poverty and differential vulnerability.

CARE has developed a Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA) tool to work more effectively at the grassroots. The CVCA generates detailed information about local livelihoods, climate risks, and adaptive capacity. The tool's nature makes it easier for community members and other stakeholders to understand climate change and its wide-ranging consequences. Assessments are conducted separately for men and women, as well as other marginalised groups. Adaptation strategies grow from the initial assessment to target priority issues and highly vulnerable social groups.

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CARE's community-based approach to adaptation is composed of the following four inter-related action areas:

### **Reducing the Risk of Disasters**

Many natural hazards – like cyclones, floods and droughts – are increasing in frequency and/or intensity. The best scientific data suggests this trend will continue. Activities such as early warning systems, improved shelters, and food and seed banks are therefore critical to reducing the risk of disasters and minimising their long-term consequences for poor households.

### **Making Livelihoods More Resilient**

Of course, adaptation to climate change entails more than dealing with its catastrophic impacts. Though violent storms and other extreme events grab newspaper headlines, chronic changes – such as higher temperatures and chaotic rainfall patterns – may pose an even bigger threat to poverty reduction goals. Therefore, CARE is particularly committed to helping communities and local institutions make rural livelihoods more resilient to climate variability and slow onset changes. Our activities include the rejuvenation of appropriate traditional knowledge, the promotion of innovative agricultural practices and the diversification of income sources.

### **Strengthening Local Capacity**

CARE's experience has shown the vital role that local civil society and government institutions play in supporting communities' adaptation

efforts. This is why CARE's *modus operandi* includes close partnerships with local non-governmental and community-based organisations, as well as government agencies. Everyone benefits. We learn from their experience and insights, while they get much needed capacity strengthening support to analyse climate risks, identify appropriate adaptation measures, and integrate this knowledge into planning and decision-making processes.

### **Supporting Social Mobilisation and Advocacy**

The factors that determine adaptive capacity include access to and control over resources; access to information, technology, skills and infrastructure; the power to make decisions at the household and community level; sound policies; and institutional capacity. Therefore, a rights-based perspective is inherent in a holistic approach to reducing vulnerability to climate change. CARE focuses its advocacy and mobilisation efforts on empowering women, enabling vulnerable groups to participate in local decision-making/governance, and ensuring equitable access to resources and services vital to adaptation.

CARE is constantly learning and innovating in its efforts to help poor communities overcome the challenges posed by climate change. Our programs in Bangladesh and Tajikistan are examples of our commitment in action.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Article 4.4.

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