

2025
WHITEPAPER

Women Empowerment

A PILLAR FOR A HUNGER-FREE WORLD



In collaboration with CARE

Introduction

Today, an estimated 750 million people suffer from food insecurity, primarily due to conflicts and climate change.¹ This alarming situation distances us further from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 2 (Zero Hunger), which aims to eradicate hunger by 2030. Women and children are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and bear the brunt of this predicament.

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There are 84.2 million more women than men who have food insecurities worldwide.

- Emily Janoch, Associate Vice President, CARE International

Although they are the first victims, women are also one of the best levers for initiating sustainable change towards a hunger-free world. Empowering women is key to achieving economic and food security. Our field experiences confirm this observation which has become a deep conviction and a strategic pillar for Stop Hunger action.

“

Women are key players for a hunger free world. By supporting women, our programs worldwide contribute to a more equitable and food secure future for them and their communities.

- Mouna Fassi Daoudi, President of Stop Hunger

In this whitepaper, we highlight the barriers women face, showcase their role as agents of change, and outline steps to help them achieve financial autonomy. We also share insights on how the private sector can play a vital role in supporting these efforts.

Learn how you can get involved.



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First Victims and Agents of Change

In recent years, the rise in natural disasters, economic instability, and political crises has had even greater repercussions on women, affecting their living conditions and their ability to feed themselves and their families.

1.1 Economic Inequalities - A Barrier to Empowerment

2.4 billion women worldwide face multiple obstacles that prevent them from achieving economic autonomy.²

Across different regions of the world, they are still often deprived of the same rights and resources as men, creating deep disparities. This hinders their contribution to economic development and amplifies their vulnerability to crises.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), in developing countries, **“women generate 60% to 80% of food production and represent nearly half of the agricultural workforce. However, they own less than 10% of the land.”**³

This limits their ability to fully participate in agriculture and food production, attain food security, and ultimately improve their own lives and the lives of their families.

Granting property rights to women and providing them with access to resources and tools is key to unlocking a more just, inclusive, and prosperous future.



And yet...

When women and mothers are financially autonomous, they **reinvest an average of 90% of their income into the education, health, and nutrition of their families**, thus fostering a dynamic of resilience within their communities.⁴



Like Esther, many women do not hesitate to deprive themselves to ensure the survival of their loved ones.

"I eat less than I need so my grandchildren can eat."

- Esther, a CARE beneficiary in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Vulnerability to Crises - An Overwhelming Burden for Women

Women are disproportionately impacted by food-related issues, climate change, and armed crises. In times of scarcity, they are on the front lines, fighting fiercely to meet their families' essential needs and secure food and water. Food insecurity, which increases during these periods of tension, exposes

some women to more domestic, physical, verbal and sexual violence, especially when they are not in education or if they are married before the age of 15.⁵ The same observation applies during climate migrations of local communities to refugee camps or conflict zones.

And yet...

Women play a major role in conflict pacification. In 2021, women represented 48% of Heads of Mission and Deputy Heads in the United Nations (UN) departments of political affairs, peacebuilding, and peace operations.⁶

1.3 Distanced from Politics and Public Institutions

To date, only a couple of major UN studies provide gender-disaggregated data on food insecurity, with the most recent being the 2023 FAO study, The status of women in agrifood systems.⁷

The **lack of visibility in statistics** limits targeted public or political actions to give women equitable opportunities.

Moreover, in some regions of the world, women continue to be **marginalized from public debate** and leadership positions in both economic and political spheres. As of 1 January 2024, women represented only 23% of cabinet members heading Ministries, leading a policy area.⁸



Darlen Velasco Torrez
Representative of ethnic minorities
in the Bolivian Parliament

And yet...

In countries with gender quotas, the representation of women is 5% higher in parliaments and 7% higher in local governments. Once women have access to governance, **they actively participate and initiate concrete and sustainable actions to fight food insecurity**.⁹

1.4 Limited Access to Education and Training

Today, a staggering **122 million girls worldwide still do not attend school, and nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women**.¹⁰ For girls fortunate enough to be enrolled in school, reasons to drop out remain plentiful with challenges including the prioritization of daily chores and economic needs over schooling, long and potentially dangerous journeys to and from school, lack of adequate infrastructure, etc.

And yet...

When girls do have access to education, they often outperform boys, graduating in higher rates. This translates into tangible results with **each additional year of schooling increasing women's average salaries by 10 to 20%**, confirming that education is a powerful tool for escaping poverty and achieving emancipation.¹¹



Toutes à l'école
Permaculture training, Cambodia

SUPPORTING WOMEN

Steps to a Virtuous Path

In 2024, Stop Hunger supported nearly 200,000 women towards greater financial autonomy through 55 projects and initiatives in 31 countries.

