

A woman wearing a yellow headscarf and a striped dress is focused on writing in a notebook. She is standing in a refugee camp, with other people and tents visible in the background. The scene is set outdoors under a clear sky.

# IMPROVING PARTICIPATION AND PROTECTION OF DISPLACED WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH CAMP MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

**ANNA HIRSCH-HOLLAND**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication contains two reports written by Anna Hirsch-Holland, a consultant working with NRC. They are based on research that she conducted as part of a global project exploring how women’s participation in community governance mechanisms, both inside and outside camps, contributes to enhancing women’s safety. The wider project is managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as the global co-lead of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, and funded by the US Bureau for Population, Migration, and Refugees.

The author would like to acknowledge the women and men from displacement-affected communities who shared their perspectives during the field research, as well as the staff from service providers and Camp Management teams who also provided valuable insights. Thanks go to Nada Abdulrahman who supported the field work in Iraq; Jean Ndede and Susan Nakaitan Achuka in Kenya; and Eric Mativo in Tanzania – as well as all their colleagues in the NRC Country Offices who welcomed and took care of her. Particular thanks are also due to Noorina Anis (NRC) who led the data collection single-handedly in Afghanistan; Marjolein Roelandt and Amina Saoudi (IOM) who provided support and suggestions on the methodology and draft reports; and Giovanna Federici (NRC) who has provided invaluable advice, feedback, and friendship throughout the research.

Anna Hirsch-Holland is a freelance humanitarian worker specialising in community governance and capacity building, particularly in informal camps and urban out of camp settings. She has spent the last five years designing and implementing projects for the Norwegian Refugee Council, including in Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq. She holds a Master’s in International Relations from the University of Oxford.

## LINKED RESOURCES

Both reports in this publication are also summarised by the author in video presentations for both community members and humanitarian practitioners.

These videos are available at [www.womenindisplacement.org](http://www.womenindisplacement.org) or by scanning the QR codes here.

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Women’s Role  
in Coordination



The Role  
of Older Women

Cover and back-cover photo: Patoney Frogh, Emergency Coordinator for NRC, talks to women in the North Region of Afghanistan. Patoney says “I always say to my friends and colleagues here, it is not us who empower women and girls, but actually they empower us. The humanitarian system still primarily sees women and girls as victims, and treats women and girls as passive beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. But actually, women and girls are already playing a key role as frontline responders in disasters and conflicts, especially in a sensitive country like Afghanistan. The contribution of women as humanitarian actors needs to be well recognized and further supported.” (Afghanistan, 2019) © NRC/ Enayatullah Azad

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
<b>CM</b>	Camp Management
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>HI</b>	Humanity and Inclusion
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>LWF</b>	Lutheran World Federation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OPA</b>	Older Persons' Association
<b>RAS</b>	Refugee Affairs Secretariat (Kenya)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	The UN Refugee Agency
<b>US</b>	United States of America
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<b>WRC</b>	Women's Refugee Commission

# FOREWORD

The humanitarian sector, in recent years, has made ambitious commitments to make participation and empowerment of women and girls a core principle of humanitarian response. This is imperative, not just as a matter of fulfilling basic human rights, but because evidence shows that humanitarian outcomes are enhanced when women's role is strengthened.

But the realisation of these commitments is not easy. The contexts where we deliver humanitarian aid are often profoundly patriarchal, and women's exclusion from public life is a broadly accepted norm that often permeates our work. Even if our programmes are reaching roughly equal numbers of men and women, this is of little use in telling us to what extent women have truly participated in the projects we deliver.

The two reports in this publication take us beyond the numbers to look deeply into the role of displaced women in managing the displacement situation of their families and broader communities – whether through external humanitarian activities, or by their own initiative. By zooming in on two groups of women – community leaders, and older women – the reports analyse the valuable contributions that these women are making despite the barriers they face due to pervasive structural inequalities. The reports powerfully illustrate how women's participation in delivery and coordination of humanitarian activities is critical not only for enhancing women's rights and safety, but for ensuring the quality of assistance and services for the community as a whole.

This shift in narrative, away from women as vulnerable victims and towards women as important agents of change, is a critical part of achieving our commitments to displaced women's rights, and must be applauded. What is more, the reports provide evidence-based, concrete, and practicable recommendations for teams working on the ground to support and enhance the role of women through humanitarian programmes – particularly Camp Management teams, who have such a crucial role to play in enhancing the participation of displaced communities in the humanitarian response.

I am thankful to the women, girls, boys, and men who shared their insights for this research, and to the author for allowing their voices to be heard. I welcome these reports, and hope that their recommendations can be of real use to colleagues in the field, all over the world, to bring real change for all people affected by displacement through our humanitarian action, regardless of their gender and age.




**Marit Glad**

Director Programme Development and Support,  
Norwegian Refugee Council

PART 1

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN COORDINATION



Women leaders from Kalobeyei  
Integrated Settlement. (Kenya, 2019)  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, based on the findings of a global qualitative study, presents practical recommendations for Camp Management agencies to improve the contribution that displaced women can make to their communities through their inclusion in the coordination of humanitarian responses in camps, informal sites, and urban out of camp neighbourhoods.

Ensuring the meaningful participation of displaced communities in decision making is a fundamental responsibility of Camp Management agencies; so too is ensuring efficient and *inclusive* coordination of assistance and protection at the level of a camp, informal site, or neighbourhood. When Camp Management agencies integrate these twin responsibilities, they improve humanitarian outcomes – and even more so when they ensure women’s meaningful inclusion.

Having a role in coordination means being able to contribute to the collaborative process of information sharing and planning to solve problems and address needs; in practice, this means being able to liaise with a range of external stakeholders through activities such as meetings, referrals, reporting, and monitoring. This research set-out to understand the contributions that women in community governance structures can make to this kind of coordination, and the impact they can thereby have on their communities, and especially on women’s safety and protection. At the same time, the research sought to analyse the barriers and enablers women face to participate meaningfully in coordination, and to suggest *practical* steps that Camp Management agencies can take to dismantle the barriers while enhancing the enablers, across a range of displacement settings and cultural contexts.

The study highlighted many encouraging examples of how displaced women – with the support of Camp Management agencies – are involved in various coordination mechanisms and thereby having an influence on the well-being of their communities. They have managed to fill gaps in essential services and assistance, they have addressed security threats, and they have held duty bearers to account. Across all contexts, women leaders and committee members have been pivotal in facilitating access to protection services through referrals and information sharing; and in the formal camp context their insights regarding site planning and infrastructure were particularly critical for highlighting the safety issues facing women. Service providers consistently agreed that women were more engaged than men in supporting the wider community, and more able to articulate problems as well as suggesting creative solutions.

At the same time, the study highlighted ongoing barriers to women’s participation in coordination. These barriers are combined and intersecting, but all stem from the same root: a pervasive patriarchal culture. While this is not a new observation,<sup>1</sup> the study provides a nuanced understanding of how culture leads to women’s *structural exclusion* from coordination processes and mechanisms, as well as resulting in women’s lack of *capacities* compared to men. On the *structural* side, cultural practices and assumptions mean that men are more likely than women to take on formal and informal representation positions that have a mandate for coordination. Moreover, men have greater access to social and professional networks that open up avenues for coordination and problem-solving, and often have more freedom of movement to attend meetings for coordination – especially in out of camp urban

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<sup>1</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendations', (11th session, 1992) Paragraph 10. See also: UN WOMEN, *The Effect of Gender Equality Programming on Humanitarian Outcomes* (2015), p.13; Anna Hirsch-Holland/NRC, *Women's Participation Study*, 2018, p.7, 8; and Inter Sector Working Group, *Gender Mainstreaming in Rohingya Refugee Response*, 2018.



settings. On the *capacities* side, men often have more prior experience and soft skills in coordination, and therefore confidence, which makes them more able to proactively approach stakeholders and to speak-up in coordination forums. They are also more likely to be educated and therefore literate, as well as more likely to be able to speak the language(s) of coordination.

These cultural, structural, and capacities challenges are reinforced by humanitarian agencies, whose internal staffing structures often mirror those of the contexts where they are working (i.e. lacking in female staff). Moreover, humanitarian actors are not coordinated in their community engagement approach, with many interacting primarily or exclusively with pre-existing prominent and confident community representatives (typically men), even when more inclusive and representative structures are available. In some cases – particularly outside of formal camps – multiple agencies establish different community-based structures (such as committees or focal points), and with no overall coordination of these mechanisms, their legitimacy and influence can be undermined.

Nevertheless, the study has identified a number of recommendations for Camp Management agencies to address the barriers to women's participation in coordination. These fall into two broad categories: first, representative coordination and governance structures must be in place and supported (recommendations 1 to 6), and second, women's capacity and resources for coordination must be built (recommendations 7 to 9). Some of these steps are minimum requirements to ensure women's participation; others are strongly advised for further enhancing women's role. While these recommendations are aimed at Camp Management agencies, many could also be adopted by other sectors or agencies seeking to mainstream women's participation and ensure safe programming. Additional recommendations (A to E) are also provided to enable Camp Management agencies to use women's role in coordination to address women's safety and protection specifically.

### Recommendations for creating and supporting representative coordination and governance structures:

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- 1 After establishing and formalising governance structures that include women in equal number and status as men, CM agencies must ensure the recognition of these structures and their linkages with stakeholders including humanitarian services providers, national authorities, and other community leaders or focal points - **minimum requirement**.

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  - 2 Manage meetings in such a way as to encourage women's participation and contributions; for example considering the timing and location, the facilitation style, and the number and type of participants – **strongly advised**.

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  - 3 Facilitate access to an accessible women-only physical space for coordination, whether provided directly by the CM agency, or 'borrowed' from a service provider or the community – **strongly advised**.

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  - 4 Develop multiple methods of coordination, besides meetings, including exploring how digital technology could be used to enable women's role in monitoring and reporting – **strongly advised**.

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  - 5 Cultivate women's social and professional networks through formal and informal mechanisms, with an emphasis on diversifying the range of stakeholders within their networks – **strongly advised**.

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  - 6 Ensure adequate female representation among agency staff – **minimum requirement**.

### Recommendations for building women's capacity and resources for coordination:

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7 Design and ensure implementation of a capacity building plan that covers minimal topics required for coordination (e.g. information on service providers, communication skills, problem solving techniques, and legal frameworks), as well as others highlighted by the women, including (if necessary) literacy and language skills – **minimum requirement**.

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8 Provide coaching over a sustained period of time to support negotiation with service providers or authorities to address problems, and (where possible) assign in-kind or financial support for community-led initiatives to directly respond to issues raised – **strongly advised**.

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9 Provide material resources and access to livelihoods/economic empowerment opportunities – **strongly advised**.

### Recommendations for improving women's safety through women's role in coordination:

A Facilitate a coordinated approach among community-based protection mechanisms, ensuring that protection focal points or female volunteers are mapped out and linked to women leaders.

B Facilitate meetings in which women leaders can meet with service providers who implement services that impact on women's safety and protection (not only women's protection agencies).

C Set aside specific meetings, or timeslots within meetings, for gender segregated discussions with leaders.

D Train and support women from governance structures to map safety risks and to present these in coordination forums; consider assigning specific in-kind or cash-based resources for responding to issues raised through community-led initiatives.

E Ensure that women from governance structures are trained on GBV response and prevention, including referral principles and pathways.

Implemented together, the recommended actions can help to break down cultural barriers to women's participation, while also building the skills, confidence, and external recognition that women need to be able to have an influence through coordination, and thereby to ensure their own safety and to protect their rights.

## 1

# INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Participation and coordination are two fundamental components of a Camp Manager's role. This means the Camp Manager is responsible for ensuring meaningful participation of displaced women and men in decision making, while also facilitating inclusive coordination that improves and optimises service provision while minimising gaps and duplications. This research brings together these two essential responsibilities in order to understand how the Camp Manager can specifically enhance the role of and influence of displaced women in coordination.

This research speaks to a broader paradigm shift taking place in the humanitarian sector, whereby affected communities are no longer seen as passive victims but rather as agents of response and change themselves,<sup>2</sup> whose participation must be ensured and promoted by humanitarian responders. In particular, it responds to the growing recognition of the specific role that *women* can play and the need to make special efforts to include and empower them, since they are so often (though certainly not always) less able than men to participate in and influence humanitarian response and outcomes. This is not just a matter of fulfilling basic human rights, but there is also strong empirical evidence that women's leadership "contributes to better emergency preparedness and risk reduction; more efficient and effective humanitarian response; and inclusive and sustainable peace building and conflict resolution in communities."<sup>3</sup> While various research studies have explored how women's participation in humanitarian response can be improved generally,<sup>4</sup> none have looked

specifically at the role of displacement-affected women in *coordination*, nor the role of a Camp Management agency in facilitating this.

Traditionally, the participation element of the Camp Manager's role would be achieved through establishment of and/or support to governance mechanisms – whether informal or formal, and whether using pre-existing leaders/representatives or selecting new ones (e.g. camp committees or block leaders). On the other hand, the coordination element would be achieved through establishing coordination forums and mechanisms (e.g. regular site meetings, reporting tools). Camp Management (CM) actors may sometimes see these roles as separate, when in fact they should be inextricably linked. If participation efforts do not allow camp residents to engage in coordination mechanisms, then the influence of these residents will be limited. Moreover, if women (from young to old) are not able to participate in managing displacement, including (but not only) through their participation in governance and coordination, then the efforts of CM (and other) actors will be sub-optimal. This was a finding of a study into the effects of gender equality programming on humanitarian outcomes, which found that "there were consistent, strong links across sectors between women's ability to influence humanitarian programmes and [...] improved humanitarian outcomes. Women's central role in ensuring all household members' access to services coupled with their awareness of the needs of different members of the household makes them ideal partners for humanitarians in

<sup>2</sup> E.g. see Alison Barclay, Michelle Higelin, and Melissa Bungcaras, *On The Frontline: Catalysing Women's Leadership In Humanitarian Action*, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Barclay et al, p.11

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Kristine Anderson, *Tearing Down the Walls: Confronting the Barriers to Internally Displaced Women and Girls' Participation in Humanitarian Settings*, UNHCR 2019; Barclay et al (ibid); IOM and WRC, *Women's Participation Pilot Project Learning Report (Baseline and Endline)*, December 2017.

designing and assessing the impact of programming.”<sup>5</sup>

Typically, CM and other actors will establish women’s groups/committees in an effort to assure women’s participation. However, even if women are apparently participating in governance structures and coordination mechanisms, this does not necessarily translate into their being able to genuinely influence outcomes. This report presents the findings of a qualitative study into how women can play a role in and influence the outcomes of coordination in a range of displacement settings<sup>6</sup> with the support of a Camp Management agency. The report thereby suggests pro-active and context-sensitive steps that could be taken by CM agencies to ensure that project design and implementation promotes not only women’s participation in, but also their influence on, coordination. While the report is targeted at CM agencies and the broader Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) sector, many of its recommendations could also be applicable to any agencies or sectors looking to enhance women’s inclusion and leadership – whether as part of a “safe programming” approach, or as part of a women’s focussed project.

Specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions:

- ❶ What issues and topics do women tend to bring to the table when they are included in and able to have influence on/through coordination?
- ❷ What are the critical success factors and barriers for women in displacement to:

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  - a) Participate in coordination structures and mechanisms?
  - b) Have an influence through participation in coordination?
- ❸ What practical steps can be taken by CM actors to enhance displaced women’s participation in coordination structures, and influence (especially with regards to protection) through participation in coordination?
- ❹ How does women’s role in coordination differ according to the displacement context (i.e. formal camp, informal camp, and out of camp)?

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<sup>5</sup> UN Women, *The Effect of Gender Equality Programming on Humanitarian Outcomes*, 2015. p.179

<sup>6</sup> Namely: formal camps where the CM agency has a mandate; informal (i.e. spontaneous, self-settled) displacement sites where the CM agency may or may not have a formal mandate; and out of camp neighbourhoods (where the displaced are scattered among host community in a defined area) where the CM agency is unlikely to have any formal mandate.

# 2

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 DEFINITIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research concentrates on contexts where Camp Management projects are being implemented in the various displacement settings that may be served by a ‘Camp Management approach’, including formal camps, informal sites/settlements,<sup>7</sup> and out of camp urban neighbourhoods.<sup>8</sup> The research focusses on the displaced communities residing in these settings – including internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and returning refugees/IDPs.

“Participation” in the Camp Management Toolkit is defined as *“a process...where individuals and groups from the displaced community identify and express their own views and needs and where collective action is taken to significantly contribute to solutions”*<sup>9</sup> while “coordination” is defined as *“a process of sharing information and planning together in pursuit of mutual and agreed upon goals.”*<sup>10</sup> This research understands “women’s participation in coordination” to be a combination of these two concepts, whereby women are able both collectively and individually to collaborate with a range of stakeholders (male and female) in order to express their views and contribute to solutions. Through desk reviews and field work, the research has investigated the extent to which women are participating in various formal or informal mechanisms and processes of coordination, namely: coordination meetings; direct communication with stakeholders (e.g. by phone); referrals; reporting; and monitoring. Their participation in these mechanisms may involve

multilateral or bilateral coordination with any stakeholders that women perceive to be influential in the camp/site/neighbourhood, including NGOs (local, national, international), UN agencies, authorities, community-based voluntary groups, public services, or influential community members and traditional leaders.

Besides their participation in coordination mechanisms, the research also assesses the extent to which women are able to influence the outcomes of coordination. For the purpose of this research, ‘influence’ is based on the perceptions of both women and service providers as to the extent to which women are able to direct services to those they perceive to be more in need in their community; solve problems they have prioritised; bring new services or assistance to their community (‘filling gaps’); change the way assistance and protection is being delivered to improve its quality, appropriateness or relevance; and – as a consequence of all of the above – to improve safety and security of women.

Humanitarian coordination in a given country takes place on multiple levels, from sub-camp level, e.g. blocks in a camp, up to national level, i.e. national clusters/working groups. Since this research pertains to the role of CM agencies, it will concentrate on the levels where CM agencies focus their work, namely: Municipal or City/town (i.e. sub-regional); Camp or neighbourhood level; and sub-camp level.

<sup>7</sup> In this report, different terms are used depending on local naming conventions.

<sup>8</sup> Where displaced persons are living in accommodation with and among the host community. For NRC, this approach is known as “Urban Displacement and Out of Camp” (UDOC) and is included as a part of the Camp Management approach.

<sup>9</sup> IOM, NRC, UNHCR, *Camp Management Toolkit*, 2015, p.47

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60

## 2.2 SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY

The research questions were investigated through a qualitative approach, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources included studies and reports on women’s participation in humanitarian contexts – including but not limited to CM projects. The literature suggested possible barriers to women’s participation, as well as means for overcoming them, which were then corroborated and expanded through primary data collection in the field.

The field work took place in four countries, of which three currently have NRC Camp Management projects (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Tanzania) and one (Kenya) has other NRC interventions<sup>11</sup> but not a CM project. These contexts covered a range of displacement settings and different types of CM interventions. The full methodology is explained in [Annex 1](#) (Detailed Methodology).

**Table 1:** Summary of research locations

Location	Displacement setting	Type of displacement	Nationalities
Afghanistan: Kabul	Urban Informal settlements (protracted)	IDPs, refugee returnees	Afghan
Afghanistan: Herat	Peri-urban formal and informal sites	IDPs	Afghan
Iraq: Ramadi	Out of camp urban neighbourhoods	IDPs, IDP returnees	Iraqi
Iraq: Ramadi, “Kilo 7”	Urban informal settlement	IDPs, IDP returnees	Iraqi
Kenya: Kakuma	Formal camp; formal integrated settlement	Refugees	Multiple, including South Sudanese, Somali, Burundi
Tanzania: Nyarugusu	Formal camp	Refugees <sup>12</sup>	Congolese and Burundian

Data collection comprised of 37 key informant interviews and 22 focus group discussions with men and women of different ages from the displaced community and staff implementing camp management projects. A total of 206 people (152 women and 54 men) were consulted.

<sup>11</sup> Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance; WASH; Livelihoods; and Education.

<sup>12</sup> Note: data collection was limited to speaking with service providers and CM staff – see further details in [Annex 1](#).

## 3

## PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Equal participation of women and men is enshrined in numerous international legal and policy frameworks<sup>13</sup> and women's role in coordination also logically follows from the World Humanitarian Summit commitment to “empower Women and Girls as change agents and leaders.”<sup>14</sup> CM and other actors are well aware of the need to include women in governance structures, and there are many encouraging examples of such initiatives, and the positive results they have had in terms of allowing women to participate in coordination. For example, both male and female Syrian committee members consulted during an external evaluation of ‘Collective Site Management and Coordination’<sup>15</sup> in Lebanon noted that one of the most rewarding parts of being committee members was the increased influence on service providers that they gained by virtue of being in the committee.<sup>16</sup> Though both men and women expressed this sentiment, a greater proportion of female committee members than male felt that being on the committee helped them to influence service providers (91% compared to 76%).<sup>17</sup> Similarly, female Neighbourhood Committees in Afghanistan felt that being on a committee better enabled them to be involved in coordination.

“ There was no clinic in the area, so we went to the NGO that NRC introduced us to. Being in the NRC committee gave us credibility, which made the men support us in playing this role in the community.”

