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Remarks for the HLPF Townhall Style Meeting
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Thank you Mr. Steiner and Ambassador Akram for inviting CARE to contribute to this important topic.

I want to focus my remarks on the gender impacts of COVID-19, which is deepening existing inequities for women and girls. Without addressing this, we will fail to achieve not just SDG5, but all SDGs. We cannot build forward, when half of humanity is being pulled back.

When CARE conducted a global survey last year, 6,000 women told us that the impact of COVID-19 on their lives was nothing short of **catastrophic**. Some areas stood out:

Firstly, **women's jobs and livelihoods** were worse hit because the majority who work in the informal sector and in low paid or part-time jobs, are women. These were often the first jobs to disappear. They usually do not come with legal or social protections.

Secondly, when times are toughest, the **last to eat and the first to suffer** are women and girls. This is resulting in negative, long-term impacts on their health and the health of newborns. And times are certainly tough: 55 countries are now acutely food insecure and hunger is looming across the globe, from Yemen to South Sudan, from Burkina Faso to Honduras, due to the combined effects of the pandemic, climate change, protracted conflicts.

Thirdly, even pre-COVID, women were doing three times as much unpaid care work as men. The pandemic has added an **extra 2-3 hours of care work** per day, due to sick family members and school closures. Many left their jobs due to the surge in care work; this has increased their economic hardship and affected their mental health.

Finally, it is described as a 'shadow pandemic', but **gender-based violence remains one of the most brutal and barbaric barriers to human progress**. Here I am not only talking about dramatic spikes in intimate partner violence during lockdowns – violence which was already at pandemic-levels prior to COVID, with 1 in 3 women experiencing violence in their lifetime – but also child forced marriage, since for some, having one less mouth to feed, is a life and death calculation, not a choice.

We are at a global crossroads where inaction has never looked so costly. We are at risk of rolling back the hard-won gains in gender equality over the last 25 years and seeing millions pushed back into extreme poverty. This is not the legacy that any of us want to pass on to next generations.

So what can we do?

It is precisely at the time when economies are being rebuilt that we must **prioritize inclusion and equity**.

We must **build caring economies**, and stop seeing care work as a "women's issue", but as an economic one. Each year, unpaid care work adds approximately US\$10.8 trillion to the global economy, which is equal to 9% of global GDP.

This is why at the Gender Equality Forum in Paris last week, civil society recommended that **10% of domestic national income be spent on affordable child, elder and disability care services**. Care workers must be paid living wages and enjoy decent conditions, including a workplace free of abuse. To do this, we need the public and private sectors to be on board, as well as the non-profit sector.

Indeed, CARE International shared last week our own commitments as part of the Generation Equality Forum and as co-leaders of the Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition. Even the most vulnerable and disenfranchised women can, with the right tools, become powerful economic and social actors. We have committed to **support at least 10 million women** to take part in community savings groups, contributing to reducing the number of un-banked women, and supporting women-led organizations.

We all have a role to play, but only through action and concrete commitment can we start to dismantle the barriers that have held women and girls back from economic justice. Only in doing so will we get back on track to realizing the SDGs, the global goals that are more relevant than ever, and achieve social justice.

Closing remarks (one minute - one recommendation, time permitting)

One point I want to emphasize is that we all need to do a better job at holding ourselves accountable – to the communities we serve, our local partners, those who fund our work, and the humanitarian and development sector more broadly.

I include my own Organisation, CARE International, in this challenge. We have just finished a review of our contribution to the SDGs over the five years leading up to COVID-19. We are proud that with our partners, we contributed to significant change in 11 of the 17 SDGs.

But we know that all of this is in jeopardy because of the combined effects of the pandemic, climate change, protracted conflicts, and the looming hunger crisis.

We need to do better on several fronts, including:

- Investing in local women-led and women’s rights organizations so they can be at the decision-making tables and shape their own future;
- Supporting partners to scale up the locally-driven solutions that are working; and
- Deepening our own commitment to gender equality and decolonizing the aid sector.

The enormous challenges we are facing require, from all us, unprecedented levels of ambition. As we approach 2030, CARE is committed to working harder on these challenges, and we hope many will join.