Our field experiences demonstrate that empowerment is a gradual and transformative journey. It seeks to lift vulnerable women out of survival mode and equip them with the tools to build meaningful, self-sustaining futures. To achieve this, we recommend a **holistic three-step approach**:



Meeting Vital Needs



Building Self-Confidence
and Skills



Providing Lasting Support



Stop Hunger and World Food Programme
Skill-based volunteering mission, Senegal

2.1 Meeting Vital Needs, A Prerequisite

Ensuring access to basic needs and psychological security are the foundational steps towards achieving greater autonomy. This involves providing immediate support and stabilization, ensuring that women have access to essential resources and a safe environment.

Basic Needs

According to Lily Kendall, from Young Women's Trust, **42% of single mums have been unable to afford food** or other essential items in 2024 in England and Wales.

Access to safe shelter, nutritious food, clean water, and healthcare is not just a necessity but a prerequisite for well-being and stability. Meeting these needs allows women to regain control over their lives, build resilience, and pursue opportunities for growth and self-sufficiency.

“
A woman who has nothing to eat struggles to find a job, feel confident and capable.

Elizandra Cerqueira
Founder of Fundadora do Maos de Maria, Brazil

Administrative existence

According to the World Bank, **nearly 50% of women in low-income countries lack official identification** (compared to 28% of men).¹² An ID is more than just a document - it is a key to opportunity. Even in western countries, without it, women in vulnerable situations may struggle to access:

- Housing assistance
- Healthcare and social services
- Childcare support during training and job searches
- Financial services and banking

“
“We support refugee women who are alone with children. We help them by organizing childcare, giving these mothers the opportunity to work, develop their businesses or study.”

Foundation Za Dobroto in Bulgaria

Psychological Support

Providing a safe and caring environment allows women to share their experiences, heal from trauma, and rebuild their confidence.

- Active listening and validation of emotions help women regain trust in themselves and others
- Encouragement and mentorship foster resilience and motivation
- Community-based support networks create a sense of belonging, reducing isolation and strengthening social ties

Research shows that women who participate in community groups report higher levels of psychological empowerment and civic participation.¹³

2.2 Building Self-Confidence and Skills: Key to Autonomy

Gaining financial autonomy requires a combination of self-confidence, education, and practical job readiness. Several key steps can help vulnerable women integrate into the workforce, from rebuilding their self-esteem to acquiring essential skills and understanding workplace expectations.

Building Trust and Self Confidence

Trust is essential for rebuilding self-esteem, overcoming isolation, and fostering community connections. In peer support groups and safe spaces, encouragement and kindness empower women to share experiences, build resilience, and boost confidence.

Life Skills, Education and Literacy Programs

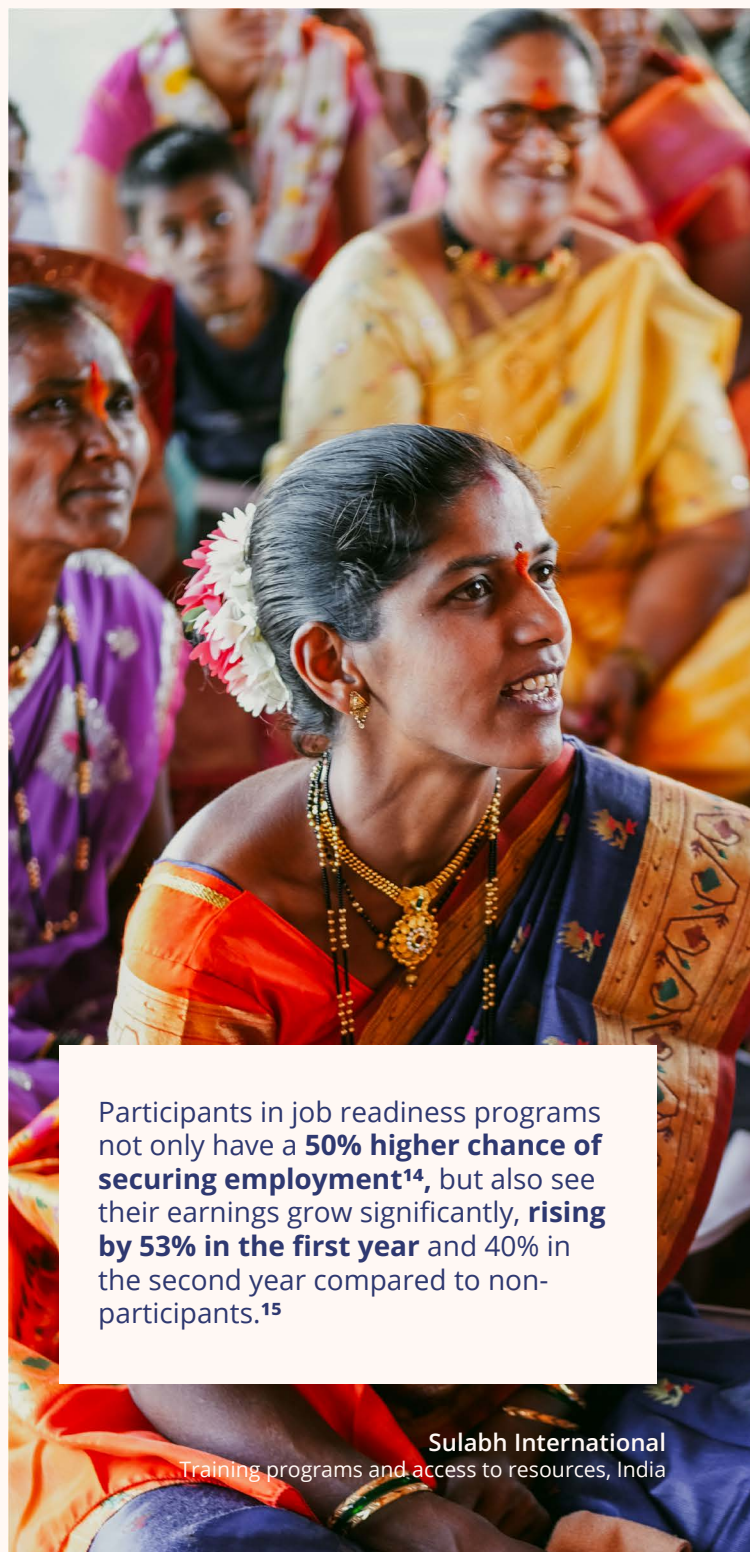
Many vulnerable women have limited formal education, making literacy and basic skills training essential for employability. Workshops can include:

- **Basic Education:** Adult learning programs in math, reading, and writing help bridge knowledge gaps
- **Digital Literacy:** Training in computer skills, online job applications, and financial literacy ensures women can navigate modern work environments
- **Soft Skills Development:** Workshops on communication, time management, conflict resolution, and problem-solving equip women with the skills needed for both professional and personal success

Understanding the Job Market and Job Readiness Training

Navigating the job market can be overwhelming for those unfamiliar with professional environments. Providing targeted training ensures women can transition from learning to employment.

- **Job Market Awareness:** Information sessions on different career paths help women identify opportunities that align with their skills and interests
- **Job Application Training:** Hands-on workshops cover resume writing, interview preparation, workplace etiquette, and professional networking
- **Apprenticeships and Internships:** Partnerships with businesses to provide on-the-job training and mentorship increase employment prospects



Participants in job readiness programs not only have a **50% higher chance of securing employment**¹⁴, but also see their earnings grow significantly, **rising by 53% in the first year** and 40% in the second year compared to non-participants.¹⁵

2.3 Providing Long-term Support

Empowerment doesn't end after the first two phases. Long-term support ensures that women not only sustain their progress but also solidify their independence and avoid setbacks.

Financial Tools and Resources

According to the Global Findex Database 2021, approximately 742 million women worldwide remain excluded from the formal financial system. This means they do not have access to a bank account.¹⁶

Financial inclusion is a critical component of women's empowerment. There are several effective solutions for promoting financial inclusion: microfinance, financial literacy and education, as well as peer-to-peer lending, such as CARE's Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) program.

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The VSLA program developed by CARE involves creating self-managed savings groups of 15 to 25 people who meet regularly to save their money in a safe space, access small loans, and obtain emergency insurance. Supported by a comprehensive approach, VSLAs aim to strengthen sisterhood bonds among participants.

- Aurore Pereira, Gender Equality Advocacy Officer, CARE





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Support after the program allows us to stay in touch and continue the personal and professional growth of our women alumni. This is essential to maintain a low relapse rate (6%) and high employability (70%). Together We Bake (TWB) graduates know they can count on their TWB family.

- Stephanie Wright, Together We Bake Co-Founder, USA

Creating a Support Network

Throughout the journey, time is both an ally and a challenge. To avoid relapse into economic insecurity and sustain financial autonomy, support must continue beyond the job readiness program. Key strategies for long-term support include:

- **Alumni and Peer Support Groups:** Establishing networks where graduates can stay connected, share experiences, and support one another. These groups foster a sense of community, accountability, and ongoing motivation.
- **Leveraging Local Resources:** Encouraging participants to access community organizations, social services, and professional development opportunities. These resources provide essential support, from financial assistance to career advancement.

Closing the Loop: The Power of Collective Action

This holistic three-step approach benefits not only the individuals but also their families and entire communities. The private sector plays a crucial role in reinforcing these efforts. In the next section, we'll explore how businesses and industries can contribute to and benefit from supporting and creating opportunities for women in vulnerable communities.