Female Neighbourhood Committee Member, Afghanistan<sup>18</sup>

However, women's inclusion in governance structures does not necessarily translate to their involvement in or influence on coordination. This was a finding from IOM and WRC's Women's Participation Assessments in five different camp contexts,<sup>19</sup> as well as in NRC's Women's Participation Study in an out of camp context (Afghanistan), where women's committees (contrary to men's) did not emphasise having a coordination role with any agencies other than NRC CM staff and felt that generally they were still not included in community-level decision making and problem solving.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in Lebanon, more men than women in NRC-established committees reported having interaction with authorities (67% and 44% respectively). In Jordan, a consultation with women in Za'atari refugee camp found that despite having a 50% gender balance in committees this “did not achieve the presumed goal of equal participation of women and men due to cultural roles that dictate the interactions between men and women”, and in some cases overt intimidation

<sup>13</sup> For example, see: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 23, Political and Public Life (Sixteenth session, 1997), U.N. Doc. A/52/38/Rev.1 at 61 (1997), reprinted in *Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 260 (2003), Paragraph 2. Also: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Convention on the Political Rights of Women; the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1996); the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998); UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 (2000); UNSCR 1820 (2008); and UNSCR 1889 (2009).

<sup>14</sup> World Humanitarian Summit, *Women and Girls: Catalysing Action To Achieve Gender Equality (High-Level Leaders' Roundtable)*, 2016. See also: *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action*, 2017, pp. 1-13

<sup>15</sup> As implemented by NRC, DRC, and Concern Worldwide from 2014 - 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Ofelia Garcia, *Joint Evaluation: Collective Site Management and Coordination (CSMC) in Informal Tented Settlements (ITSs) - Lebanon*, 2016, p.37.

<sup>17</sup> Based on NRC's Internal Monitoring through FGDs with committees.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Hirsch-Holland, *Women's Participation Study Report (Afghanistan)*, NRC 2018, p.9

<sup>19</sup> IOM and WRC, *Women's Participation Learning Report (Baseline)*, p.9

<sup>20</sup> Hirsch-Holland, *ibid.*, p.8, p.5



Female committee members participate in a meeting to identify community challenges, organised by NRC in Jalalabad (Afghanistan, 2017). © NRC/ Jim Huylebroek

by male members actually led women to withdraw from such structures.<sup>21</sup> More broadly, a UN Women study on the effectiveness of Gender Equality Programming in humanitarian contexts found that “merely increasing the presence of women did not automatically translate into increased power for women.”<sup>22</sup> This was corroborated by findings from this study, where despite a roughly 50:50 ratio of male and female leaders or committee members across all the contexts studied, many barriers to women’s participation in coordination were highlighted.

Evidently, establishing a women’s committee/ group, or ensuring women are members of mixed gender leadership structures, is not sufficient for ensuring women’s meaningful participation in humanitarian response and in coordination specifically – in terms of making sure that their voices are heard and included in decisions about the life of the camps, settlements, or neighbourhoods where they live. To increase the effectiveness of women’s inclusion in governance structures, we thereby need to understand more about the barriers and enablers to their involvement and influence.

<sup>21</sup> Melinda Wells and Geeta Kuttiparambil, ‘Humanitarian Action and the Transformation of Gender Relations’, *Forced Migration Review*, 52, May (2016), 20–22, p.21

<sup>22</sup> UN Women 2015, p.39



# 4

## WOMEN'S ROLE IN COORDINATION

Before attempting to understand the factors that may enable and enhance, or prevent and constrict, women's role in coordination, the study has assessed the extent to which women are currently involved in coordination in the Camp Management (CM) projects featured in the study. Across 12 different displacement settings with CM interventions (for which data could be obtained), women comprise almost half (and an average of 46% per location) of all the members of community governance or volunteer structures established through the projects.<sup>23</sup> Though this says little about the quality of their involvement, it at least suggests that CM interventions have created structures that provide a foundation for inclusive participation of women. Moreover, almost all of the community leaders or committee members consulted in the study – both male and female – felt that their role included coordination, even if this was emphasised more by men than by women, who instead highlighted their roles in disseminating information and referring cases.

### 4.1 COORDINATION MEETINGS AND INTERACTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Few projects could present data on the number and percentage of women attending or participating in coordination meetings; the fact that this data is not available is itself a 'red flag' – if CM agencies are not monitoring women's participation in coordination mechanisms, then they will have little means of ensuring that women's participation is actually happening. Nevertheless, across nearly all study locations the perception among informants was that men have

more engagement with external stakeholders (NGOs and authorities) than women – whether through formal meetings or informal bilateral engagement. For example, in the formal camps of Tanzania and Kenya, most service providers said that there are almost always more male than female leaders attending meetings or reaching out to them bilaterally – even for 'women's issues' (such as requesting GBV awareness sessions). A staff member from Humanity and Inclusion (HI) working in Kakuma Camp (Kenya) said that unless you specifically ask for equal male and female representation in a meeting "you will have 62 men and eight women." Most service providers also agreed that men tended to be more vocal in these meetings, besides a small number of unusually confident women. In Iraq men had participated in more meetings – including those they had organised themselves – and with a wider range of stakeholders than women in both displacement contexts, with a particularly stark difference in the out of camp context. Moreover, men were in touch with these stakeholders through a variety of mechanisms – not just meetings, but also phone calls, email, and social media. Women had only met with service providers operating daily in the settlement or Community Centre and had not organised their own coordination meetings independent of NRC.<sup>24</sup>

Service providers themselves can often be remiss in coordinating with community members, and particularly women, especially in the out of camp neighbourhood or informal site context. For example, in Iraq, the typical pattern is to use 'Mukhtars' and in Afghanistan 'Maliks' – the community 'gatekeepers' and almost always male

<sup>23</sup> Afghanistan (East Region, Badghis, Herat, Kabul); Lebanon (Bekaa, North); Iraq (Ramadi City, Kilo 7); Tanzania (Nyarugusu); Myanmar (MTN and TKP); Kenya (Kakuma, Kalobeyei).

<sup>24</sup> In general, both men and women in Iraq were keen to be introduced to more service providers, and this was especially expressed in the informal settlement, where committee members wanted to take on the external liaison role in place of NRC.

– to gain access to communities, identify beneficiaries, and even (in some cases) provide the physical space for the service provision. This is of course concerning since (as mentioned by various community members) these men generally try to direct assistance and services to their own family members. Even in a formal camp setting with apparently equal representation of men and women, service providers in Tanzania reported to coordinate primarily with male leaders, who occupy most of the senior roles that have a mandate for liaising with service providers.

Besides service providers (i.e. NGOs and authorities), it seems there is more equality between men and women in terms of their coordination with influential community members – e.g. other levels of leadership within a camp, or religious leaders in the community. For example, in Kenya, all the women and male leaders said that they work with their counterparts on all issues, and the women at Block or Neighbourhood level said that they frequently coordinated with the male and female Zonal leaders as well as with thematic committees within their Block (e.g. WASH, Peace, Elders) to try and solve problems before taking them to service providers. In the Iraq out of camp neighbourhood context, both male and female committee members reported to be coordinating with imams (including, sometimes, the wife of the imam) and family sheikhs who apparently have a big influence in the community, and in Afghanistan women coordinated with Maliks, influential male elders, and in a few cases with landlords – thereby enabling them to prevent evictions.

## 4.2 REPORTING AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

In few of the CM locations studied here were committee members (male or female) involved in writing reports, nor had they been invited or given any templates or guidelines to do so. Nevertheless, in the Iraq informal settlement women reported to be collecting information by writing notes and sharing these verbally with NRC. Similarly, in Nyarugusu, the Tanzanian Red Cross reported that women leaders were particularly active in taking notes about health facility issues, using

notebooks provided by the Red Cross; while in Kakuma, literate women would keep a record of issues in their notebooks, to share during coordination meetings. In Afghanistan, some women were collecting information on people with disabilities and sharing this with service providers, as well as reporting back to NRC verbally. In general, it seems that participation in this element of coordination depends on provision of specific requests or templates by service providers for the information, as well as the material resources (i.e. stationary).

## 4.3 REFERRALS AND SERVICE MAPPING

In terms of creating or updating service mapping and referral pathways, this does not appear to be something that community leaders contribute to in the formal camp setting, in contrast to the informal site or out of camp neighbourhood setting. For example, in Afghanistan, CM staff report that Kabul's settlement committees (including female) have shared information on active service providers with NRC to facilitate development of service mapping. It seems that in contexts of poor coordination – particularly urban areas of protracted displacement – community members have more up-to-date information about who is doing what where than the agencies that would normally have the mandate to compile and share such information. However, the extent to which community members can contribute as such depends on their own networks – something that was generally found to be more lacking among women (see [Section 6.4](#)).

In terms of conducting referrals, virtually all leaders consulted (male and female) reported to play some role in referring cases. In Iraq and Afghanistan, committee members were referring cases to NRC for onwards referral, as well as disseminating information to community members about services and in some cases mobilising people to receive them (e.g. child vaccinations). Protection-related service providers in Iraq, Tanzania, and Kenya mentioned that women were more active than men in referring cases to them – apparently due to their ability to find out about delicate cases in the community,



Community leaders gather in Kakuma Refugee Camp. (Kenya, 2019) © NRC/ Anna Hirsch-Holland

and their willingness to bring these to service providers (while men might feel more ashamed to do so). In Bangladesh, women's committees have helped with mapping of temporary shelters for extremely vulnerable individuals, as well as disseminating information about Feedback and Information Centres, which has subsequently led to an increase in the number of other female community members approaching the Centres.

#### 4.4 ASSESSMENTS AND MONITORING

In Iraq (Ramadi informal settlement known as 'Kilo 7') and Afghanistan (Kabul informal settlement), men and women committee members were reportedly gathering information from their sites to direct service providers, including authorities; for example, making lists of people in need of mobility devices, or identifying where wells, drainage, or sewage works should be installed. Men and women committee members in

Kilo 7 also said that they are monitoring service provision by the authorities, and share this information (collected in photographs and notebooks) every Tuesday when the municipality visits the site. In the formal camp settings of Kakuma (Kenya) and Nyarugusu (Tanzani) leaders (male and female) were apparently systematically engaged in monitoring of service provision, as well as involved in data collection for needs assessments. In Afghanistan (Herat) IDP focal points would also monitor arrivals and departures to the sites, while in Kenya leaders would monitor when shelters became empty and report this to the shelter agency. These monitoring activities were apparently conducted equally by men and women. In Bangladesh, women's committees established through IOM's Women's Participation Project (together with Site Management) are structured by way of sectoral sub-committees which are responsible for monitoring their respective services.

# 5

## WHAT WOMEN BRING TO THE TABLE IN COORDINATION

### 5.1 ISSUES RAISED BY BOTH WOMEN AND MEN

In terms of communal issues, it seems that men and women often raise similar issues across all contexts, and often work together to solve these issues. For example, in Iraq's out of camp context, men and women committee members worked together to plan an intervention with NRC to address safety in the local graveyard. They also both raised the issue of lighting in the streets – something that is often posed as a measure to address women's safety, but it is clear that the whole community feels safer with such an intervention. WASH, education, health issues, site/ neighbourhood maintenance, access to paid work and training, and the general security situation were other topics raised by both men and women in most contexts, as well food, NFIs, and firewood in Tanzania and Kenya.

That said, some service providers observed that women were particularly helpful in the way that they raised and solved certain issues. For example, Tanzanian Red Cross staff said that women leaders were particularly active in monitoring and reporting on the quality of service delivery at health centres, bringing many issues to Health Committee meetings, and following-up to ensure that changes are made based on the action points of these meetings. In Kenya, service providers commented on how women were able to explain more specifically the nature of challenges facing households and women in particular – including fire wood collection, water supply, health, and hygiene issues – as well as suggesting practical solutions. Many service providers also recognised the strong motivation of women to support their communities; for example, staff in Afghanistan (Kabul) reported that women acted more as 'enablers' than men who would often cause barriers to progress.

### 5.2 WOMEN'S PROTECTION AND SAFETY

Most service providers and leaders alike suggested that women were always more likely to refer individual protection issues than men, to follow-up with female headed households, and to raise issues of women's protection in terms of domestic/intimate partner violence. In Kenya, women apparently also tend to raise girl's issues such as early marriage, lack of support for girls, teenage pregnancy, as well as safety issues pertaining to fire wood collection and site planning. On the latter point, for example, the Site Planning agency said that they ask women for advice on the best location for water points and brick harvesting sites, since they could face sexual harassment in some locations.

Most informants agreed that having female staff and female leaders/representatives is also critical to allow coordination between staff and community in dealing with GBV issues. Moreover, in Kenya, staff from IRC said that female leaders were also more likely to endorse and promote GBV response best practice, while men were more inclined to support traditional resolution methods for domestic violence. In other contexts (particularly Iraq) women as well as men implied that NGOs and authorities (e.g. police) do not have an effective role in solving domestic violence and marital problems, instead pointing to the role of imams, sheikhs, and the extended family – including, in particular, the mothers of abusive husbands (on which, see [Part 2](#) of this publication).

All respondents in all contexts emphasised the fact that women would be much more likely to disclose a specific GBV issue or general women's protection issue to a *female leader* than a male. This is far from a revelation, but underpins the importance of women's role in coordination to allow better reporting and input on how these issues are dealt with.

## 6

# BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO WOMEN'S ROLE IN COORDINATION

The research found that a web of intersecting factors hinder or help women's role in coordination. For each barrier, there are a range of issues that cause or reinforce this barrier; at the same time, there are a corresponding set of 'enablers' that can mitigate or even eliminate the barriers. As such, no single 'barrier' or 'enabler' can be considered in isolation, and the analysis below reflects this. Nevertheless, one of the most significant and foundational barriers pertains to patriarchal culture; hence, this factor is dealt with first. [Section 7](#) then attempts to develop the analysis further into practical steps setting out how to overcome the identified barriers by concentrating on enablers.

## 6.1 CULTURE AND FAMILY SUPPORT

“*In all nations, the most significant factors inhibiting women's ability to participate in public life have been the cultural framework of values and religious beliefs.*”<sup>25</sup>

UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

According to a large-scale 'listening' project which consulted more than 6,000 recipients of humanitarian aid, “patriarchal cultural bias of local men and humanitarian workers” was commonly cited as a major barrier to women's leadership in humanitarian action.<sup>26</sup> According to this study, the same is true of women's role in coordination of humanitarian response in displacement. However, the study has also identified various methods for mitigating or even

changing that culture, within the scope of humanitarian activities.

Even if men (or indeed other women)<sup>27</sup> are actively denying women's external role, the results of this study suggest that culture need not be decisive in preventing women's participation in coordination. First, men in all the study locations seemed to accept women's coordination with *female* service provider staff, and women leaders themselves report to feel more comfortable in raising issues (especially those pertaining to women's needs) with female staff. Thankfully, most humanitarian organisations are becoming increasingly cognisant of the need to ensure gender balance in their teams, and many service providers consulted for this study acknowledged the importance of their female staff to allow women to communicate and coordinate with them – even if they had not yet managed to achieve gender parity. Some of the women in the Iraq out of camp neighbourhood context said that while their husbands were initially unhappy about their role in the committee and attending the Community Centre, they became supportive once they had a better understanding of the Centre – namely the fact that it is staffed by women and has a women's only space. This is similarly reported by CM staff in Afghanistan. As such, in contexts where it remains culturally sensitive for women to meet with men, there must be sufficient female humanitarian staff involved in coordination, and potentially female-only physical spaces in which coordination can take place (see [recommendations 3 and 6](#), below) – and about which men have been adequately sensitised. Moreover, the creation of a *women's*

<sup>25</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendations', (11th session, 1992) Paragraph 10. See also: UN Women 2015, p.13; Hirsch-Holland, *ibid*, p.7, 8; and Inter Sector Working Group, *Gender Mainstreaming in Rohingya Refugee Response*, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Mary B Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time To Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. 2012, p.120

<sup>27</sup> In Iraq, some older women consulted in the companion study to this one, said that mothers-in-law may prevent their daughter-in-law from participating in activities outside of the home, on account of her domestic responsibilities.

*coordination network* might be a more culturally acceptable method for women's participation in a 'public' role (see recommendation 5 in [Section 7](#), below).

“ This morning I woke at 7am to make breakfast, and my husband was encouraging me to come to this meeting”

Female Neighbourhood Committee member, Iraq

Second, this study shows that some cultural change is possible within the framework of humanitarian activities – particularly in contexts where displacement spans many years. Kakuma Camp and Kalobeyi Settlement provide the clearest example: more than a decade of women's empowerment activities and gender equality initiatives – including training for both male and female leaders – and general education seem to have led to a cultural shift that supports women's greater role in the public sphere and thereby in external coordination. This was noticed by many informants – including long-serving UNHCR staff, female leaders themselves, and men in the community.

“ In 2009 I was a chairlady and then I was elected again recently, and it is very different now: before I had to wait for feedback from the chairman and he would deal with raising issues, but now I can raise issues myself directly.”

Female Somali Block Leader, Kakuma Camp, Kenya

Similarly, Tanzanian staff in Nyarugusu Camp have noticed that Congolese women are more active as leaders and in public forums, and posit that this is in part due to the fact that Congolese have been in the camp for longer and therefore more exposed to gender equality and rights programming. According to a Community Engagement study conducted by NRC in Nyarugusu in 2018, some women leaders still felt that men dominated discussions during coordination, and this was linked to lack of training for male leaders on women's rights – something that NRC is now addressing. Besides agency-led women's empowerment activities, cultural and behavioural change appear to take on a dynamic of their own. Informants (service providers and refugees) from Kakuma and

Kalobeyi referenced the cultural 'melting pot' of the sites, promoting the diffusion of more 'women-friendly' norms. When new refugees arrive, they arrive into a new society, i.e. the Kakuma or Kalobeyi society – one that is increasingly supportive of women and girls – and they may thereby subsume new beliefs into their existing cultural frameworks.

Such societal cultural change may take years and would likely be easier in a formal camp context, where agencies can design the Camp systems, structures, and services to promote women's participation. Nevertheless, even in more short-term interventions and/or outside of formal camps, the findings of this study suggest that cultural constraints can be overcome through the proactive support of a CM agency. This is especially the case when the culture is not one that *forbids* women's external role, but simply does not 'expect' it.

Most informants suggested that a pervasive cultural belief that matters of public concern are dealt with by men (while women's role remains in the home) and that men are the ones to speak up in public, can indeed limit women's role in coordination. However, in most cases – across all contexts – respondents did not claim that women were being *refused permission* to participate in coordination. Indeed, in Iraq some of the men from the neighbourhoods suggested that “women *think* men don't want them to participate or interact externally, so men tend to do more of the coordination” – implying that men are not in fact opposed to women taking an external role, but women *assume* men are opposed to it. In other words, the pervasive culture results in men, by default, taking the initiative to be the interlocutors and problem-solvers outside of the home, while women – by default – tend to ask husbands or male leaders to raise issues on their behalf. This implies that, with the right encouragement, the dynamic *could* change and women could start to take more initiative; this certainly seems to be the case for some of the women in this study, who – with the support of a CM agency – are tackling many communal issues within a patriarchal environment.

For example, in Kilo 7, Iraq, all male stakeholders and service provider staff referenced the active engagement and influence of the *women*, and the women committee members themselves did not seem to feel constrained by a patriarchal culture, despite their living in such an environment.<sup>28</sup> Asked to reflect on why they have come to have this position in their community, the women referenced not only their own skills and personality (of which more in [Section 6.2](#) below), but also – crucially – NRC’s support and backing, including swiftly responding to problems and requests raised by the women at the start of the intervention (e.g. asking for lighting to improve safety). Women from the out of camp neighbourhood context in Iraq seemed to agree on this; on the one hand, they lamented that “*when a woman can talk and raise her voice to service providers and authorities, they say she is a bad woman*” but on the other hand they said that this attitude would change if only women could actually have an influence to achieve their requests – this would give them credibility, and the attitude in society would thereby change in support of them. However, they felt that they could not have such an influence without NRC’s support. Women in Afghanistan (both informal and formal sites), reflected a similar sentiment.

“ If NRC responds to our problems then we can be more influential in the community, but if we are bringing problems and NRC is not doing anything, it would decrease their trust in us.”

Female committee member from a Kabul Informal Settlement, Afghanistan

Regardless of the context or longevity of a displacement response, all humanitarian staff (not only CM) have a critical role to play in challenging or reinforcing patriarchal cultures that restrict women’s participation. Unfortunately in many cases they do the latter, by engaging only the default decision-makers – i.e. men.<sup>29</sup> This was apparent in Iraq, where many service providers liaised primarily with male Mukhtars, and

similarly observed in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, and even Kenya – despite it boasting one of the most well-established women’s leadership structures. This implies that the establishment of women’s committees or leaders will only lead to their participation in coordination if service providers change their default *modus operandi* (coordination with men). The role of the CM agency in pushing for this change – which may or may not then lead to deeper cultural change – is essential, and detailed further in [Section 6.3](#), below.

## 6.2 CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS

### 6.2.1 Confidence

In all contexts, women’s shyness compared to men was cited by almost all informants as a barrier to their involvement and influence on coordination – preventing them from speaking up in meetings and approaching service providers. Yet agency staff said that when women *do* feel confident to speak up, they make particularly valuable and practical suggestions – being more likely than men to suggest solutions rather than only problems, as well as explaining more clearly and specifically about needs and gaps.

Lack of confidence appears to be linked to both culture (whereby women cannot speak up in front of men; see also [above section](#)) and lack of education/skills (see [below section](#)), but also to the lack of *experience* that women have in coordination-type activities compared to men. This phenomenon is highlighted in Action Aid’s policy report on women’s leadership in humanitarian action, where the authors suggest that women’s poor representation in decision-making structures prior to the crisis means they have not already cultivated an understanding of processes and systems that would position them to take on such roles during or following a crisis – unlike their male counterparts.<sup>30</sup> The findings of

<sup>28</sup> This was confirmed by FGDs conducted for the companion study to this research pertaining to the role of older women, whereby all participants emphasised that men were “at the top of everything” and playing the primary external/public roles, as well as being the heads of their families.

<sup>29</sup> Observed also by Anderson, Brown, and Jean, p.121

<sup>30</sup> Barclay, Higelin, and Bungcaras, p.16, pp.21-22

this study also support this claim. For example, in Iraq's out of camp context, the women were interested in attending and even organising their own coordination meetings but felt that they could not do this without NRC's support in setting up and facilitating the meetings – this in contrast to men who were able to set up and attend coordination meetings, despite not being supported by NRC to do so.

“ Before we were not as confident to be involved in these kind of meetings or activities but now [since NRC's support] we can participate with enough confidence.”

Female committee member from a Kabul Informal Settlement, Afghanistan

This highlights the importance of providing ongoing and close support to women so they can 'catch-up' with their male counterparts and build their confidence – as indicated both by Iraq's neighbourhood context, and Afghanistan's informal settlement context, where female committee members/focal points that had undertaken more training and had been working for longer with NRC were more confident and better able to express themselves,<sup>31</sup> as well as being able to cite more examples of problems they had solved through coordination. In particular, female committee members in Afghanistan said that through NRC's support they had gained skills and techniques for communication and negotiation, as well as guidance on “what we should do, who we should contact, and how” – to the extent that they claimed to feel “as influential as men” in terms of their influence on service providers. Tanzanian staff also felt that women who had spent longer in the camp with more exposure to trainings and empowerment activities also showed more confidence.

Besides addressing culture and skills, some service providers – e.g. Oxfam in Iraq and IRC in Kenya – suggested that meeting separately with women could be a way to provide them with a more comfortable environment to contribute to coordination. However, other providers – including a women's protection staff in Tanzania

– said that meeting separately with women could risk antagonising men. Moreover, it is possible that this would perpetuate women's inability to speak-up in front of men. Alternatively, several service providers said that they have developed a particular way of conducting mixed gender meetings to encourage women's contributions – for example, NRC in Tanzania said that “for every three men who speak, three women must also speak”, and a similar technique was also mentioned by Humanity and Inclusion (HI) in Kenya. Moreover, adjusting the size and scope of meetings could help to encourage women's participation: coordination meetings in some formal camps involve all zone leaders, vice-leaders, and secretaries which could amount to upwards of 60 people – this would be an intimidating forum for even the most confident of people. As such, smaller meetings at the level of sub-camp (i.e. two to four zones) might provide a more conducive environment for women's participation in coordination.

“ Women have a lot of valuable ideas and information – especially if you can speak with them alone.”

Staff from a Women's Protection agency, Nyarugusu Camp, Tanzania

Finally, it is important to remember that coordination is not simply a matter of turning up to (and speaking in) meetings, and indeed other components of coordination may be less impacted by women's lack of confidence. The contexts studied here provided a few such methods; for example, in the Iraq informal settlement women and men volunteers have been asked to collect information through photographs and notes, which they systematically report to NRC and local authorities. This has enabled them to improve the quality of the services provided in the site – for example, rubbish collectors were charging individual households even though it was meant to be 100% paid by the municipality, which the volunteers were able to report, and the problem was thereby solved. A CM agency working on coordination and community governance should therefore ensure a range of methods for inclusive

<sup>31</sup> As per observation by the researchers



coordination – e.g. techniques and activities for monitoring and reporting. These can boost women’s role in coordination and “give meaning to their interaction with service providers” – as suggested by a Protection service provider in Afghanistan, even if they are too shy to speak up in coordination meetings.

### 6.2.2 Literacy and technical skills

Illiteracy or limited literacy can affect access to information on the humanitarian response,<sup>32</sup> which could in turn hinder women’s ability to contact and liaise with humanitarian agencies. Similarly, it may prevent them from taking part in ‘written’ elements of coordination such as writing reports, letters, petitions, or lists. However, since these barriers can be overcome with the right support (e.g. in Afghanistan, illiterate committee members share ‘verbal reports’ which are transcribed by CM staff), it seems that the bigger impact of illiteracy in terms of women’s role in coordination is that it diminishes their *confidence* to participate. In Afghanistan, according to CM staff, illiterate women feel shy in external liaison and raising their concerns with those that they perceive to be more educated than them,<sup>33</sup> and educated women tend to be better able to absorb information and take initiative. Similarly, in Tanzania, NRC’s WASH staff said that “[an] educated woman would have a lot more confidence and can speak in front of men”. By way of comparison, in contexts such as Ukraine where there is almost 100% literacy among both women and men,<sup>34</sup> humanitarian field staff report that women are more active and dominant than men during consultations with aid agencies.<sup>35</sup> Many women leaders consulted in this study have requested literacy training as well as general

education, and this could be a key way in which to increase their confidence and therefore participation and influence on coordination.

Beyond literacy skills, some service provider informants also perceived that men more often possessed other ‘soft skills’ that equip them to participate in and influence coordination – such as communication and negotiation skills. This could be a result of the prior practice they have had (see [above section](#)) or because they more often benefit from training provided by humanitarians. According to data obtained for this study<sup>36</sup> of the 1,516 leaders or volunteers trained by CM agencies in coordination-related topics such as conflict resolution, leadership, and communication, fewer than 37% were female. In one of the formal camps, women leaders had only received Code of Conduct/Do No Harm and GBV training, while men had received training in leadership and camp management.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore not surprising that women leaders frequently requested “training, skills, and resources”<sup>38</sup> which they think could give them an influence alongside male leaders.

Interestingly, it seems that even if the training itself is not directly relevant or required for coordination, the fact that it *builds women’s confidence* is in itself valuable. For example, female committee members in Iraq’s out of camp context highlighted the tailoring and first aid training they received from Islamic Relief over the ‘Committee Training’ they received from NRC, and women leaders in Kakuma also said that what they valued most from their trainings was that it made them “feel more confident”. As such, building women’s skills in general can also build their confidence to participate in coordination, even if they do not directly use these skills in the process. This suggests that CM agencies should consult with

<sup>32</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, *The South Asia Women’s Resilience Index: Examining the Role of Women in Preparing for and Recovering from Disasters*, 2014, p.33

<sup>33</sup> IOM and WRC’s Women’s Participation Learning Report (Baseline) also found that women leaders did not believe in themselves and their ability as leaders, with reference to that fact that they were “not educated” and were “too ‘afraid and shy’ to represent the needs and concerns of others.” Pp.9-10

<sup>34</sup> <https://knoema.com/WBES2017Jun/education-statistics> - accessed 27/06/19

<sup>35</sup> NRC national field staff providing anecdotal feedback to the author during field work in June 2019.

<sup>36</sup> From four contexts: Lebanon (informal settlement); Iraq (informal settlement); Kenya (formal camp); Tanzania (formal camp).

<sup>37</sup> This is in the process of being addressed with further trainings for women, as well as GBV training for men.

<sup>38</sup> NRC Afghanistan internal outcome monitoring. See also Hirsch-Holland, Women’s Participation Study Report (Afghanistan) 2018

women leaders to see which trainings they would most value – rather than only delivering a standard set of CM trainings. Their requests will likely vary across contexts, and would require a specific learning needs assessment.

In some contexts, language can also be a significant barrier to women’s influence on coordination, linked to their being less educated. For example, in Tanzania some Burundian women leaders can only speak their local dialect, while meetings are conducted in Swahili – this means they cannot undertake any leadership roles higher than cluster (i.e. sub-block) level, let alone Zone level, which is where most coordination takes place. Similarly in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, lack of Swahili or English language is a significant barrier for many women to be able to speak-up (or even follow) meetings; while in Afghanistan (Herat informal and formal sites) most women are native Pashto speakers and do not speak or understand Dari, which is the main language of humanitarian staff and therefore coordination. Women’s committee members in Za’artari camp, Jordan, requested to receive English classes so that they could better argue their case with the largely English-speaking decision-makers in the humanitarian community,<sup>39</sup> and indeed language training could be a key enabler to women’s influence in coordination. For example, a female leader in Kakuma mentioned that she had attended classes and found them helpful for her role – she could now communicate in Swahili and understand English.

### 6.2.3 Personality and motivation

As suggested above, specific skills may be less important than confidence in enabling women’s participation. However, personality and motivation also seem to be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for women’s involvement in coordination. Women leaders from across the different contexts mentioned that their particular personalities and motivation enabled them to do their jobs well, and service providers agreed that the most active women were those with the “right”

personalities. Women from local authorities in Iraq gave many examples of uneducated women who, though their “strong personalities”, were able to connect with authorities to solve problems in their neighbourhoods. In Afghanistan, staff described certain female committee members in Kabul as particularly motivated and interested to support their communities, as compared to men who tended to look out primarily for their individual or family needs. Kabul women were also more motivated than more recently displaced IDP women in Herat, who – facing more difficult living conditions – felt less able to support their wider community. This suggests that building women’s role may be more challenging in situations where basic needs are still not met.

“ We are in our own pain and own problems so how can we solve other problems in the community? Also today and tomorrow is unknown, maybe the government will evict us from this site anytime.”

Female Focal Point, Herat Informal Settlement, Afghanistan

While personality may be hard to shape, motivation is something that can be influenced and should therefore be a focus of agencies supporting women’s role in coordination. For example, while many women from the neighbourhoods in Iraq seemed in initial focus groups to be motivated by supporting their own family needs rather than the wider community, when the same women were engaged during a networking workshop, they highlighted a range of communal problems that they were enthusiastic to solve. This brings us back to the value of the support and encouragement of a CM agency in motivating women to be involved in coordination “in the pursuit of shared goals.”

At the same time, when women perceive that they cannot influence results or they are not listened to, their motivation to participate in coordination shrinks. For example, according to a service provider in Tanzania, women become frustrated when they cannot see tangible changes, and when they cannot participate in activities and take a role

<sup>39</sup> Wells and Kuttiparambil, p.21

in designing them. This highlights the importance of facilitating tangible results achieved through women's role in coordination – as highlighted above in the [section on culture](#). An example of how this might be done is through a 'Women's Consortium' for women leaders – as implemented by Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Kakuma Camp; the Consortium is action-oriented, helping women to follow-up on specific issues – such as creating a day-care centre for children of teenage mothers. Staff say that “since the Women's Consortium we have seen a big change – women are encouraged, and they know it is their right to participate and represent issues to the agencies.”

### 6.3 A COORDINATION SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE THAT ENCOURAGES COMMUNITY AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

#### 6.3.1 Formalising and promoting women's role in coordination

IOM/WRC's Learning Report notes that “how management of the IDP site is first established influences how likely women are able to participate in governance structures”<sup>40</sup> – regardless of the cultural context. This finding is further supported by the present study – in both formal camp and informal site or out of camp neighbourhood settings.

For example, Nyarugusu Camp's hierarchical leadership structure means that the positions involving most coordination are the Zone Leaders, and without any quotas for women's representation at this level, men initially assumed these roles in all 14 Zones, and still occupy 13 out of the 14 positions. In an attempt to create more gender balance, each Zone has since been obliged to elect an 'assistant' or 'vice-leader'<sup>41</sup> to be held by the opposite gender, but these are much less involved in coordination (if at all), and service providers report that the majority of their

engagement is with the male leaders since they hold the more senior positions. As such, women are structurally excluded from the main coordination forums, and men are also more likely to proactively approach service providers even for women-centred issues such as GBV. Women leaders thereby feel that they are underrepresented in leadership positions.<sup>42</sup> Service providers, including those from a Women's Protection agency, said that women's role in coordination would only be enhanced if there were more female Zone Leaders so they then have the mandate to represent their Zone.

By comparison, in Kenya's Kakuma and Kalobeyei sites, women's participation in leadership (including bilateral and multilateral coordination meetings) is embedded in the constitution of the camp/settlement, whereby every Zone/Village and Block/Neighbourhood must elect a female as well as male leader, and these two leaders work together as equals. This has been endorsed not only by NGOs and UNHCR, but also by the Kenyan 'Refugee Affairs Secretariat' (RAS), which is both the Camp Administrator and Manager. Moreover, the camp structure is underpinned by the Kenyan legal framework, on which all leaders have been trained; this legal foundation legitimises and endorses women's role in the public sphere, even among culturally restrictive communities. According to male leaders, RAS and many NGOs refuse to accept petitions unless they are signed by the male and female leader of a Zone/Block, and several NGOs said they would request and accept nothing less than equal attendance of men and women at meetings.

“ You have to make the community know that if there are no women in attendance, there is no meeting.”

UNHCR staff working in Kakuma Camp, Kenya

This is undoubtedly a key enabler in women's role and influence in coordination in the camp, whereby women are systematically invited to coordination meetings (and thereby account for

<sup>40</sup> IOM and WRC *Women's Participation Learning Report (Baseline)*, pp.11-12

<sup>41</sup> Informants disagreed on the terminology.

<sup>42</sup> Hadi Al Khateed, *Participatory Community Assessment Report: Nyarugusu Camp, Tanzania*, NRC 2018

around 47% of attendees – and often even more in Kalobeyi which is newer and has included 50% women leaders since day one).<sup>43</sup> Women leaders themselves say that their equal status as leaders enables them to express women’s concerns.

The establishment of adequately gender balanced representation structures is thereby an enabler for women’s role in coordination, but only if it is complemented by actions that also promote and support such structures. Even in formal camps where women’s role is well-established and legally recognised, female leaders are sometimes still not recognised by service providers; for example, in this study many service providers consulted in Kakuma Camp still perceived that “*there are more male leaders than female*”, or saw women leaders as performing only a ‘ceremonial’ or ‘secretarial’ role.<sup>44</sup>

The challenge of achieving recognition and acceptance of female leaders is even greater in many informal or out of camp settings. In these contexts, pre-existing male leaders or representatives (e.g. Mukhtars in Iraq, Shawish in Lebanon, Maliks in Afghanistan, or Majis in Bangladesh) quickly become the default interlocutors between aid agencies and communities, and as their position becomes entrenched (to their material advantage) they become increasingly unwilling to relinquish power, to women or otherwise. The women from Kilo 7 in Iraq, for example, noted a tension between themselves and the Mukhtar, who did not appreciate committee members treading on his toes. Moreover, some service providers in Iraq were simply not aware of NRC’s committees (informal settlement and out of camp neighbourhoods), and in Afghanistan (Herat) NRC’s assigned female site focal points said that service providers “don’t listen to us and they don’t value us... we are in contact with them as other normal community members *not as focal points of NRC*.” By contrast, in Kabul, NRC’s CM project has made great efforts to formalise and promote women’s (alongside men’s) committees in the

informal settlements, including by arranging specific coordination meetings for them with service providers and presenting them to other service providers as “The Settlement Committee” – thereby giving them legitimacy and recognition. According to female committee members, this has allowed them to raise concerns and collaborate with service providers and other stakeholders to respond to needs in their sites – such as building borewells, establishing vocational training courses for women, and negotiating with landowners to avoid eviction. They urged NRC to continue to “advise other service providers to not only rely on Maliks, they should also consult with us”. Similarly, female committee members in Iraq’s Kilo 7 requested wearable visibility to increase the formality and recognition of their roles, which they felt would improve their influence.

““ *The problem is that we are always seeing women through the lenses of men. We don’t think they have a say, we think that they are weak and enslaved. But, they can fight and have a say in their lives - especially if they are given more information and can see that they are valued.*”

Male Protection Staff member, Afghanistan

Formalising and institutionalising gender balanced leadership/representation structures from the outset of a displacement crisis is clearly a critical enabler for women’s participation in coordination. However, CM agencies must also ensure that all stakeholders are informed and sensitised on this structure, and ideally obliged to coordinate equally with both the male and female representatives.

<sup>43</sup> These figures provided by The Lutheran World Federation during a Key Informant Interview

<sup>44</sup> E.g. a staff member from a shelter and site planning agency said “in each Zone there is a chairman who is the leader and a chairlady who is the assistant”.

### 6.3.2 A flexible humanitarian response

Besides establishing, promoting, and training leadership/management structures, the willingness and ability of stakeholders (including the CM agency) in the coordination system to be *influenced* by them is also crucial, and this is illustrated by the case of NRC's work in Iraq. In Kilo 7 (informal settlement), female (and indeed male) committee members were resoundingly positive about their ability to influence NRC, while they were less positive about their influence on other agencies or authorities. They referenced many new services brought to the site as a result of NRC's involvement.<sup>45</sup> Some of these services were provided directly by NRC CM<sup>46</sup> and WASH<sup>47</sup> departments, others through NRC's negotiation with external service providers – a process that continues as new priorities are identified. Similarly, a Neighbourhood Committee from the out of camp context had also managed to solve some communal issues through coordination with NRC, including a major problem of insecurity in the local graveyard. By contrast, another Neighbourhood Committee could not give any example of communal problems solved or new services brought to their neighbourhood, despite having received a similar amount of training during a similar timeframe (around six months) as the committee from Kilo 7 and the aforementioned neighbourhood.

It therefore seems that the ability of some committees to solve problems through coordination was significantly due to NRC's *resources and expertise* to listen to the community, help them set priorities, and to *respond* to these priorities. The particular skills (e.g. obtained through training) of the committee members seem less decisive, therefore, in the impact that the committee members could have through coordination. That does not mean that training and skills are unimportant, but it implies that

capacity building alone is insufficient to ensure that community members (regardless of gender) can have an influence through coordination.

This points to a broader and more fundamental issue in the structure of humanitarian aid and its coordination: accountability and participation can only be achieved if the structure and its parts are willing and flexible to allow their work to be community driven. This is often not the case. For example, for the most prized and controversial assistance – namely cash, food, non-food items, and (depending on context) shelter – the humanitarian coordination system has developed complex and opaque forms of beneficiary selection which prevent any community-based beneficiary identification, including referral by elected community representatives. Indeed, women from authorities in Iraq mentioned that they had a lot more success coordinating with local NGOs who had more flexibility in their work, than with international agencies. If this is the case for the relatively well-educated and well-to-do authority staff, then community members have little hope of being able to engage meaningfully in coordination with INGOs.

Nevertheless, with the support of an agency that has expertise and authority in coordination and negotiation, community representatives – and especially women – may have more hope of being involved in coordination with service providers to plan and implement the services and support that they have prioritised. This was reflected by Iraqi committee members participating in this study, who mentioned the importance of NRC's formal backing in giving them an influence and creating change. Similarly, in Lebanon a greater proportion of female committee members than male felt that being on the committee helped them to influence service providers (91% as compared to 76%),<sup>48</sup> and they expressed a concern that without the backing of an NGO they would lose this influence.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Including: electric lighting in the streets; fences and danger signs around dangerous collapsed buildings; dumpsters; weekly rubbish collection and provision of drainage and sewage networks by the municipality; demining; provision of literacy and IT classes for youth; and establishment of child psychosocial support services within the CFS.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. the lighting, danger fencing and signs, literacy and IT classes

<sup>47</sup> E.g. Provision of hygiene kits, toilet chairs, and hygiene promotion

<sup>48</sup> Based on NRC's Internal Monitoring through FGDs with committees.

<sup>49</sup> Garcia, p.6

## 6.4 ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS, AND TO COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The IOM/WRC Endline Report notes that projects must be designed to “strengthen women’s capacity to build networks as well as skills.”<sup>50</sup> The findings of this study certainly indicate that – without support – displaced vulnerable women have less social capital than men, particularly in out of camp or urban environments, where they also have weaker networks than wealthier and more educated women.

For example, in the out of camp context of Iraq, women Neighbourhood Committee members struggled to name any organisations – even those they had come into contact with directly, and instead spoke generally about “organisations that come to the Community Centre”, of whom they had met a maximum of four. By contrast, men (committee members and local volunteers) had met with some 16 NGOs or UN agencies between them, as well as more than 10 different types of authorities and various voluntary groups.

Men’s greater contact with authorities than women seemed to be in large part a result of their social networks that gave them entry points to various (male) staff at authorities – two informants from a local ministry corroborated this, noting that they tend to have more contact with men since they meet them at informal locations such as the market or cafes. This gives men more ability to influence authorities for provision of services, and they gave various examples of such, including removal of concrete roadblocks; street cleaning; police to patrol the neighbourhoods at night; and street lighting.