How the Private Sector can Support

Nations and organizations across the globe increasingly recognize that empowering women leads to more resilient economies, stronger communities, and overall societal progress.¹⁷ The private sector plays a critical role in helping women, particularly those in vulnerable situations, overcome barriers such as food insecurity and limited access to job markets.

Companies can contribute in two key ways: by **partnering with NGOs** and by implementing **independent corporate initiatives**.

3.1 Partner with NGOs to Drive Impact

NGOs serve as a crucial bridge between companies and vulnerable communities. By working with them, businesses can maximize their impact. Here are best-in-class strategies for achieving that.

Provide Financial and In-Kind Support

Supporting with financial contributions, in-kind donations (such as food, professional clothing, or IT equipment), or sharing resources (e.g. access to free office space), strengthens NGO operations and better supports beneficiaries.

In many regions, tax incentives are available for corporate donations.

Facilitate Job Readiness

Providing job discovery sessions, career coaching and internships helps women understand industry expectations and build confidence in entering the workforce. Additionally, offering guidance on resume writing, interview skills and access to professional networks increases their chances of employment.

Engage Employees in Skills-Based Volunteering

Employees can volunteer to deliver training in areas such as digital literacy, communication, language skills or technical expertise, equipping women with market-relevant skills. Additionally, women professionals within the company, in particular women who have overcome similar challenges, can share their personal success stories, serving as inspirational role models and mentors to help guide and motivate women from vulnerable backgrounds.

3.2 Deploy Independent Corporate Initiatives

Beyond partnerships with NGOs, companies can launch their own initiatives to create positive social impact, while strengthening their workforce through employee engagement, networking and skills.

Initiate Inclusive Hiring Programs

Companies can create entry points through apprenticeships and entry-level positions with on-the-job training. Providing mentorship and career development pathways ensures women can transition into stable, higher-paying roles.

Support Microenterprise & Cooperative

Some women may not be in a position to enter formal employment but could thrive as entrepreneurs. Companies can provide seed funding, tools, or partnerships to help them start small businesses or cooperatives.

Expand Access to Financial Services

Partner with financial institutions to provide low-barrier banking services, microloans, and financial literacy programs, enabling women to manage their finances and invest in their futures.

Invest in Community Development

Through Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives, companies can fund projects that promote women's empowerment in education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship.

Drive Industry-Wide Change

Businesses can leverage their influence to promote inclusive policies, encourage social impact initiatives within their supply chains, and prioritize partnerships with organizations that align with these values.



3.3 Why Supporting Women Benefits the Private Sector

Investing in women's empowerment isn't just the right thing to do - it's a powerful driver of business success. Companies that support vulnerable women, whether through NGO partnerships or internal initiatives, help build a more skilled, diverse, and resilient workforce.

When employees engage in mentorship, skills-based volunteering, and career training, they find greater purpose in their work, strengthening corporate culture and retention. Research shows that workplace turnover is reduced by 57% when employees volunteer and give as compared to when they engage in neither activity.¹⁸

Financial inclusion and job readiness programs don't just uplift individuals - they create stronger local economies and expand the talent pipeline.

By championing women's economic inclusion, businesses don't just foster change; they gain loyal employees, a stronger reputation, and long-term economic growth.

Conclusion

We hold steadfast to the belief that supporting women on their path to resilience is the barrier against precariousness and food insecurity, as well as the key to greater social justice.

The journey is long, but every step counts.

Join the 20,000 volunteers of Stop Hunger and support the many projects of our 330 partner NGOs.

We all have a role to play - together!

Be a changemaker.

#jointhemovement



“

Investing in women facing food insecurity not only boosts productivity and economic growth but also strengthens community development and resilience, creating a sustainable and equitable future for all.





Nathalie Brindeau, Stop Hunger Europe Director

Learn More

To reinforce your understanding:

- Watch our 2024 International Women's Day Webinar with Stop Hunger, CARE, WFP and Sodexo
- Discover the FAO's SOFI 2024 report

8 MARCH 2024
Unlocking Women's Empowerment
on the Path to Zero Hunger



SOFI Report 2024

Download

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About Stop Hunger

Stop Hunger is a global non-profit network working for a world without hunger. Initiated in the United States in 1996 by employees of Sodexo, its founding partner, the movement has since grown. Today, we are present in 73 countries, working hand in hand with over 330 NGOs.

www.stop-hunger.org

About CARE

CARE International places special focus on working alongside women and girls. Equipped with the proper resources, women and girls have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. In 2024, CARE worked in over 121 countries, reaching 54 million people through nearly 1,450 projects.

www.care.org



TOGETHER FOR ZERO HUNGER



To learn more about Stop Hunger, visit
www.stop-hunger.org
and connect with us on social media