Similarly, educated women working at local authorities and for local voluntary associations seemed to have a much wider network than the female committee members – including voluntary groups, local and international agencies, and community leaders such as sheikhs. They attended, and some also organised themselves,

many coordination meetings with a variety of stakeholders – taking place at the offices of the organisation (especially for authorities) or at NRC’s Community Centre.

By contrast, in the informal settlements of Kabul – which provide a comparable context to the Iraq out of camp context – women’s committee members seemed to have strong and growing networks, in part as a result of the CM project, which has initiated gender separated coordination meetings bringing together committee members and agency or authority staff. This provides a structured way for both women and men to engage with service providers. Women committee members appreciated being able to directly contact relevant agencies and thereby understand and influence what services are provided, whereas before NRC’s intervention they did not know who to talk to for which issues, nor how to contact agencies to follow-up on progress of interventions. The women committees cited various examples of services and assistance they had managed to bring to their sites since engaging in coordination. For example, two women’s committees managed to negotiate with WASH providers for the provision of borewells, while another convinced the Department of Education to provide places to 20 women at its literacy centre. Linking women to service providers (and other relevant stakeholders – including more ‘connected’ women) in urban informal settlements or out of camp neighbourhoods is therefore essential, especially since information (e.g. service mapping and visibilities) about working service providers is almost always much weaker in these settings than in formal camps.

Besides links to authorities, NGOs, and voluntary groups, respondents in the Iraq out of camp neighbourhood context also mentioned that imams (including, sometimes, the wife of the imam) and family sheikhs have an influence in the community; moreover, everybody said that they had some kind of contact with these people – both men and women. Similarly, in Afghanistan (Kabul and Herat) women said they would appeal to elders and mullah imams who would represent

<sup>50</sup> IOM and WRC, Endline Report, p.6, p.12

them in “high level places”, and in Kabul some committee members had managed to contact a local business/factory with the result that it began to provide a tailoring training for widows and female headed households in the site. It seems that urban and out of camp contexts offer a wider range of influential people that are quite accessible to all community members, and could therefore be more formally included in coordination mechanisms, or at least, community members should be encouraged to seek their support in solving issues through coordination – particularly issues such as livelihoods.

“ Before [we were a committee and in touch with service providers] the organisations would bring for us anything that they wanted, but now they are bringing services based on our requests and applications.”

Women’s Committee Member, Informal Settlement, Afghanistan

In environments with *newly* displaced populations (rather than protracted displaced or returnees) - whether a camp, informal settlement, or out of camp context – knowledge about and contact with service providers (or other stakeholders) is unlikely to be pre-existing. As such, the CM agency (and others) can play a critical role in promoting the residents’ creation of internal and external networks. For example, in the formal camp environments of Nyarugusu, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei, CM agencies<sup>51</sup> together with authorities and UNHCR facilitate regular or ad hoc meetings in which leaders – male and female – can coordinate with service providers. Moreover, leaders have been trained to know how to contact NGOs, and they all demonstrated a sound knowledge of who is doing what in the camp (enhanced by strong visibility by all agencies). Some of the female leaders said that they had phone numbers of many incentive workers and field staff from agencies, and could call them if needed; they also felt able to visit offices of NGOs in case of an urgent need – though this proactiveness also stemmed from their particular confidence and personalities (see [above sections](#)).

On the other hand, depending on how it implements its coordination mandate, the CM provider could also have the perverse effect of restricting networking and inhibiting the community’s direct coordination with service providers. For example, in one of the informal sites featured in this study, men and women reported to have little direct interaction with authorities and NGOs. This seems to be because the Camp Manager has created a dynamic whereby CM staff are acting as interlocutor between service providers and the community; e.g., they encourage committee members to refer all problems to them (rather than directly to relevant service providers) and, as yet, do not include committee members in coordination mechanisms such as the bi-weekly coordination meetings for all service providers working in the site, which are held off site some 15 minutes’ drive away.

The above suggests that CM agencies in all contexts should play a critical role not only in informing women (and men) about service providers but also in linking them to these providers through in-person interactions. However, as illustrated in prior sections, women’s confidence and skills to interact with service providers must also be built, and their role in coordination with these providers must be formalised and promoted. This is illustrated by NRC’s women focal points in Afghanistan’s Herat formal site, who said they still had no contact with organisations, despite being introduced to service provider staff at monthly meetings. Women must specifically be supported to create ‘networks’, and this might mean conducting a range of different activities to build their knowledge, capacity, and confidence – further suggestions are included in [Section 7](#).

<sup>51</sup> NRC in Nyarugusu; but in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, LWF takes responsibility for direct support, capacity building, and coordination with community leaders – following on from its role as the Camp Management agency (now transferred to the national authorities through RAS)

## 6.5 TIME AND SPACE

### 6.5.1 A neutral and safe public space

Across different contexts, it seems that the provision of a physical space is necessary to facilitate women's participation generally, and also specifically in coordination, since it provides them with a safe and convenient place where they can build their skills and thus their confidence, obtain information, and meet with service providers and others in the community. Women attending the Community Centre in Iraq said that visiting the space gave them more confidence to speak with organisations, and indeed none of the female Neighbourhood Committees had attended any meetings outside of the Community Centre – in contrast to their male counterparts. Women in the urban informal settlements of Afghanistan (Kabul) valued being able to meet agencies at their local Community Centre, since they cannot travel as far as men to raise issues with service providers. While such a space may be particularly relevant in an out of camp setting, providing safe meeting spaces could be equally important in an informal or formal camp setting. For example, the women's committee in Iraq's Kilo 7 specifically requested a space where they could conduct their own meetings and work, and this is also something that was requested by women leaders in Kenya, as well as recommended by CM staff in Tanzania. In addition, CM staff in Bangladesh felt that women's spaces were a "key enabler" for women's role in coordination.

At the same time, in the out of camp context there may be a risk in focussing coordination efforts on the Community Centre, thereby neglecting the neighbourhoods. For example, female Neighbourhood Committee members were aware only of services being delivered directly in the Community Centre itself. As such, any influence they may have extends only to the type of services provided therein (and thus only within the scope of training/awareness sessions) and not for the collective problems facing them at the

neighbourhood or wider city level. Women in this study identified a number of problems in their neighbourhoods but said they had not raised them "because nobody came to the neighbourhood to ask us". This suggests that any coordination efforts taking place from the base of a Community Centre should nonetheless seek to include service providers working outside the Centres, and ensure that committee members are linked to them for coordination.

### 6.5.2 Time to participate

Women's burden of unpaid work and childcare responsibilities was mentioned by many respondents as a barrier to their participation.<sup>52</sup> For example, committee members from Kilo 7 mentioned that they were only able to participate because their children were grown and did not require close supervision, while women in the out of camp context mentioned that lack of time due to childcare and domestic responsibilities left them little time to participate in coordination (or other) activities outside of the home. Similarly in Kenya and Tanzania many respondents said that women's domestic responsibilities meant they had less time as leaders, and service providers also mentioned that since women are the designated 'head of household' for receiving humanitarian assistance, they are sometimes unable to attend meetings because they have to attend the distributions.

At the same time, however, a female leader in Kenya's Kakuma Camp said that domestic responsibility did not have to be a barrier – especially for women whose children were at school; a group of Somali women leaders also enthusiastically explained how they organise their days so as to be able to attend meetings, or find others to help them in the home. It could be that living in the communal environment of an informal settlement or camp makes it easier for women to take on voluntary roles, since they can share childcare responsibilities with neighbours

<sup>52</sup> Barclay, Higelin, and Bungcaras have also observed this. For example, in Ethiopia women reported that they cannot attend local government meetings because the meetings are held when they have conflicting household responsibilities, and in the Philippines mothers with babies could not be involved in meetings because they did not take place in a safe environment where they could participate with their babies, p.21



and relatives living in the same site. It cannot therefore be assumed that women's domestic responsibilities will hinder their participation; nevertheless, agencies must be cognisant of this possibility and explore ways to overcome it. For example, Humanity and Inclusion in Kakuma/Kalobeyi said that they arrange meetings in the morning and make sure they last not more than one hour (after which women tend to leave).

Besides childcare and domestic responsibilities, some women also lack time since they are partaking in livelihoods activities – whether by choice, or because they are the head of the household,<sup>53</sup> or their husbands are unable to work. In Kakuma this seemed to be a particular barrier to women's involvement – demonstrated by the fact that in one of the FGDs almost half of the participants were deputising for the actual women leaders who were at work (e.g. teaching). Since more educated women seem to be more likely to volunteer/be elected as leaders, they are also therefore more likely to have work – and this is something that must be carefully managed by any agency supporting coordination activities, though it applies equally (and perhaps even more so) to men.

## 6.6 RESOURCES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

### 6.6.1 Financial incentives

Financial or in-kind rewards can serve to incentivise women's participation in coordination – particularly in contexts where families do not receive basic assistance such as cash, food, or NFIs. For example, women in the out of camp context in Iraq and informal settlements of Kabul, were keen to have economic or other tangible remuneration for their role in the committees – e.g. reimbursement for transport, or a monthly stipend. In Iraq, they were also grateful for being able to participate in tailoring courses, which

enabled them to bring home clothes they had sewn. Besides helping them to provide for their family needs, being able to show a material *personal* benefit from their participation seemed to improve the willingness of husbands to support their participation in activities (including coordination) taking place at the Community Centre.<sup>54</sup> That said, provision of a stipend or other material benefit must be carefully weighed-up by CM agencies against its risks. For example, it could motivate people for the wrong reasons and distract from their 'public service' role, as well as creating a dependency and potentially limiting the sustainability of the CM intervention since volunteers may cease to work after their incentive payments stop. It may also create tension in the community, as others resent the volunteers for receiving payment.

### 6.6.2 Socio-economic status and participation in the economy

Informants in this study suggested that socio-economic status is important in determining influence on coordination, regardless of gender, though poor women would be especially disadvantaged due to all the barriers discussed above.

“ Poor people cannot have contact with authorities, especially poor women. Rich people [in the authorities] don't need to coordinate with us, so they don't.”

Female Neighbourhood Committee Member,  
Ramadi, Iraq

Various studies have thereby shown that improving women's role in economic activities (e.g. establishing and running businesses or taking employment) can have positive impacts on their ability to participate and be heard in public life. This was also suggested by a service provider in Kenya who said that if women were involved in income generating activities their confidence

<sup>53</sup> E.g. see Phyllis Birnbaum, *On Her Own: How Women Forced to Flee from Syria Are Shouldering Increased Responsibility as They Struggle to Survive*, CARE/Columbia University Press, 2015, p.5

<sup>54</sup> Similarly, women leaders in Gaza have reported that “their mobility and participation comes under less scrutiny when it is associated with financial return to the family”. Barclay et al, p.32.

would grow as they would be engaging with others outside of the home. UN Women presents evidence from four case studies of Gender Equality Programming, where women's economic empowerment resulted in "greater collective self-confidence, [and] enlarged capacity to take on more substantial roles in the management of community affairs."<sup>55</sup> The South Asia Women's Resilience Index found that women's economic empowerment programs can effectively enhance women's leadership through improving the "bargaining power" of women, formalising their right to assets, and involving them in local planning.<sup>56</sup> This implies that if women committee members are provided with livelihoods opportunities alongside their role in the committee, their influence might thereby increase. At the same time, given the scarcity and demand for such interventions, this brings with it the risk that more vulnerable women would be thereby excluded, or other community members will perceive female committee members as personally benefiting from their positions (as per the issue of financial incentives, mentioned above), which could undermine their position as community representatives. Moreover, it could antagonise men, who feel the weight of societal and family expectation to earn money for the family, yet often struggle to do so in displacement contexts.

### 6.6.3 Other resources

On a purely practical level, women's access to certain material resources can make a difference to their involvement in coordination.

For example, in Nyarugusu and Kakuma/Kalobeyei, men have access to bicycles more often than women, which allows them to travel more easily to meetings. NRC gave some women leaders bikes in Nyarugusu and found that this did indeed improve their attendance at meetings; women leaders in Kalobeyei also specifically requested bikes.

Another factor is phone credit: in Kakuma/Kalobeyei, women and men Zone/Village leaders receive phone credit to fulfil their role, and they said this was essential (with most saying that the credit was not sufficient for all the calls they must make); however, Block or Neighbourhood level leaders do not receive this. Mobile phones (and in some cases credit) have similarly been appreciated by women committee members in Lebanon informal settlements and Afghanistan neighbourhoods. In Afghanistan, many households have only one mobile phone, if at all, and typically men would be the ones 'owning' this phone – giving women leaders mobile phones is therefore an important way to facilitate their coordination with service providers, especially in out of camp or informal camp contexts where agency staff do not have offices and may not have a daily presence in the site/area.

Finally, women committee members in Iraq's Kilo 7 and leaders in Kenya's Kakuma and Kalobeyei valued or requested visibility items including identity cards, t-shirts, and jackets to give them greater recognition in their roles.

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<sup>55</sup> UN Women, 2015, p.22. This was also a finding of the IOM and WRC Learning Reports (both Baseline and Endlines): "Program actions that increase women's access to safe livelihoods and economic resources can level the playing field for women and promote the opening of opportunities for all to participate in decision-making." This is something that Help Age International has also discovered in its programmes to support older women in Pakistan, as well as ODI/HPN in research from Niger (see Suzy Madigan, 'Is a humanitarian crisis the time and place for women's economic empowerment?', 21 Aug 2019)

<sup>56</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit. See also Barclay et al, p.32.

## 7

# HOW CAMP MANAGEMENT AGENCIES CAN ENHANCE WOMEN'S ROLE IN COORDINATION

While we cannot assume that women will always participate less than men, the sections above have outlined a range of barriers to participation in coordination that women living in a patriarchal cultural context can face. The first step in responding to these barriers is to analyse the context – tools such as the IOM Women's Participation Toolkit,<sup>57</sup> as well as research tools produced for this study (included in [Annex 3](#)) can be useful for conducting such an analysis. Nevertheless, this study has been able to identify some common themes and suggestions for how CM agencies could bolster the enablers and tackle the barriers to participation in coordination. The recommendations are divided into two main themes: one pertains to enhancing the structures that facilitate women's involvement in coordination; the other relates to building women's capacity and resources to have more influence through coordination. A [third set of recommendations](#) concerns specific steps that can be taken to improve women's safety and protection by strengthening the role of women in coordination.

Though the recommendations are aimed at CM agencies, some of them may also be applicable to other sectors working to improve women's participation more broadly, or to mainstream women's inclusion into their areas of work. Moreover, many of the recommendations could be equally relevant to supporting inclusion of men in contexts where this is also a struggle.

<sup>57</sup> Available at: <https://womenindisplacement.org>

## 7.1 METHODS TO ENHANCE WOMEN'S ROLE IN COORDINATION

### 7.1.1 Establish and support structures that enable and legitimise women's role in coordination

#### 1 Establish, formalise, and promote a coordination and management structure that includes women

It is clear that unless camp/settlement/ neighbourhood governance structures are set-up to include women equally, then men will almost always become the default participants and influencers in coordination. As such, CM agencies must ensure that a gender-equal structure is established – following principles of inclusivity (i.e. including vulnerable and marginalised groups), participation (in how representatives are selected), and do no harm (i.e. ensuring harmful power dynamics are not entrenched or created). CM agencies must consult the community to decide how to structure these mechanisms, including whether to create mixed-gender or separate forums. If they are separated, then the CM agency must consider how to encourage joint working and coordination between the two, and to ensure that men do not end up assuming the burden of coordination for general issues, while women are assigned to work only on 'women's issues'.

Beyond establishing the structure, the CM agency – in conjunction with the relevant cluster or working group – must ensure that it is recognised and preferably officially endorsed and mandated by relevant stakeholders, including hosting

authorities. The CM agency must also then play an *ongoing* and active role in ensuring that all stakeholders (service providers, authorities, other community structures,<sup>58</sup> and the general population) are aware of and coordinating with both the women and men in these structures. This role seems to be of particular importance in out of camp neighbourhoods or informal sites, where there is typically less coordination and less understanding and awareness of community-based structures, especially when no agency has been assigned a mandate to undertake CM functions at the site or neighbourhood level, including coordination and support to community governance.<sup>59</sup>

Over time, women's role in the community governance structures and, by extension, coordination, will likely contribute to a deeper cultural shift whereby women's role in communal matters is recognised and encouraged. However, engaging with men in the community at the outset is likely to be essential to allow women's meaningful role in the formal structures. This study has found that once men are reassured about women's role in coordination and governance structures, they become more supportive. This could include inviting them to visit the physical locations of meetings/trainings. Speaking with both women and men to understand the cultural constraints to women's participation, and how to overcome these, is always a must.

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## 2 Manage meetings with an aim to encourage women's contributions

The way in which a CM agency manages coordination meetings is critical to the extent and quality of women's participation therein. For example, where coordination takes place during mixed gender meetings, the CM agency can encourage women's contributions by alternately asking for women's and men's contributions. Moreover, adjusting the size and scope of meetings could help to encourage women's participation: conducting smaller meetings at the level of

sub-camp or neighbourhood, and with smaller numbers of service provider staff, might provide a more conducive environment for women's participation. Alternatively, separate women's coordination meetings could take place (see [below recommendation](#)).

An analysis of the specific cultural context (in discussion with community members and leaders) will guide judgement on this issue, but to truly enable women's involvement in coordination the ultimate goal should be for their inclusion in mixed gender forums, even if this requires a transition period (which may last the duration of a CM intervention) during which women only meet separately from men. Regardless of whether meetings are single sex or mixed, the timing (hour of the day and duration) as well as location and transport for getting there, and possible provision of childcare and refreshments, should all be arranged to encourage women's participation. This applies regardless of the displacement setting, though the latter is particularly pertinent in urban out of camp settings or large camps, where women may have to travel longer distances to reach the meeting location.

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## 3 Provide a physical space for coordination

Facilitating access to specific meeting spaces for women can help to encourage their role in coordination in contexts where it remains controversial for women to meet with men outside of their own families – this seemed to be the case equally for formal camp, informal sites, and urban out of camp neighbourhoods. Providing women-only physical spaces (and therefore meetings) can also serve as a way to build women's confidence to contribute in discussions, which could later help them to meet in mixed gender forums as well. Moreover, having an 'office' could legitimise and formalise women's responsibilities in coordination. Physical spaces for coordination can take many forms, and while they might be owned and managed by a CM agency, they could also be provided by a third party (whether another NGO,

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<sup>58</sup> E.g. Thematic committees – such as WASH or Protection committees.

<sup>59</sup> See Giovanna Federici (CCCM Cluster), *Desk Review: Urban Displacement and Outside of Camp*, IOM, NRC, and UNHCR, 2014, pp.35-36

or the community themselves) and simply used by the CM agency and community representatives for meetings.

In the urban out of camp environment, CM agencies have established Community Centres<sup>60</sup> to serve as physical bases from which to conduct community level coordination. This can be an essential way to bring urban women into coordination, so long as the coordination efforts taking place from these Centres also include service providers working outside the Centres, i.e. in the neighbourhoods where the women reside. Moreover, there should also be sufficient outreach to ensure that issues at the neighbourhood level can be identified and followed-up. In addition, the locations and quantity of Community Centres should be carefully considered: given the often more limited mobility of women, a single Community Centre within a city will have a certain natural ‘catchment’ area (in terms of how far women are willing to travel to reach it), and is unlikely to enable women from across many different neighbourhoods in the city to be involved in coordination from the same Community Centre location.

As such, a CM agency working outside of camps could explore additional or alternative bases from which to conduct women’s coordination within the urban environment, including offices of authorities or local community-based organisations – which is thereby also in keeping with the ‘localisation agenda’. For example, in Iraq, the Department for Youth and Sport in Ramadi has reportedly recently opened a meeting room specifically for women within the wider government building; this could be a space that could host a women’s coordination meetings for the neighbourhoods which may also give women the confidence to start approaching authority buildings, as well as providing an alternative to the NRC Community Centre which could eventually close (if not handed over to a local provider).

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<sup>60</sup> Known as “Community Resource Centres” in some contexts, such as Iraq

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#### **4 Include women in multiple methods of coordination**

Coordination is more than coordination meetings, and the CM agency can thereby include women in other elements of coordination that may be less impacted by lack of confidence – one of the main barriers to their influence on coordination. The CM agency should be creative and pragmatic in establishing specific techniques and activities that can give women (and indeed men) an important role in coordination – particularly those pertaining to referrals, monitoring, assessments, and reporting. These could potentially involve the use of digital technologies – such as apps that allow real-time service monitoring and referrals, or mapping of safety issues (e.g. “danger spots”) in a camp or neighbourhood.

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#### **5 Cultivate networks, and consider the creation of a specific “Women’s Coordination Network”**

The CM agency must ensure that women leaders are aware of and linked to stakeholders – not as a one-off, but on an ongoing basis. This may be in the form of regular or ad hoc coordination meetings, and may include accompanying women to external meetings. In particular, supporting women to coordinate with *other women* – whether from NGOs, authorities, private business, influential individuals, or voluntary groups – can be particularly helpful to increase their collective confidence and influence, as they can build on and use each other’s networks, experience, and skills. Moreover, it could also be a more culturally acceptable method for women’s participation in ‘public’ life.

The creation of a women’s coordination mechanism, supported by a CM agency, seems to be particularly relevant in urban environments – both informal settlements or out of camp. In such settings, traditional humanitarian actors are normally much less visible and accessible to community members, particularly for women who may be less likely to leave their homes/



Women's Networking Meeting at the NRC Community Centre in Ramadi. (Iraq, 2019) © NRC/ Anna Hirsch-Holland

neighbourhoods, and where there is also a plethora of other influential stakeholders who can help (or hinder) the resolution of problems. For example, in Iraq some influential and more educated women in the out of camp neighbourhoods setting were willing to work with and support women's committee members from both the neighbourhoods and the informal settlement. A pilot "Women's Coordination Network" event was held, which brought together women from NRC's committees, NGOs, authorities, and voluntary groups. Their combined networks were of course much wider than their individual ones, and included both men and women from authorities, NGOs, the community itself, and from volunteer groups. The women attending the event were inspired to see how many potentially influential contacts they could identify as a group. At the same time, many of these contacts – particularly those in authorities – were men, and while some women from the community did not feel confident/comfortable to meet with them, others were willing to do so on their behalf, and this is why a 'Women's Coordination Network' could be of added value.

The CM agency's role would be to support the establishment and initial development of this coordination mechanism, but without trying to maintain ownership over the whole process; instead, the emphasis should be on encouraging the development of women's dynamic, extensive networks. In practice, this would mean identifying and bringing together a range of female stakeholders; helping them to map their networks and define the issues they want to solve; and ideally to help to formalise their role within the broader public institutions and humanitarian structure of the location in question. [Annex 2](#) provides more detail on the steps required to create a Women's Coordination Network, as well as a sample session plan for a launching or scoping workshop.

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**6****Ensure adequate female representation among Camp Management agency staff**

Besides ensuring that the community structures themselves are adequately gender balanced, the same must be true of the CM staff, especially in particularly restrictive cultures where women may be unable to meet with male service providers. While a CM agency may not be able to impact the gender balance of other service providers (though it could certainly advocate for female liaison staff to be assigned), it should at least ensure its own staff has adequate female representation. In Afghanistan's CM project (Kabul and Herat), the recruitment strategy aimed for a two thirds female team, since women can interact with both male and female community members. Female staff also facilitate coordination meetings between male service provider staff and female IDP focal points – something that may have been less acceptable to the community had the meetings been facilitated by male CM staff.

**7.1.2 Build women's capacities and resources**

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**7****Provide training and education opportunities to women leaders**

The study has suggested that women often possess less confidence and experience in coordination compared to men – particularly more economically vulnerable and less educated women. Besides wider societal cultural change, this can be addressed through provision of training and education, and the CM agency must thereby take responsibility for designing and implementing an appropriate capacity building plan for women leaders/representatives – regardless of the displacement context.

The particular topics of training seem less important than the fact of providing it on a regular, ongoing basis to build confidence. Nevertheless, topics that have been highlighted by women consulted in this study include

information on service providers, leadership and communication skills, problem solving techniques, conflict resolution, women's rights, and legal frameworks. In addition, literacy classes for illiterate women could also be a key factor in improving their confidence, as well as providing them with a 'hard skill' needed for some elements of coordination – such as taking notes, filling out monitoring forms, or writing letters and petitions. In some cases, language training could also be critical for women's ability to understand and contribute to discussions in coordination meetings, and to liaise with service providers. While the CM agency should take overall responsibility for designing the capacity building plan for women leaders, they should engage with other service providers to allow access to training and education on a range of topics, including specialised areas that CM agencies may not have expertise in themselves – such as GBV or adult literacy.

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**8****Assign time, resources, and expertise to achieve results**

This study suggested that in many patriarchal contexts women are not in fact actively prevented from participating in public life, but men take on this role 'by default'. As such, with the right encouragement and motivation by a CM agency, women can be persuaded to tackle problems through coordination "in pursuit of shared goals". This means that, besides the provision of formal training, informal follow-up and ongoing coaching and encouragement by CM agency staff is equally important for motivating women and building their confidence – across all displacement settings. CM agencies must factor this into their project planning – ensuring that adequately qualified staff<sup>61</sup> and time are assigned to providing face-to-face support to women in leadership positions over a sustained period of time.

This 'soft' support becomes even more effective when the CM agency has access to in-kind or financial resources to enable women to solve the

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<sup>61</sup> I.e. staff with technical understanding of Camp Management and coordination, as well as soft skills in coaching and motivation, problem-solving, and community liaison.

issues they have prioritised, or at least where the CM agency has sufficient expertise in negotiation and coordination to be able to support effective advocacy to other service providers.<sup>62</sup> Once women start to achieve results through their involvement in coordination, a positive cycle will ensue: “the more we can achieve, the more influence and respect we will have”. This will of course also be supported by the other measures suggested above and below.

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**9**

### **Provide material resources and livelihoods opportunities to support women’s role in coordination**

Provision of certain material items can serve a range of purposes to enhance women’s coordination role. First, items such as mobile phone, airtime/credit, and notebooks can be pivotal in helping women to undertake practical tasks involved in coordination including writing reports and contacting service providers or other leaders. Second, items such as t-shirts, tabards, or identity cards can give women (and men) legitimacy and recognition in their role. Depending on the context, other items might also be useful for women – e.g. bicycles or torches were mentioned by women in this study. Besides the practical use of these items, they can also serve to incentivise and motivate women to participate.

Beyond the provision of these small tangible inputs, research also suggests that taking steps to enhance women’s economic status is linked to their increased confidence and authority, which can improve their role in and influence on coordination. As such, CM agencies may want to partner with livelihoods providers to thereby enrol women leaders in their livelihoods projects and/or to proactively reach out to women that have previously benefited from livelihoods interventions to encourage their involvement in governance structures. However, provision of a stipend or other material benefits, including enrolment in livelihoods projects, must be carefully weighed-up against risks – e.g. creating tension with other members of the community

and/or challenging the sustainability of the intervention.

### **7.2 Methods to enhance women’s safety through women’s role in coordination**

This study has found that though there are some issues that are equally raised by men and women in coordination, there are others that are more often raised by women, as well as more effectively dealt with by women. In particular, women have a better understanding of safety issues pertaining to the site or neighbourhood layout and infrastructure, and related to women’s duties (e.g. fuel and water collection, or attendance at distributions); they are also better placed to identify and respond to GBV cases. As such, there are specific steps that CM agencies can take to enhance women’s role in coordination to address women’s safety and protection issues in particular:

- A** CM agencies should facilitate a coordinated approach among community-based protection mechanisms, including mapping out community-based protection mechanisms present in their areas of operation, and linking women leaders and members of governance structures (such as neighbourhood or site committees) to these mechanisms – e.g. ‘GBV focal points’ or ‘Protection Committees’. The women leaders/committee members may have more extensive networks than the GBV/Protection focal points, while the latter may have more insights into GBV/Protection issues. The women leaders/committee members can thereby ensure that these insights are shared and discussed in coordination forums that the GBV/Protection focal points may not have access to. These linkages could be formed through a one-off introduction, or through a regular structured meeting – depending on the context and ‘proactiveness’ of the women involved.

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<sup>62</sup> Including other departments of the CM agency, or external agencies, authorities, etc.





NRC staff speak to women about protection concerns at NRC's Community Centre in Nangahar. (Afghanistan, 2017) © NRC/ Jim Huylebroek

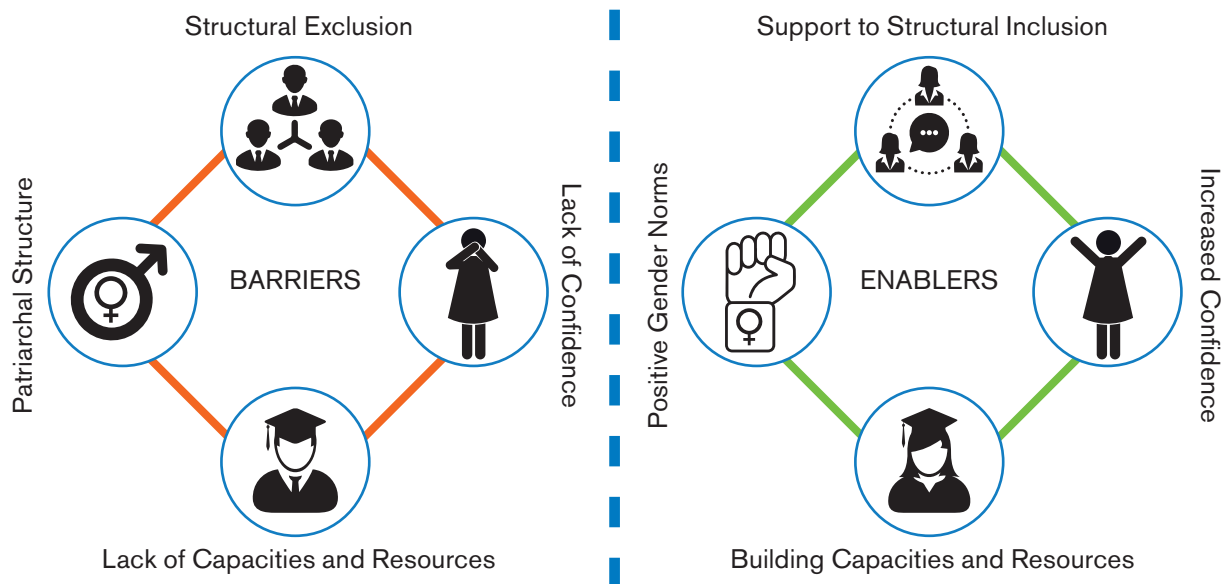
- B** CM agencies should ensure that women in governance structures are regularly introduced to agencies delivering services that impact on women's safety – not only protection agencies, but also WASH, site planning, distributions, and others. Even if it is best practice for these service providers to consult with women, they may fail to do so on their own initiative, or may do so in an ad hoc or irregular fashion, and with randomly selected women who may not have the skills to adequately assess and communicate the issues pertaining to women's safety.
- C** Even if a camp or neighbourhood governance structure comprises of mixed gender members, the CM agency should set aside specific meetings, or timeslots within meetings, for gender segregated discussions. Male staff should sit with male leaders, and female staff with female leaders – to enable them to raise issues that they may not feel comfortable to raise in a mixed gender forum.
- D** CM agencies should train women in governance structures to undertake their own 'safety mapping' exercises (similar to the method employed in the IOM/WRC Women's Participation Toolkit), and they should be supported to present the findings of these mapping exercises in coordination forums. There is also a potential here to explore how technology could facilitate women's role in this regard – e.g. through the development of safety mapping and monitoring apps that could enable women to map out and report safety issues using smartphones.
- E** Since women are clearly much more likely to identify and respond to cases of GBV, CM agencies must ensure that female leaders/ committee members receive adequate training on referral principles and pathways, and GBV response/prevention – as well as being linked to any service providers or community members that are providing women's protection services. Ideally, the training itself would be provided by an agency specialising in GBV and women's protection; however, training on basic referral principles and pathways could also be delivered directly by CM agency.

# 8 CONCLUSION

This study has identified various ways that displaced women are involved in coordination within camps, informal settlements, and out of camp settings. There are encouraging examples of women from committees or leadership structures who, through their coordination with each other, with service providers, and with other community members or leaders, have managed to achieve positive changes in their communities. They have brought new essential services, they have directed assistance to the most vulnerable, they have addressed security issues, and they have helped to design appropriate and relevant responses – including those that improve women’s safety and protection.

At the same time, the study found that many women still face significant barriers to their participation in, and influence on, coordination – more so than their male counterparts. While the precise barriers (as well as enablers) vary from context to context, there are some general trends, and in all contexts the intersecting effects of patriarchal culture, structural exclusion, lack of confidence and education, and poor networks serve to mutually reinforce one another in preventing women’s meaningful involvement in coordination.

Nevertheless, the study has also found that most of these barriers can be mitigated, to a greater or lesser extent, through the efforts of a CM agency. The contribution of the CM agency falls into two broad categories: the first addresses the structures and mechanisms that can often exclude women from participation; the second addresses the capacity constraints that can limit women’s confidence and skills, and thereby their influence. On the first, this encompasses all actions that ensure women’s role in coordination mechanisms and governance structures is formalised and facilitated from the outset of a displacement response, and that strong sensitisation and awareness raising takes place about their role – not just among community members but also among other working agencies, including authorities. This sets the foundation for women’s participation. On the second, this involves providing structured support (training, coaching, skill-building, and potentially livelihoods opportunities) over a sustained period of time, as well as provision of resources and expertise to help women to solve problems they are trying to address through coordination. The diagrams below illustrate how the cycle of exclusion can be transformed through structural inclusion and capacity building.





Female committee members participate in a meeting to identify community challenges, organised by NRC in Jalalabad. (Afghanistan, 2017) © NRC/ Jim Huylebroek

[Section 7](#) set out a number of specific steps that can or should be undertaken by a CM agency: some of these are minimum conditions, without which women's role in coordination will not be achieved. Others are strongly advised in order to enhance women's influence. A further set of recommendations specifically related to safety and protection is also provided, since if women's role in coordination is supported in the right way, they can play a key role in addressing sensitive issues of women's safety.

Although this research has concentrated specifically on coordination, many of the steps mentioned above apply more broadly to women's participation in leadership. As such, by including these steps in a contextualised community governance strategy and action plan, the CM agency can make considerable progress not only in women's role in coordination, but women's leadership more widely.

Moreover, there are other steps that can and should be taken by other actors, that will be complementary to the CM agency's efforts. In particular – as we could see in Kakuma Camp especially – a broader set of women's protection and empowerment programming, as well as improved education for girls alongside boys, has the potential to fundamentally change the patriarchal cultures that can be so inhibiting to women's participation and influence in the public sphere.



**PART 2**

# “WHEN THEY SPEAK, YOU LISTEN”: THE ROLE OF OLDER WOMEN IN DISPLACEMENT

Members of a site management committee meet in their informal settlement. (Lebanon, 2014)  
© NRC/ Sam Tarling

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through this study, NRC has developed and piloted a methodology for Camp Management and other agencies to understand the role that older women play in supporting their families and communities during displacement, including in formal camps, informal sites, and urban out of camp neighbourhoods. In better understanding older women's role in the community, including in the protection of women and girls, Camp Management agencies can then develop methods for harnessing the role of older women to improve humanitarian outcomes, including women's protection; some such methods are suggested in this report.

While it is undisputed that crisis-affected women can and should participate in humanitarian response, and that special efforts must be made to include and empower them, these efforts have not normally extended to older women. Older women *and* men are both frequently excluded from analysis and activities, rarely specifically consulted, and almost always considered only in terms of their vulnerability rather than their potential to be active participants in humanitarian response to displacement. This exclusion is exacerbated for older women in many displacement contexts, since they are much less likely than older men to have a pre-existing leadership role and hence less likely to be consulted or included by humanitarian agencies. Most older women informants in this study said that they were not consulted by humanitarian agencies and did not feel included in their activities; many lamented that since displacement their role was diminished – particularly in formal camps, where aid agencies were more plentiful and active than in out of camp settings.

However, excluding older women from humanitarian analysis and participation initiatives undermines their dignity and deprives them of their rights; may cause or exacerbate mental health and psychological issues; and misses an opportunity to harness their experience and

position for the benefit of the wider community and humanitarian operations – particularly for women's protection and safety. Since Camp Management agencies have a fundamental role to play in facilitating the meaningful participation of men and women in the management of displacement, they also have the potential to enhance and support the role of older women. Although many participation initiatives encourage the establishment of new mechanisms and structures (e.g. 'committees'), this research sought to understand how Camp Management agencies could understand the *existing* roles that older women play and build on these, rather than only imposing new participatory mechanisms.

In order to understand the role of older women, the study has drawn on anthropological approaches, which means assessing relationships and knowledge in the community – in particular concerning the roles and influence of grandmothers, mothers, and other family members; decision-making patterns in the household; and knowledge and practices related to the well-being of women and children. Conducting this assessment and analysis can allow humanitarian practitioners to understand and then capitalise on the "cultural capital" of the community, rather than simply imposing on them a foreign cultural doctrine and practice. The study thereby developed a four-step process for understanding the role of older women, which is supported by practical tools (included in [Annex 3](#)) and can be replicated by Camp Management or other agencies in the field. The process involves in-depth consultation with different demographic groups in the community, as well as with local staff and particularly active or influential older women.

The study involved field work in four locations: Afghanistan (urban informal settlements and a peri-urban formal site); Iraq (informal settlements and urban out of camp neighbourhoods); Kenya (formal camp); and Tanzania (formal camp). The

different locations provided contexts that varied not only by culture, but also by displacement type, including recent and protracted displacement, as well as refugees, IDPs, and returnees. Despite the variety in contexts, some striking similarities were observed across all of them, as well as subtle differences, in terms of how older women are supporting their communities, including with regards to the safety and protection of women and girls.

#### **Older women's position and role within their communities:**

- Command respect and authority from all other community members – albeit in some cases diminished due to displacement-induced vulnerability and loss of traditional roles.
- Play a key role in handing down traditions and customs to younger generations, and advising others in their community as well as providing emotional support.
- Play a conflict resolution role within and between families, including between husband and wife, parents and children, children with other children, or adults with other adults.
- Contribute to the domestic and childcare responsibilities of the household, and in some cases also the financial income or in-kind resources.
- Have extensive social networks and understanding of the community, including historical knowledge.

#### **Older women's impact on women and girls' safety and protection:**

- Given their significant role in protecting and handing down traditions, older women can have a key influence on the continuation or transformation of customs and practices that may harm or help women and girls – such as early marriage and domestic violence.
- Older women in most contexts seem to be able to influence the behaviour of adult men (particularly their grown-up sons or grandsons) – including behaviour towards wives and children, to the extent that some older women claim they can actually stop men from behaving violently.
- Older women are more likely than older men to support non-traditional GBV response methods, as well as divorce if this is what a victim wants. However, at the same time, many older women do still favour a mediation approach emphasising the unity of the family, which may lead to persuading women to stay with abusive husbands – contrary to GBV response best practice.
- On decisions about marriage and divorce, older women can be pivotal, sometimes having an equally or even more influential role than the older man, and being able to stop a marriage that they disapprove of. They also advise adolescents who may be entering into illicit relationships, providing 'warnings' to both parties about the risks involved.
- Older women can have an influence on the extent to which women and girls participate in the community – e.g. attendance at school, work, or humanitarian services.

Though the precise nature of older women's roles will vary not only by context, but also by family and individual personality (hence the need for an in-depth analysis, as suggested above), the broad trends highlighted above lead to several general recommendations that can be contextualised for a range of settings. These suggestions provide methods for Camp Management and other agencies to engage with older women to enhance their supportive role in the community:

- 
- ① Include older women – particularly those who are already influential and active in their communities – in community engagement initiatives, including in inter-generational governance structures where they can support their younger counter-parts – **for Camp Management agencies.**

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  - ② Establish safe spaces that can be used by older women to (a) develop a livelihoods activity and (b) to provide their 'protective' role – e.g. provision of emotional support and advice, and conflict resolution – **for Camp Management agencies with support of Protection and Livelihoods.**

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  - ③ Formalise and shape older women's protective role to support referrals; respond to protection cases; and provide behaviour-change awareness. For older women to take on these roles they should be trained using “dialogical communication methods” – a process by which harmful practices are discussed and respectfully challenged in a way that builds new consensus, rather than simply imposing new ideas – **for Protection agencies with support from Camp Management.**

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  - ④ Livelihoods and income-generating activities for older women – **for Livelihoods agencies with support of Camp Management.**

Older women can and do play a key supportive role in their families and wider communities during displacement. However, it is also evident that many of them feel like their role as advice-givers and transmitters of culture is being displaced by the work of humanitarian and development agencies. Engaging older women and restoring their influential role in society is therefore imperative, not only for the value this can have for the well-being of other community members, but also for the protection of their own rights and dignity in displacement.



## 1

## INTRODUCTION

The humanitarian sector is increasingly cognisant of the role that crisis-affected women can and should play in humanitarian response, and the need, therefore, to make special efforts to include and empower them.<sup>63</sup> However, in reality such efforts have normally not extended to older women. Older people are frequently excluded from analysis and activities entirely,<sup>64</sup> and almost always considered only in terms of their vulnerability rather than their potential to be active participants in displacement management or humanitarian response. This exclusion is exacerbated for older women in many displacement contexts, where older men are much more likely to have – by default – a pre-existing leadership role and hence to be consulted or included by humanitarian agencies.<sup>65</sup>

Ensuring meaningful participation of displaced women and men in the management of their displacement situation is a foundational objective and core activity of the Camp Management (CM) sector. Traditionally, the participation element of the Camp Manager’s role would be achieved through establishment of and/or support to governance or ‘leadership’ mechanisms (e.g. camp committees or block leaders), and more generally in efforts to engage the community – including women and girls – in activities designed by the CM agency.

However, as recommended in the IOM/WRC Women’s Participation Baseline Learning Report, we must “shift mindsets and reflect on how humanitarian actors could support how women and girls already participate at household and community level in collective action.” This research responds to this recommendation with specific reference to older women – seeking to understand the role that they are already playing in their community, to see how CM agencies (or others) could capitalise on this role to support the community more broadly, and particularly to support other women.


The report presents the findings of a qualitative study into the role that older women are playing in their communities in a range of displacement settings,<sup>66</sup> and thereby suggests possible steps that could be taken by CM and/or other agencies to (a) replicate this kind of study in their own project in order to (b) develop mechanisms to enhance and capitalise on these roles – particularly with regards to women’s safety and protection. Some suggested methods for (b) will be presented, but the emphasis is on the process of understanding and reflecting on older women’s roles, before responding with defined activities and initiatives at the field level.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. in 2016, high level leaders at the World Humanitarian Summit agreed that “the capacity, knowledge, and impact that women and local women’s groups consistently display in a crisis is [...] rarely supported due to [...] structural inequalities”, and called for changes to ensure women’s empowerment in humanitarian action. World Humanitarian Summit, *Women and Girls: Catalysing Action To Achieve Gender Equality (High-Level Leaders’ Roundtable)*, 2016. See also: Alison Barclay, Michelle Higelin, and Melissa Bungcaras, *On The Frontline: Catalysing Women’s Leadership In Humanitarian Action*, Action Aid 2016.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. “Many surveys – such as demographic and health surveys – only collect gender-based violence data on women aged between 15 and 49” – Poppy Walton, ‘I Went to the EU Development Days and Older Women Were Invisible’, Help Age International Blog 2018

<sup>65</sup> As per the findings of this study and secondary literature, where ‘elder’ males often form part of traditional leadership structures.

<sup>66</sup> Namely: formal camps where the Camp Management agency has a formal mandate; informal (i.e. spontaneous, self-settled) displacement sites where the Camp Management agency may or may not have a formal mandate; and out of camp contexts (where the displaced are scattered among host community in a defined area – e.g. a neighbourhood) where the Camp Management agency is unlikely to have any formal mandate.



Safura, 60, caring for her new-born grandson; his mother died after giving birth. They are IDPs living in a camp in Herat. (Afghanistan, 2019) © NRC/ Enayatullah Azad

Specifically, the research will seek to answer the following questions, looking for similarities and differences between different displacement contexts:

- ❶ To what extent and in what ways are older displaced women participating in NGO/UN/ Authority-led (“agency-led”) participation mechanisms (e.g. committees, groups), and how can Camp Management actors encourage or enhance the role of older women in these mechanisms?
- ❷ Separate from agency-led initiatives, in what ways might older displaced women participate in and support their communities (both within and outside the immediate family) – particularly with regards to women’s protection?
- ❸ How can Camp Management actors learn about the particular role of older women in contexts where they are implementing Camp Management interventions?
- ❹ How can Camp Management actors capitalise on the findings of (3) to enhance the protective role that women may play in their communities?<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Camp Management Toolkit recommends that “strategies to effectively involve women can make use of their specific social position and existing cultural roles rather than trying to involve them in ways that go against tradition”, IOM, NRC, and UNHCR, *Camp Management Toolkit*, 2015, p.54

# 2

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 DEFINITIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research concentrates on contexts where Camp Management (CM) projects are being implemented in the various displacement settings that may be served by a ‘Camp Management approach’, including formal camps, informal sites/settlements,<sup>68</sup> and out of camp urban neighbourhoods.<sup>69</sup> The research focusses on the displaced communities residing in these settings – including internally displaced persons, refugees, and returning refugees/IDPs.

The UN definition of an “older person” is 60+ years; however, in many societies a younger or older age is used since old age is linked to death rates, retirement ages, and social conventions. As such “older women” has been defined according to each context analysed in the research<sup>70</sup> in consultation with local staff during the field work planning, and verified again during primary data collection with community members. A common theme that emerged during all field work is that the community’s understanding of who is older is dependent on a range of factors, particularly: age, physical appearance and ability, and position in the family (“grandparent”). Due to the latter two factors, many communities consider people in their fifties to be “older” or “elders”.

The research investigates the participation and role of older women in different spheres, falling into three main categories: first, in agency-led structures, initiatives, or projects; second, in the ‘public’ sphere generally (i.e. outside of immediate and extended family) but separate from any agency-led initiatives, whether at a group or individual level; and finally in the ‘private’ sphere (i.e. within immediate and extended family) and independent of agency-led initiatives. The Camp Management Toolkit “degrees of participation”<sup>71</sup> provides a framework for understanding and analysing the extent of older women’s participation in agency-led initiatives. However, to understand older women’s role outside of agency-led initiatives, in both the public and private sphere, the research employed an anthropological approach, drawing on a methodology developed by Dr Judi Aubel in The Grandmother Project, which involves assessing how older women relate to others within their community and families, and how they are involved in transmitting cultural norms and practices in the community.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Terminology used in the study corresponds to local naming conventions

<sup>69</sup> Where displaced persons are living in accommodation with and among the host community

<sup>70</sup> This approach is also recommended by Jo Wells in *The Neglected Generation: The Impact of Displacement on Older People*, HelpAge International 2012

<sup>71</sup> *Camp Management Toolkit*, p.48

<sup>72</sup> Judi Aubel, *Involving Grandmothers to Promote Child Nutrition, Health and Development*, World Vision 2014, pp.36-47

## 2.2 SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources included studies, reports, and project reviews pertaining to the role and participation of older people in a range of contexts. Primary data collection then allowed further investigation into the actual and potential role of *displaced* older women in settings with CM interventions, including through piloting of tools that use an anthropological approach to understand the role and relationships of older women and others in the community.

Primary data collection took place in four countries, of which three currently have NRC CM projects (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Tanzania) and one (Kenya) has other NRC interventions<sup>73</sup> but not a CM project. These contexts covered a range of displacement settings and different types of CM interventions – further details are included in [Annex 1](#) (Detailed Methodology).

**Table 1:** Summary of research locations

Location	Displacement setting	Type of displacement	Nationalities
Afghanistan: Kabul	Urban Informal settlements (protracted)	IDPs, refugee returnees	Afghan
Afghanistan: Herat	Peri-urban formal and informal sites	IDPs	Afghan
Iraq: Ramadi	Out of camp urban neighbourhoods	IDPs, IDP returnees	Iraqi
Iraq: Ramadi, “Kilo 7”	Urban informal settlement	IDPs, IDP returnees	Iraqi
Kenya: Kakuma	Formal camp; formal integrated settlement	Refugees	Multiple, including South Sudanese, Somali, Burundi
Tanzania: Nyragusu	Formal camp	Refugees <sup>74</sup>	Congolese and Burundian

Data collection comprised of 36 key informant interviews and 21 focus group discussions with men and women of different ages from the displaced community and staff implementing camp management projects. In addition, staff from other service providers working in the project locations provided some insights on their work with older women and their perspectives about the role of such women. A total of 194 people (140 women and 54 men) were consulted.

<sup>73</sup> Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance; WASH; Livelihoods; and Education.

<sup>74</sup> Note: data collection was limited to speaking with service providers and CM staff – see further details in Annex 1.

## 3

## PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Nearly a quarter of the world’s women are over the age of 50,<sup>75</sup> and it is estimated that older people make up 10–30% of displaced people, with a majority being older women.<sup>76</sup> International law and policy clearly asserts the right of older people to be included and actively participate in community life, including in humanitarian contexts.<sup>77</sup> Yet older people are frequently excluded or are considered only in terms of their vulnerability. While it is true that older people have specific needs and can be very vulnerable, they are also “adults who have had tremendously rich lives and a lot of experience, and a lot of potential to give back to society in some way.”<sup>78</sup> UNHCR, in its ‘Guidance on Working With older Persons in Forced Displacement’, aptly describes the need to recognise and involve older persons, highlighting the important roles that they play,<sup>79</sup> and this sentiment is supported by the findings of NRC’s 2018 Women’s Participation Study in eastern Afghanistan – which inspired the current research. During that study, women from Neighbourhood Committees<sup>80</sup> particularly emphasised that “women’s problems” are solved by older women and that older women are the only women who can speak to ‘maliks’ (male community leaders).

“ I am elderly and I help solve the problems. If I leave it to the youth, they will be in conflict with each other and they will fight.”

Older woman member of NRC’s Neighbourhood Committee, Afghanistan<sup>81</sup>

And yet, at least in the humanitarian context, the role and position of older women in the community is often not recognised and even less often is it considered as an opportunity. For example, in a gender analysis of the Rohingya Refugee response the nutrition section notes that lactating mothers sought advice from older women in the community, but presents this as a negative point (since mothers do not access specialist support) rather than a dynamic to capitalise on.<sup>82</sup> This seems to be a problem also present among development projects such as health and nutrition programmes which, according to The Grandmother Project, tend to “focus exclusively on children and women of reproductive age, and either ignore grandmothers or view them as an obstacle rather than a resource.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ann Stewart and Jennifer Lander, *Transforming Gender Relations in an Ageing World: A Policy Discussion Paper*, HelpAge International 2018, p.2, footnote 1

<sup>76</sup> Veronique Barbelet, *Older People in Displacement: Falling through the Cracks of Emergency Response*, HelpAge International/ODI 2018, p.1

<sup>77</sup> Principle 7 of the UN Principles for Older Persons (adopted by the General Assembly in 1991) states that older persons should remain integrated in community life and participate actively in the formulation of policies affecting their wellbeing. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging in 2002 linked this to humanitarian contexts, calling for “enhanced contributions of older persons to the re-establishment and reconstruction of communities and the rebuilding of the social fabric following emergencies.” (See: Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging 2002, Second World Assembly on Ageing, Objective 2 under Issue 8 (“Emergencies”), paragraphs 55-56). In addition, the IASC has provided a briefing on humanitarian action and older persons, which advocates for “[facilitation of] older persons’ involvement in decision-making, and in humanitarian prevention and response activities.” – see Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Humanitarian Action and Older Persons: An Essential Brief for Humanitarian Actors*, 2008

<sup>78</sup> Cynthia Powell of HelpAge International as quoted in IRIN News article: <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/88403/haiti-dont-forget-elderly>

<sup>79</sup> UNHCR, *Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement*, 2013

<sup>80</sup> Established by NRC as part of its Urban Displacement Out of Camp (UDOC) project

<sup>81</sup> As quoted in Anna Hirsch-Holland, *Women’s Participation Study Report (Afghanistan)*, NRC 2018 [Not publicly available]

<sup>82</sup> Iulia Toma, Mita Chowdhury, Mushfika Laiju, Nina Gora, and Nicola Padamada, *Rohingya Refugee Response Gender Analysis: Recognizing and Responding to Gender Inequalities*, ACF/Save the Children/OXFAM 2018, p.29

<sup>83</sup> Aubel, 2014, p.vi.

Part of the problem is the pervasive perception that older people's role is largely passive: "it is assumed that after 60, older people 'can't work' and 'just sit'" - especially in a disaster, where most processes exclude older people's participation in community and camp life.<sup>84</sup> For example, an ODI study of older displaced people in Ethiopia and South Sudan found a disconnect between older people's perceptions of their changing roles and understanding of these issues among aid actors: "older people told us that Western values and education and the role given to younger people in the camps created tensions between generations, and that young people had taken over their role as community leaders."<sup>85</sup> By contrast, NGO staff working in the camps assumed that nothing had changed in older persons' roles<sup>86</sup> - suggesting that these staff have failed to develop a sufficiently nuanced understanding of older people's actual and potential roles. It is therefore not surprising that NGOs have not developed adequate systems for ensuring older people's participation. Even where older people are consulted or involved, this is likely to target primarily a smaller subset of respected "elders", who, as well as being male, normally have a higher socio-economic standing in the community and are therefore unlikely to represent the wider population of crisis-affected older people.<sup>87</sup>

According to some practitioners we are now at a "critical juncture" where this attitude is starting to change and there is "an increased recognition of older people as contributing actors, not just vulnerable recipients of assistance."<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, examples are primarily found among age-focused humanitarian agencies (principally HelpAge International), or in the development sector where there seems to have been more innovation and good practice in this regard.

Excluding older women from humanitarian analysis and participation initiatives can cause or exacerbate mental health and psychological issues of older people<sup>89</sup> while depriving them of their rights;<sup>90</sup> prevents establishment of services and protective mechanisms tailored to their specific needs; and misses an opportunity to harness their experience and position for the benefit of the wider community and humanitarian operations - particularly for women's protection and safety.

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<sup>84</sup> Will Day, Antoinette Pirie, and Chris Roys, *Strong and Fragile: Learning from Older People in Emergencies*, HelpAge International, 2007, p.6

<sup>85</sup> Barbelet. p.9

<sup>86</sup> Barbelet. p.22

<sup>87</sup> Barbelet. p.v

<sup>88</sup> Barbelet. p.27

<sup>89</sup> Older people in an ODI study "linked mental health and psychological issues with their loss of power, authority and role in the community as a result of displacement." Barbelet, p.v

<sup>90</sup> UN Principles for Older Persons state that "Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being, and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations" (Article 7); "Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities". Adopted by General Assembly resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991 (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OlderPersons.aspx>).

## 4

# OLDER WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN AGENCY-LED ACTIVITIES

The lack of older people's participation, including and especially older women, was highlighted in much of the secondary literature consulted for this study, and corroborated by primary sources. In Iraq, neither the older women nor the service providers consulted in the research could mention any examples of older women's participation at any levels. They had not been approached for provision of information, and all of the older women participating in the research said that this was the first time they had ever been consulted. In Kenya, the older women informants said that they were only consulted after specific emergencies (e.g. a recent flooding) and otherwise they felt forgotten, especially as their assistance was dwindling. They said that agencies do not consult with them as they assume that leaders will take information from the older people – however, they said that camp leaders were not accessible and did not proactively consult with them. While a small number of older people, including women, have a leadership role in traditional 'Committees of Elders', these are not recognised, let alone consulted and included, by service providers; moreover, informants were lacklustre about the influence of these committees due to cultural changes in the camp.

In Afghanistan and Tanzania, older women did apparently attend some information sessions for 'passive information transfer', and others attended FGDs and community meetings for 'consultation'. Moreover, in Tanzania there are some activities implemented by agencies that facilitate older people's 'functional' participation – e.g. a mobile phone charging station, which is staffed by older people who can earn a small income by providing this service for camp residents.

Moving closer to the 'interactive' end of the participation spectrum, there are older women participating in camp leadership. For example, in Herat (Afghanistan), 17% of NRC's female committee members are 50 or above, while 8% are 60 or above; in Kabul, 31% are 50 or above while 15% are 60 or above, and some are also volunteering as Community Health Workers with another agency. Similarly, in Iraq, 18% of NRC's neighbourhood committee members are aged 50 or more, while 9% are 60 or above.<sup>91</sup> These numbers are quite encouraging and suggest that there is at least a foundation for 'interactive' participation and ultimately 'ownership'.

While CM staff did not indicate that particular efforts or initiatives had taken place to support the older women's role in the committee, some informants suggested that in Afghanistan the Maliks (male community leaders) invite older women to meetings with service providers, and the older women felt able to speak with these stakeholders. This highlights the potential that older women have in playing a coordination role, since (in the Afghanistan context, at least) they have more freedom to meet with men and are more accepted in playing a 'public' role than their younger counterparts.

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<sup>91</sup> Numbers for Kenya could not be obtained, but on observation there were some older women leaders.



Base Khalaf, 60, and her grandchildren.  
(Iraq, 2018) © NRC/Tom Peyre-Costa

**Table 2:** Degrees of Participation of Older Women in the research field locations

Degree of Participation	Examples
Ownership	None – though potential for this in places where older women are members of Site/Neighbourhood Committees
Interactive	Some older women involved in site/neighbourhood management committees or have camp leadership positions – which in some cases enables them to participate in decision making with service providers
Functional	Some older people involved in agency-designed initiatives (Tanzania and Afghanistan). Others involved in Camp Management leadership structures or traditional structures (e.g. 'Councils of Elders') but decision-making in humanitarian response is limited
Consultation	Some older women consulted by agencies during FGDs or assessments – normally ad hoc rather than systematic/regular
Information transfer	As per above (consultation)
Passive	Some older women attending information and awareness sessions, or community meetings during which they do not participate but only listen



# 5

## OLDER WOMEN'S ROLE OUTSIDE OF AGENCY-LED STRUCTURES

### 5.1 COMMUNITY'S PERCEPTION AND TREATMENT OF OLDER PEOPLE

While there were of course differences across the studied contexts, there were also some clear common themes. In particular, in all contexts older people are respected and revered within their communities, and generally cared for by their families and neighbours. In Iraq they were described as “at the top of everything” and that “when they speak, everyone listens”; similar sentiments were expressed by adult men and women as well as adolescent girls in Kenya. Older women are respected alongside older men, but most participants agreed that the older man has the highest status in a family until he dies, at which point the older woman takes his place.

At the same time, a few respondents – particularly in Kenya's Kakuma/Kalobeyi camps and in Afghanistan's Herat informal sites – also highlighted the fact that older people can be a burden, “another mouth to feed”, and that older women who are separated from their family are particularly vulnerable and need extra care from neighbours and service providers.

Moreover, even if older women are universally respected, the extent of their influence varies. In particular, it seems that access to humanitarian assistance and livelihoods affects the extent of older women's influence, and that this in turn can be linked to displacement context. For example, if displaced families have access to emergency household assistance (such as food, NFIs, and cash) and are also isolated from livelihoods opportunities that would typically be open to older women (e.g. cultivation or small-scale trading), this lessens the role of the older woman in her family and therefore – possibly – her authority within that family. This was observed in the formal camp context of Kakuma, in contrast to

the urban out of camp and informal site settings of Iraq and Afghanistan where older women were more involved in providing for their families – especially if sons or husbands (adult or older) had been lost due to conflict.

At the same time, if the conditions of a camp or informal camp environment exacerbate the vulnerability of older people (e.g. in Afghanistan's Herat; or in Kakuma where there is declining assistance without durable solutions), this also seems to diminish their role in the community. Moreover, in a long-established camp with a ‘heavy’ presence of NGOs undertaking behavioural change activities or providing services that previously would have been fulfilled by older women, older women's role is diminished. These conditions are all present in Kenya's Kakuma camp, where there was a sense among many informants that older women's traditional roles are being eroded since displacement, and as a consequence their status in the community is weakened.

### 5.2 OLDER WOMEN IN THE 'PRIVATE' (FAMILY) SPHERE

#### 5.2.1 Status in the family

Participants across all contexts agreed that the elder man in the family is generally the “boss”, but they also agreed that the elder woman has a major role to play. One of the male participants in Iraq noted: “If she asks you to do something, you must do it”, and other Iraqi men joked that the older woman is “the police” of the family, and they especially emphasised that once the older man dies the elder woman becomes the first authority in the household: “she supports her family in everything and does everything”. As such, the role of many older women in Iraq has increased since

displacement and losing husbands through the conflict. The older women must then do everything for the family such as paying rent, buying food, and following up on documentation and legal issues.<sup>92</sup>

In all contexts, informants suggested that – regardless of the presence or not of an older man – older women also provide childcare and other domestic responsibilities, and in case of orphaned children they are often the ones to take the children in.<sup>93</sup> Adult men in Kenya also emphasised that older women had particularly good knowledge about the household’s needs, since they stay at home and care for the children. At the same time, some informants – particularly in Kakuma camp – said that older women’s role is diminishing as many have become too weak since displacement.

“*My grandmother is around 70 and she likes cooking, and in the evening she gathers her grandchildren together and teaches them how to sing and tells them stories*”

Young South Sudanese woman, Kakuma Camp, Kenya

### 5.2.2 Contributing to family income and food basket

In most contexts, participants emphasised that older women (and in some cases older men as well) were involved in paid or unpaid livelihoods activities – such as cultivating vegetables for the family, running small retail business such as market stalls or small neighbourhood shops, or perhaps undertaking a simple craft such as wool spinning in Afghanistan. Moreover, older women in Iraq and Afghanistan would go to the markets to do the family shopping, and would sometimes take their daughters or grandchildren with them.<sup>94</sup> South Sudanese informants in Kakuma noted that older women know a lot about cultivation and agriculture, which they were engaged in back

home, but seem unable to do in the camp. The older women expressed sadness that they cannot pass these techniques to the younger people in Kakuma, where there is apparently inadequate land or irrigation for cultivation.

### 5.2.3 Solving family disputes

Participants across all contexts agreed that older women play an important role in keeping the unity of the family – both in terms of protecting the ‘institution’ of the family itself and defending its interests, as well as solving disputes through mediation, often together with the older man of the family (but without him if he has died). Most informants emphasised that older women (and men) are involved in trying to prevent (sometimes “at all costs”) the separation of husband and wife, and in Iraq the men in particular highlighted older women’s role in resolving marital problems – see [Section 6.2](#). However, among the South Sudanese older women in Kakuma it seems that Councils of Elders or elder men are more involved in solving marital disputes, while older women emphasised their conflict resolution role primarily in relation to disputes between parents and children (also mentioned by staff in Tanzania). At the same time, they said “if the son is religious he will listen to his mother, but in most cases men will not listen to elder women” – this contrasts significantly from the findings of Iraq and Afghanistan where older women held more sway over their adult sons – as explained in [Section 6.1](#).

### 5.2.4 Knowledge and expertise

South Sudanese older women in Kakuma camp as well as Iraqi older women see themselves as playing a key role in sharing religious and cultural knowledge and practices. For example, they accompany children to mosques or churches, and teach them how to pray – particularly when the

<sup>92</sup> This is similarly the case for Syrian refugees – see Evelyn King Mumaw, *Woman Alone - the fight for survival by Syria's refugee women*, UNHCR 2014

<sup>93</sup> This has also been recognised in other contexts such as South Sudan (Barbelet. p.v) and among Syrian Refugees (Mumaw/UNHCR, 2014)

<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in Pakistan women who cannot be accompanied by a male head of household could only access services in the company of older female family members – on whom *purdah* [social rules] restrictions are not so strict. IDMC, *Briefing Paper on Flood-Displaced Women in Sindh Province, Pakistan*, 2011, p. 9

mother is too occupied with domestic work to do so. In addition, across all contexts, older women were recognised as playing an important role in supporting parents in matters of health and nutrition, including maternal and child health – based on the older women’s extensive experience in these matters, and especially when public health services are lacking. However, adult and older women consulted in Kakuma also said that older women’s expertise in this regard was being displaced by NGO staff, and that this left many older women excluded and denied a role in the community.

“ NGOs are taking the role of older women: the older women are told not to give their advice, and then they feel like they are being denied a role in the community.”

Adult woman in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

In general, while all respondents appreciated the role of older women in the family, a few respondents in Iraq and Afghanistan also mentioned that older women can have high expectations of their family and even interfere “too much” in the lives of their offspring and in-laws.

## 5.3 OLDER WOMEN IN THE ‘PUBLIC’ SPHERE

### 5.3.1 External duties and relationships

“ As women become older, they become bolder”  
(NRC staff, Tanzania)

In Iraq and Afghanistan, participants generally agreed that older women are more able to participate in the public sphere compared to younger women due to their freedom of movement (if healthy enough) and ability to meet with non-family member men. In Kenya’s Kakuma camp, this was emphasised less, though a small number of older South Sudanese women do have positions on Councils of Elders along with older men – which solve problems among the South Sudanese community in the camp. In Iraq and

Afghanistan, older women do not seem to have a role in traditional community leadership structures like those in Kakuma. However, some have become known in the community as leadership figures (described by men in Iraq as having a “masculine” personality), and may be asked by others in the community to represent their interests – for example, an influential woman interviewed in Iraq’s Kilo 7 settlement said that other women asked her to represent them during meetings with one of the main service providers in the site. Moreover, she claimed to advise the Mukhtar and a local authority representative living in the site to “make them stronger”. As mentioned above, this similarly applies in Afghanistan, where older women said that Maliks invite them to join meetings with service providers. In Kakuma camp, it seems that some older women do take on unofficial leadership roles in the community by raising issues on behalf of other older women, as well as visiting and advising women, and collecting food to redistribute among the neediest families in their block.

In the out of camp context of Iraq, women working at local authorities gave various examples of older women who have managed to bring services and assistance to thousands of people in their neighbourhoods through their local influence.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, some informants also emphasised that older women’s ‘external’ role becomes essential if she has lost her husband; this includes, for example, approaching local authorities, going to the market, and running errands in general. By contrast, this was not something mentioned by informants in the camp setting of Kakuma, where older women alone were seen as being dependent on neighbours and humanitarian aid.

In both displacement contexts of Iraq, participants mentioned that older women often walked children to school – especially the children of female-headed households, since younger women feel unsafe walking outside, but older women do not face such issues so long as they are physically able: “nobody will make violence against us”.

<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, time limitations meant it was not possible to contact and interview these women during field work.

More generally, it seems that older women in all contexts are particularly adept in developing large and intricate social networks, while gaining the trust of a range of community members – including children. This enables them to understand the private dynamics of relationships within their community – such as between husbands and wives, and adolescent girls and boys. This knowledge then enables them to make ‘interventions’ in such private affairs – of which more below.

### 5.3.2 Provision of advice and emotional support

Across all contexts, older women were seen as a source of advice and emotional support in their communities or tribes – including for people outside of their immediate families. In Kenya, the older women described themselves as a role-model for the extended family and neighbours, especially on matters of religion and culture. At the same time, they lamented the fragmentation of the community in camp life: “in the previous life we brought up the community together, as one unit”.

Staff and community members in Iraq and Afghanistan also mentioned that older women are often ‘leading’ the mourners at funerals and the celebrations at weddings, as well as visiting bereaved families to offer condolences. All participants agreed that older people – men and women – give advice to people both inside and outside their families and that they can do this because of their wisdom gleaned from years of experience and having faced so many “ups and downs”. Older women were seen as particularly approachable persons from whom to seek support and advice – including by younger people. One young man in Iraq mentioned his preference to ask older women in the site for help, as he feels shy with younger women; and adolescent girls in Kenya said that older women “do good things for young people” and like to give them advice on many things, including “how to be responsible” in the household – particularly in terms of household chores such as cooking and cleaning.

### 5.3.3 Community problem solving and conflict resolution

Informants from across the contexts agreed that, to a greater or lesser extent, some older women are involved in conflict and problem solving at the community level – i.e. among neighbours, or within the tribe or wider extended family. Indeed, in Iraq’s Kilo 7 settlement, some participants felt that certain strong older women were able to solve problems that even the major family Sheikhs or Imams failed to solve. In Kenya (Kakuma) and Tanzania (Nyarugusu) this role was formalised through traditional justice systems that are presided over by elders both male and female. In Tanzania, staff suggested that older women would especially be involved in resolving issues pertaining to child neglect, domestic violence, and disputes between women.

““ There is a Council of Elders where grandmothers and grandfathers come together to discuss issues at the tribal level. It’s helpful because they make people obey the laws.”

Adolescent girls from South Sudan in Kenya’s Kalobeyei Settlement

Besides these ‘formal’ structures, older women also solve disputes between spouses, children, and neighbours in a more ad hoc way by bringing together disputants and mediating to solve the problem; indeed, adolescent girls suggested that older women are even more involved than men in such issues because the men are busy. They also said that older women are called upon by families who do not have their “own” elder to mediate. This informal role was also emphasised in both Iraq and Afghanistan – though informants disagreed on whether they had a greater or lesser role than men in this regard. In Iraq, participants particularly cited examples of older women intervening to solve conflicts between families that stemmed from children’s arguments or from marital problems, as well as solving marital problems themselves – of which more below. On children’s arguments, though these may seem trivial, respondents agreed that they can easily escalate to the parents (normally the mothers) and wider community, and that older women could intervene and solve the issue by talking “grandma to grandma”.

# 6

## OLDER WOMEN'S PROTECTIVE ROLE, OR NOT

### 6.1 INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Participants agreed that various family members may be involved in solving problems between a husband and wife, and in serious cases eminent community members such as imams (Iraq and Afghanistan), family sheikhs or Maliks (Iraq, Afghanistan), or Councils of Elders (South Sudanese refugees) could also be involved. However, many also agreed that this is an area where older women in particular have a significant role to play - not just in their own families but also in other families in their neighbourhood or site.


Within their own families, older women will give advice to their married sons and daughters, particularly where the son has a “bad attitude” towards his wife – this was mentioned by participants from across demographic groups in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, older women in the informal settlement context of Iraq all agreed *that they can stop violence by a husband towards his wife* through their interventions. The men described how the parents of an abused wife may go to speak to the parents of her abusive husband to solve the problem, at which point the mother or even grandmother of said husband will speak to him to make him stop. Outside of their own families, older women may still intervene by talking to an abusive husband or father about his behaviour, or mediating between a husband and wife. For example, staff in Tanzania said that some older women have their own ‘offices’ where they undertake counselling and ‘mediation’ on their own initiative, and older women from Iraq’s Kilo 7 settlement said that they advise parents not to use violence against their children. Also in Iraq, male

informants mentioned a case of an older woman who intervened when a husband was being violent towards his wife. The older woman appealed to the man to cease such behaviour, and when he did not, she reported it to the wife’s family and thereby helped the wife to obtain a divorce with her family’s support. The informants felt that this particular older woman’s personality and leadership skills enabled her to play such a role. In Kenya, South Sudanese older women said that in the past they would talk to men who were beating their wives, but nowadays this role is fulfilled “by UNHCR.”<sup>96</sup>

### 6.2 MEDIATION IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although there are examples – particularly from Iraq – of older women supporting women to obtain a divorce from abusive husbands, most informants emphasised that older women (and men) normally attempt to prevent divorce through mediation. South Sudanese older women are part of a Council of Elders that decides whether or not to grant a divorce (aiming for the latter) – and apparently tries to deal with problems before they reach UNHCR and GBV responders; adult women also said that older women often advise a wife to stay with her husband. Similarly, staff in Tanzania said that the main objective of older women intervening in marital disputes was to keep the husbands and wives together. *However*, ‘mediation’ in cases of GBV is contrary to recommended best practice in GBV response, since it generally aims at protecting family unity over and above the protection of victims of domestic abuse and can inadvertently condone the perpetrator’s

<sup>96</sup> It can be assumed that in referring to UNHCR they were referring to the range of agencies providing GBV response under the auspices of UNHCR, e.g. UNHCR, IRC, DRC, and others.



Jordan, 2016. © NRC/ Hussein Amri

behaviour.<sup>97</sup> As such, older women's role and influence has the potential to exacerbate or perpetuate GBV. At the same time, in those cases where older women do support women survivors to separate from their abusive husbands, they may be criticised by the community – this was indicated by men in Iraq who gave an example of an older woman who “threw fuel on the fire” by supporting a couple to obtain a divorce.

### 6.3 ADVICE ABOUT MARRIAGES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Besides mediation in marital problems, participants in Iraq mentioned that certain older women play a significant role in advising adolescent boys and girls in illicit relationships. One influential older woman from the informal settlement described her role in this regard: she said she would advise the boy to “back-off” and warn the girl of the risks of being involved with the boy. Similarly, in case of girls falling for

“inappropriate” men, she would advise these girls and help them to avoid a potentially harmful liaison.

In terms of decisions relating to the marriage of young women and men (or, unfortunately, girls and boys), participants recognised that the whole family would be involved in discussing this, and the precise role of the older woman, older man, and father varies by context and also by different families in the same contexts. For example, in Iraq and among South Sudanese refugees it seems to be the father who manages the whole process; while according to staff working in Tanzania's Nyarugusu camp, it is the older women among Brundian and Congolese refugees who manage the marriage process – e.g. assessing potential matches and negotiating dowry payments.

Nevertheless, in most contexts, informants felt that older women could have a decisive impact on the final decision regarding a marriage. Numerous examples were presented whereby older women

<sup>97</sup> UNFPA, Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, 2015, Box 7, p. 44.

had stopped marriages of which they disapproved. It seems that older women's extensive networks and historical knowledge of families in their wider communities positions them well to advise on possible matches, and they seem willing to provide their opinions, which will mostly be listened to. However, older women from Kakuma said that their role in this regard was much diminished in the camp, since arranged marriages were becoming less common and instead "people fall in love and get married".

Adult men and women in Afghanistan, along with adolescent girls from South Sudan in Kenya, all agreed that grandmothers were also key in 'guiding the brides' about married life – e.g. "how to treat your mother-in-law, how to manage your home, and how to stay happy in life without fighting with your husband".

## 6.4 ADVISING ON WHERE WOMEN AND GIRLS GO AND WHAT THEY WEAR

In terms of girls' attendance at schools, most respondents from all contexts agreed that – even if older women are mostly uneducated – they value and support the education of their grandchildren. However, some respondents said that this support is focussed on boys more than girls, e.g. in Afghanistan and among some South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma/Kalobeyei. On the other hand, adolescent girls in Kalobeyei said that older women are more encouraging of their education than older men; the older women emphasise that girls need to learn something since they cannot rely on cultivation, and they regret that they were not educated themselves.

“Some of the older women tell us 'your generation is different from ours – you don't know how to cultivate, so you need to go school'”

“They want you to have an education because they didn't have this themselves and they can see the benefit it has.”

South Sudanese adolescent girls, Kalobeyei Settlement, Kenya

In the refugee camps of Tanzania and Kenya, women and girls seem to have relative freedom of movement, while in Iraq, all respondents agreed that decisions about where women and girls can move around is primarily the husband/father's decision. However, it seems that older women can also influence this decision in both directions. In the out of camp context, the older women mentioned that they might stop a daughter-in-law from attending activities/work outside of the home since it would detract from her domestic duties; while in the settlement context the older women said that a girl's grandmother may argue with the father to convince him to allow the girl to move around (citing an example of a girl who was forbidden to go on a school trip). While participants implied that the grandfather would (in theory) have more influence, it is only the *grandmother* who is willing to enter into a fight with her son.

On the issue of how women and girls dress, it was generally agreed that older people are influential on this matter, and tend to have more conservative views than younger family members. As such, in Iraq or Afghanistan girls living with grandparents may therefore be veiled earlier than those who do not. However, girls consulted in Iraq did not mind wearing the veil – on the contrary, they wanted to wear it as a sign of their maturity and sophistication. In Kenya, South Sudanese girls said that older women dress in traditional clothes that are more 'respectful' than the clothes that younger people wear, and that the older women try to influence what the younger people wear – though apparently with little success.

## 7

# METHODS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE ROLE OF OLDER WOMEN

The findings presented above point to several broad patterns with regards to older women's role in displacement-affected communities, and these are also supported by other research. For example, anthropologist Dr Judi Aibel has carried out an extensive review of the roles of grandmothers in more than 40 non-Western cultural contexts,<sup>98</sup> and identified certain core roles that grandmothers play in almost all these contexts,<sup>99</sup> and which also appear to be present in all of the displacement contexts studied here. Nevertheless, there are subtle differences as well – both between and within different contexts.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, there will always be some older women who are more active and influential in their communities, while others are more passive and dependent. As such, understanding the subtleties of the roles that older women play in a given context is an essential first step in designing interventions that support and capitalise on their role.

## 7.1 METHODS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF OLDER WOMEN

This study took an anthropological approach to understanding the role of older women, and it is recommended that such an approach is taken by CM actors hoping to design interventions that can harness the influence and role of older women. Taking an anthropological approach means

assessing *relationships* and *knowledge* in the community – in particular concerning the roles and influence of grandmothers, mothers, and other family members; decision-making patterns in the household; and knowledge and practices related to the well-being of women and children.<sup>101</sup> Such an assessment can allow CM agencies (or other humanitarian practitioners) to understand and then capitalise on the “cultural capital” of the community, namely: “the cultural norms, practices, roles and networks that constitute important resources for families and communities to promote their harmonious development in society.”<sup>102</sup>

A four-step process of assessment and design pertaining to the role of older women is recommended (with mentioned tools available through the link provided in [Annex 3](#)):

**Step 1 (Tool 1):** Consult with local staff on the attitudes towards older people, and the role that they play in the displaced community. Depending on the context and the project, national staff may have more or less accurate understanding. For example, in a refugee context where there are large cultural and social divides between the host community and displaced, the national staff (if coming from the host community) may have a superficial understanding of the social dynamics among the refugee community. By contrast, in an

<sup>98</sup> Aibel, Judi, *Grandmothers: A Learning Institution*, (2005), Washington, D.C.: Creative Associates International/USAID, 2005.

<sup>99</sup> Advising and guiding younger generations on a variety of issues; supporting young mothers in child care and upbringing of children; promoting family health and providing home treatment for illnesses; advising male family members on issues regarding the well-being of children and women.

<sup>100</sup> For example, the South Sudanese grandmothers in Kenya seemed to show less inclination to challenge men (son or husbands) and played less of a core role in family dispute resolution compared to in Iraq.

<sup>101</sup> Aibel. 2014, p.31

<sup>102</sup> Aibel. 2014, p.47





Jordan, 2016. © NRC/ Hussein Amri

IDP context where national staff may even come from among the IDP community, it is likely that they will have a better understanding.

**Step 2 (Tool 2):** Consult with different population groups to understand the different internal and external roles of various community members/ demographic groups, and what are their different areas of expertise and authority. If the local team already has a strong pre-existing knowledge and experience (see above), then this step may require less time/fewer focus groups.

**Step 3 (Tool 3):** During the course of Step 1 and Step 2, informants should be asked if they know of any influential or particularly ‘helpful’ older women, or women leaders, who should then be interviewed to provide further insights on how they came to play this role and to understand how their role might be further supported. A ‘snowball’ technique can help to identify more influential older women.

**Step 4:** Taking into account the particular needs of the community, including with regards to women’s safety (e.g. those that have been identified following safety mapping exercises and discussion with women – see IOM/WRC Women’s Participation Toolkit)<sup>103</sup> as well as the findings from Steps 1 – 3, the project team should consider a range of possible activities that could bolster or capitalise on older women’s roles. These should be presented back to a select number of people in the community – from various demographic groups – to obtain feedback and refine the ideas prior to implementation. Depending on the initiatives selected (see some suggestions below) it may also be strategic to partner with another specialist agency – e.g. health or GBV related.

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<sup>103</sup> Available at: <https://womenindisplacement.org>.

## 7.2 METHODS FOR SUPPORTING THE ROLE OF OLDER WOMEN

The research undertaken has focussed primarily on understanding the role of older women, rather than ‘testing’ any ideas for how to capitalise on this. However, based on reflection with team members and some of the participants in the field research, a few suggestions are presented here. Some of these suggestions are aimed specifically at CM agencies, while others may be of more relevance to agencies working specifically on women’s protection and prevention or response to GBV.

The research has shown that many older women have significant influence and a key role to play in supporting both their immediate and extended families, and some also have an important role in the wider community. Their role often concerns some of the most sensitive topics that humanitarians and development workers may struggle to deal with – including domestic violence, early or forced marriage, and the treatment of women and girls generally. Moreover, older women’s comparative freedom of movement and expression, and their willingness, in many cases, to ‘pick a fight’ with their husbands or adult sons, uniquely positions them to challenge some of the most private and harmful behaviours with respect to women’s protection.

### 7.2.1 Older women’s inclusion in governance structures

Age-focussed organisations in various contexts have developed specific older person’s governance structures and volunteer networks, such as “Older People’s Associations”. While there are many benefits of OPAs,<sup>104</sup> these structures and other age-focussed volunteer initiatives have typically been employed to enable older people to support

other older people, rather than the wider community. For example, HelpAge in Haiti established a network of older community outreach agents working at camp level to collect data and provide home-based support for highly vulnerable older people,<sup>105</sup> and after the 2007 Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, older persons’ committees disseminated early warning messages to vulnerable older persons and their families.<sup>106</sup>

However, older men and women may have a valuable role to play in broader community management and support – not just in issues pertaining to other older people. Indeed, evidence suggests that involving older women in intergenerational governance structures may serve to strengthen the influence of younger women. For example, NRC’s Women’s Participation Study in Afghanistan found that a girls’ shura (local community committee) had managed to solve some disputes in the community with the support of elderly women; and in Pakistan, Concern Worldwide staff encouraged older women to speak up on behalf of all women, as they command respect within the community.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, many older Iraqi and Afghan women consulted in this study said that they felt able to meet and liaise with male staff from authorities or NGOs, while younger women did not feel able to.

Intergenerational leadership is also recommended in UNHCR’s *Leadership Training Manual for Young Refugee Women*, which advises that “older, established women leaders should also be part of the [young women’s leadership training] group, to provide role models to the younger women and to undertake a mentoring role in the future.”<sup>108</sup> This was also something recommended by adult men in Kakuma camp, who suggested that Lutheran World Federation (LWF)<sup>109</sup> should support elders to work with the Youth Parliament to solve problems.

<sup>104</sup> T. Suthep and A. Muange, *Older People’s Associations: A Briefing on Their Impact, Sustainability and Replicability*, HelpAge International, 2016, p.4

<sup>105</sup> Jessica Hartog, *Disaster Resilience in an Ageing World: How to Make Policies and Programmes Inclusive of Older People*, HelpAge International, 2014

<sup>106</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Humanitarian Action and Older Persons: An Essential Brief for Humanitarian Actors*. 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Supriya Akerkar and Rhea Bhardwaj, *Good Practice Guide: Embedding Inclusion of Older People and People with Disabilities in Humanitarian Policy and Practice*, ADCAP 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Eileen Pittaway, *Leadership Training Manual for Young Refugee Women*, UNHCR 2006, p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Providing Peacebuilding activities and support to Camp Leaders in Kakuma and Kalobeyei.

Identifying and engaging with pre-existing older women leaders in the community, such as those who participate in ‘Councils of Elders’ or similar traditional community structures, is an essential first step for CM agents to capitalise on older women’s influence and authority in the community. [Section 7.1](#) above suggests methods for identifying these women, and coming to understand their role and how it might be supported further – while also being cognisant of the ‘negative’ role that they may play with regards to women’s safety (see [Section 6](#)). Besides these traditional or unofficial leaders, there may be other influential older women who are keen to volunteer to become members of leadership structures even without being specifically approached or targeted. However, to be sure of ensuring inclusive and representative membership in governance structures, CM agencies should apply specific quotas for older women within such structures, and proactively seek out older women volunteers if none are forthcoming.

Besides older women’s inclusion in governance structures, given their intimate knowledge of what is happening in the community, CM agencies and others should (a) consult with them at strategic points in project planning and (b) link them to any outreach initiatives or governance structures, including camp/neighbourhood committees as well as outreach staff or volunteers. Indeed, older women (non-leaders) in Afghanistan specifically requested “to be given priority in community meetings and other activities so we can use our past experiences to inform the future interventions.”

### 7.2.2 Older Women’s Safe Spaces

In various camp and displacement settings, agencies have established “Age Friendly Spaces.”<sup>110</sup> For example, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, HelpAge International established community centres under the management of

local associations of older persons in camps and return areas – aiming to provide a space where older persons could meet and access support, as well as to facilitate advocacy within the community and with leaders.

Such spaces have been designed primarily in the mindset of older people as ‘beneficiaries’ or recipients of services, even if they play an active role within them, and have reportedly provided older people with many benefits.<sup>111</sup> However, an additional or alternative function of such spaces could be to provide a location inside the site where older women could enhance the safety of *other* members of the community, through provision of emotional support, counselling, and advice. For example, such a space could allow older women to meet privately with adolescents who may be engaging in harmful behaviours and need to be supported in private, away from their families. In other words, the “Older Women’s Safe Space” would be designed not only as a safe space provided *for* older women, but a safe space provided *by* older women.

This is something that is apparently already provided by some older women refugees in Nyarugusu refugee camp – as reported by CM staff – and was also a suggestion made by some of the older women consulted in the Informal Settlement in Iraq. They supported the idea of providing a space under the guise of another type of service – such as a small shop or laundrette – in order to serve as a discreet space that is ‘owned’ by the older women themselves rather than run by a service provider, as would be the case for a traditional ‘Women’s Friendly Space’ or ‘Age Friendly Space’. Of course, if older women are to be using these spaces to support survivors of GBV or to advise adolescent girls, then the selection and training of these women to ensure they are following GBV prevention and response best practice is also critical – as discussed below.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. Cox’s Bazaar: GiHA Brief No. 4: Interconnectedness Gender Age and Disability Issues in the Rohingya Refugee Response.

<sup>111</sup> According to Jo Wells, benefits included: reduction in isolation; shelter from rains; a mechanism to ensure that older people are represented in the community; a place to for older people to register for support and access income-generating activities; and a space for intergenerational activities, conflict resolution, and literacy classes. *The Neglected Generation: The Impact of Displacement on Older People*, HelpAge International 2012, p.24.

### 7.2.3 Older women as Protection Focal Points

Engaging older women as protection focal points – whether for referral, advice, emotional/ psychosocial support, or behaviour change – could be a valuable community-based approach for protection-focussed agencies to enhance their response in displacement settings. If these community focal points were then linked to CM-supported governance structures, the response could be enhanced even further.

While adult men in both Iraq and Kakuma (South Sudanese refugees) suggested displeasure at having organisations intervening in their private family problems, and in Kakuma the older women felt displaced by service providers’ handling of ‘family problems’ as well as other matters such as childbirth and breastfeeding, some informants suggested that organisations could engage older women to enhance and benefit from their influence and respect in society. For example, adult men in Iraq’s Kilo 7 settlement suggested that organisations should build trust and interact with the community by working closely with influential older women. These women could mobilise volunteers from among the neighbours to help them solve problems within families, refer women survivors, and even support organisations in delivering awareness sessions (e.g. on the dangers of early marriage) to support behaviour change. An adult woman in Kakuma camp also suggest that older women could be engaged as volunteers in the clinics, hospitals, and child protection offices – where they could provide advice and emotional support.

“ NGOs should give older women a role in the community and involve them in decision making”

Adult woman in Kakuma Refugee Camp

Given that many older women have wide networks and intimate knowledge of private domestic matters, they could be a key resource for linking survivors of violence to protection agencies or services. This is evidenced in Tanzania, for example, where Women’s Protection staff have found that – subsequent to adequate training or sensitisation – some older women are now referring cases to Women’s Protection Centres, whereas previously they would have only tried to convince wives to stay with their husbands in the face of domestic violence. It should go without saying that any engagement of older women in agency-supported protection initiatives would need to be accompanied by specific training and sensitisation of the women. This was also recommended by girls consulted in the Kenya camps, who agreed that older women should be trained by organisations<sup>112</sup> “since they are the ones advising us”.<sup>113</sup>

Besides their potential to refer cases, advise others, or provide emotional support, older women could also be engaged in awareness-raising activities for the protection and promotion of women’s rights. This is an approach that some protection-focussed agencies are already working on – for example in gender programming in South Sudan, where they have recognised the role that older women can play in supporting gender norm change among young women.<sup>114</sup> However, given older women’s significant influence on their families and in society more generally their involvement could also facilitate wider behaviour and social change, including among mature men who are typically the most influential in society and often obstructive of gender norm change.<sup>115</sup>

Harnessing the authority of older women to promote behaviour change is the main thrust of The Grandmother Project, which uses a “Change through Culture” approach to capitalise on the role of grandmothers as family decision-makers,

<sup>112</sup> They specifically mentioned Danish Refugee Council, which has a Women’s Protection and Empowerment project, as well as GBV prevention and response project. The participants in the FGD were all beneficiaries of the DRC project.

<sup>113</sup> Note: a recent study by IOM/WRC (presented during the 2019 Global CCCamp Management Retreat in Geneva) on participation of adolescent girls in South Sudan indicated that they prefer peer-to-peer support, rather than receiving advice from older generations. As such, the extent to which older women could be given a formal or informal role in advising adolescents would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>114</sup> Barbelet, p. 23.

<sup>115</sup> E.g. see Kristine Anderson, *Tearing Down the Walls: Confronting the Barriers to Internally Displaced Women & Girls’ Participation in Humanitarian Settings*, UNHCR 2019, p. 35.

advisors, and coaches for younger women and their families.<sup>116</sup> The approach was developed to respond to issues of child health and nutrition; however, this research has demonstrated that older women's authority and influence permeates many more themes than this, including matters of women and girl's protection. Moreover, though the approach was developed for and has been mainly applied in a development context, the longevity of most humanitarian operations would provide a similarly stable environment within which to pursue such an approach, and indeed could be essential to address increases in protection threats to women during displacement. This is also illustrated by the case of Kakuma in Kenya, where more than a decade of women's empowerment and gender equality programming indeed seems to have created a cultural shift in the camp (see the companion report on women's role in coordination).

The "Change through Culture" approach involves including grandmothers in group dialogues to explore and discuss existing cultural values, roles, and resources; as well as strengthening communication between generations and building community consensus using the influence of older women. This study has indicated that older women often have traditional notions of how to protect their relatives/community members that are not in line with GBV best practice and women's empowerment – e.g. intervening in an issue without informed consent, putting pressure on daughters-in-law not to work, or encouraging women to stay in an abusive marriage. However, the "Change through Culture" approach involves engaging older women in "dialogical communication methods" in which their received wisdom on various issues is *respectfully* challenged and possibly therefore altered – to the benefit of other community members. Besides The Grandmother Project, which has successfully used this method to change attitudes towards girls' education and marriage as well as child health and nutrition, other agencies have also successfully harnessed the influence of older women (and men)

to address harmful behaviours. For example, HelpAge International and its local partners in Tanzania (albeit not relating to a displacement context) established 'Village Older People's Committees' (VOPCs) to reduce witchcraft accusations against older women. The committees, which were trained to facilitate seminars and discussions on gender roles and responsibilities and issues facing vulnerable groups, were strikingly successful, with reported witchcraft related violence being reduced by over 90% in the 72 villages where the project was implemented.<sup>117</sup>

“Before we were displaced, we were respected. But now the culture has changed, and we don't have a role”

South Sudanese older woman refugee in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

Directly engaging older women as community-based volunteers for protection, particularly GBV prevention and response, is likely not something that a CM agency (and its staff) will have the expertise and capacity to address, so would therefore need to be taken on by a specialist protection actor. However, the CM agency would have a key role to play in coordinating and liaising with these older women focal points/volunteers, including through linking them with governance and leadership structures and thereby helping them to address women's safety issues on a wider scale in the camp or other displacement setting – for more recommendations on this, see [Part 1](#) report on women's role in coordination.

#### 7.2.4 Livelihoods and Income generating activities for older women

In situations of displacement or post-conflict, and especially in informal sites or out of camp where humanitarian assistance is less available, older women often take on a huge burden of responsibility for their families, and many older women consulted in this study thereby wanted access to income-generating opportunities to

<sup>116</sup> Grandmother Project, 'Grandmothers - An Invaluable Resource for Adolescent Girls', *Grandmother Project Bulletin Issue #13*, 2015

<sup>117</sup> Julia Powles and Robert Deakin, 'Seeking Meaning : An Anthropological and Community-Based Approach to Witchcraft Accusations and Their Prevention in Refugee Situations', *New Issues In Refugee Research*, UNHCR 2012, p. 15.

enable them to support their families. Given that healthier older women generally seem to have more freedom of movement than younger women, they may also be more able to leave the house to undertake paid work. This could enable them to contribute additional income to the household and thereby relieve some domestic stress, and in turn reduce domestic violence which, as shown in various research,<sup>118</sup> is exacerbated by economic hardship.

Besides being able to support their own families, the ability of older women (as well as their younger or male counter-parts) to have an influence in the wider society is determined “not only by local rules and values, but also by their *ownership and management of natural and other resources*,”<sup>119</sup> hence why we see that some wealthier older people retain a strong influence in their communities even after displacement. This is something that older people in refugee camps have noted themselves – identifying a link between their “declining social status in refugee camps and loss of control over natural resources and assets.”<sup>120</sup> As such, bolstering the socio-economic standing of older women could in turn increase their influence, which they could use for the benefit of problem solving and conflict resolution in their community.

Finally, with some creativity, certain livelihoods initiatives could also be linked to suggestion 7.2.2 above – “Older Women’s Safe Spaces” – e.g. women’s-run shops, kitchen gardens, or small businesses like the ‘charging stations’ of Nyarugusu could also provide a space for older women to provide their protective role in the community. In Afghanistan, NRC established women’s shops (albeit not targeting older women) in a neighbourhood where women’s movement and freedom was particularly restricted, and customers reported that one of their main reasons for visiting the shop was to meet and socialise with other women. In Kenya’s Kakuma camp, older women from South Sudan were saddened that they could no longer practice and pass on their cultivation skills; if they could be supported to re-establish this activity – e.g. through grey-water filtration gardens – they could return to playing this role, and if it was implemented as an inter-generational activity it could also give them the space to interact with and advise younger people on matters broader than just gardening. These older women also suggested that if they could be supported to make a “group business” or to have access to relief items, they could ensure that items were distributed to the neediest in the community.

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<sup>118</sup> E.g. C. Hennion, ‘Displacement and violence against women in Afghanistan’, *Forced Migration Review* 46, 2014; and R. Horn, ‘Exploring the Impact of Displacement and Encampment on Domestic Violence in Kakuma Refugee Camp’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 23, Issue 3, 2010

<sup>119</sup> Barbelet, p. v.

<sup>120</sup> Barbelet, p. 9.

# 8

## CONCLUSION

This study has confirmed that older women have a significant role to play in supporting their families and communities across displacement contexts, but that this is a role which often goes unnoticed by responding agencies. As such, humanitarians – including CM agencies – are mostly missing an opportunity to capitalise on the wisdom, respect, and authority of older women to improve the management and response to displacement crises. In particular, older women’s unique role in matters pertaining to women’s safety and protection has the potential to be harnessed for provision of more impactful GBV prevention and response activities.

Looking at four different countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Tanzania, and Kenya) with several different displacement settings (urban out of camp; urban informal settlement; peri-urban formal and informal settlement; rural formal camp) – including both IDP and refugee response – the study has nonetheless identified some striking common themes in terms of the position and role of older women.

- 1 They command respect and (to varying degrees) authority from all other community members and are seen as having a key role in handing down traditions and customs to younger generations, and advising others in their families and wider communities.
- 2 They frequently play a role in providing emotional support, and in resolving disputes/ conflicts in the community – including between husband and wife; parents and children; children with other children; or adults with other adults.

- 3 They contribute to the domestic and childcare responsibilities of the household, and in some cases also the financial income (through business or paid work) or in-kind resources (e.g. cultivating food).
- 4 They have extensive social networks and understanding of the community, including historical knowledge.

Cutting across the four main features of older women’s role in the community, as outlined above, it is also clear that they can play an important part in enhancing or, in some cases, worsening the safety and protection of women in a domestic setting, and women and girls’ rights generally. In particular, three common themes emerged:

- 1 Older women in most (*but not all*) contexts seem to be able to influence the behaviour of adult men – including behaviour towards their wives and children – to the extent that some women claim they can stop men (normally their own sons or grandsons) from behaving violently towards their families.
- 2 Older women frequently play a significant role in giving advice and making decisions about marriage of girls/women (including when and to whom they marry), and divorce (e.g. in cases of domestic violence).
- 3 Older women can have an influence on the extent to which adult women and girls participate in the community – in particular in terms of their attendance at school or work, and their participation in NGO-led or other activities.



Three generations of women, displaced from North Kivu Province, live in the same house and support each other. (DR Congo, 2018) © NRC/ Ingrid Prestetun

However, the precise role of older women in a given context would require further study by intervening agencies. This report has suggested a method for learning about the role of older women, in order to inform interventions by CM and Protection agencies. A four-step process encourages CM agencies to employ an anthropological approach to understand the role of older women in relation to other community members. First, local staff themselves must be involved in sharing their understandings; second, community members from different demographic groups must be consulted; third, identified older women ‘influencers’ or ‘leaders’ should be interviewed more in-depth; and finally, activities should be designed based on the prior steps and further consultation with a range of community members. Tools for steps 1 to 3 are provided in [Annex 3](#).

Notwithstanding the need to develop context-specific response, this report has proposed some possible methods for engaging with older women to enhance their supporting role, particularly (but not only) with regards to the safety of women and girls. Some of these suggestions are aimed at CM agencies, while others would be better led by other specialised agencies. In summary, the suggestions are as follows:



Issues this can address	Role of Camp Management agency	Role of other agency
<b>Include older women in community engagement initiatives, including governance structures</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's empowerment</li> <li>• Marginalisation of women (older and younger)</li> <li>• Other issues as per priorities and knowledge of older women (including women's safety)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigning quotas for older women's representation in governance structures</li> <li>• Ensuring that governance structures consult with older women</li> <li>• Ensuring older women's inclusion in community meetings, FGD consultations, etc.</li> </ul>	<i>Women's Protection/GBV agency:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness-raising/sensitisation and training</li> <li>• Receive and respond to referrals</li> </ul>
<b>Engage older women as Protection Focal Points and/or Behaviour Change Mobilisers</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GBV</li> <li>• Child Protection</li> <li>• Health and nutrition</li> <li>• Girl's education</li> <li>• Women's empowerment</li> <li>• Older women's marginalisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and connecting influential older women (e.g. committee members) to relevant agencies</li> <li>• Connect protection volunteers to other community-based structures</li> <li>• Receive and respond to referrals</li> </ul>	<i>Women's Protection/GBV agency:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness-raising/sensitisation and training using a "Change through Culture" approach</li> <li>• Ongoing support and coaching to older women focal points/mobilisers</li> <li>• Provide referral pathway information</li> <li>• Receive and respond to referrals</li> </ul>
<b>Establish Older Women's Safe Spaces</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above, and:</li> <li>• Provision of another service needed in the community (e.g. shop, laundrette, garden, etc.)</li> <li>• Provision of safe social space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and identify best modality for the space</li> <li>• Provide required inputs</li> <li>• Identify (with specialised agency) older women to manage the spaces</li> </ul>	<i>Women's Protection/GBV agency:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify (with CM agency) older women to manage the spaces</li> <li>• Provide relevant training/awareness-raising (as per above)</li> <li>• Provide referral pathway information</li> <li>• Receive and respond to referrals</li> </ul>
<b>Provide livelihoods and income generating activities for older women</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic hardship, and (by extension) domestic violence</li> <li>• Inter-generational relationships and knowledge/wisdom-transfer</li> <li>• Older women's marginalisation</li> <li>• Provision of safe social space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess response options</li> <li>• Identify potential participants</li> <li>• Implement activities (unless undertaken by a Livelihoods provider)</li> <li>• If applicable, liaise with Livelihood(s) provider</li> </ul>	<i>Livelihoods agency:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with CM agency to assess activity options and identify participants</li> <li>• Implement activities and provide follow-up and monitoring</li> <li>• Coordinate with GBV/Women's Protection providers</li> </ul>

This research study has indicated that older women can and do play a key supportive role in their families and wider communities. However, it is also evident that many displaced older women feel like their role as advice-givers and transmitters of culture is being displaced by the work of humanitarian and development agencies.

Engaging older women and restoring their influential role in society is therefore imperative, not only for the value this can have for the well-being of other community members, but also for the protection of older women's own rights and dignity in displacement.

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# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: DETAILED METHODOLOGY FOR PART 1 AND PART 2

### Data Sources

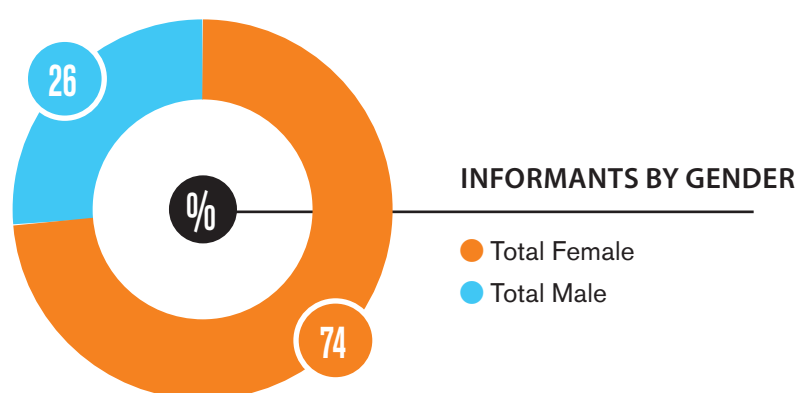
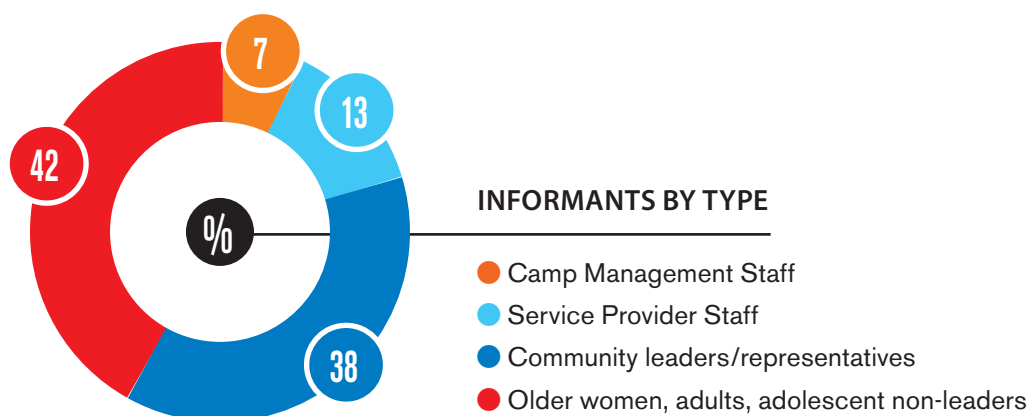
The research questions were investigated through a qualitative approach, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. For Part 1 of the research (women’s role in coordination), secondary sources included studies and reports on women’s participation in humanitarian contexts – including but not limited to CM projects. Mostly these secondary sources did not focus specifically on women’s role in coordination since this sub-topic is rarely considered in isolation to women’s participation generally; nevertheless, many of the findings are relevant to the topic of women’s role in coordination. These secondary sources suggested possible barriers to women’s participation, as well as means for overcoming them, which were then further investigated during the field work for primary data collection. For Part 2 (older women), sources included projects implemented in development and non-displacement emergency contexts, since there is such a limited number of humanitarian projects

that have specifically focused on displaced older people, let alone *displaced* older women. Primary data collection then allowed further investigation into the actual and potential role of displaced older women in settings with Camp Management (CM) interventions, including through piloting of tools that use an anthropological approach to understand the role and relationships of older women and others in the community.

Primary data collection took place in three countries where NRC is conducting CM projects: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Tanzania; as well as in Kenya where NRC has other projects but not a CM project. Primary data collection comprised of key informant interviews, workshops, and focus group discussions with men and women from the displaced community (including formal and informal leaders, men, women, and adolescent girls), as well as with service providers (public and private), and staff implementing CM projects. In addition, primary data and evaluation findings from various CM projects have also been drawn upon; and finally, staff from NRC’s CM programme in Myanmar as well as IOM’s Site Management programme in Bangladesh were also interviewed.

**Table 3:** Informants consulted

Informants	Sex	Afghanistan	Iraq	Tanzania	Kenya	Other	TOTAL
Camp Management Staff	Female	6	2	2	0	2	24
	Male	3	4	5	0	0	
Service Provider Staff	Female	4	12	5	8		47
	Male	2	5	3	8		
Community leaders/ representatives	Female	65	16	0	30		135
	Male	0	14	0	10		
Older women, adults, adolescent non-leaders	Female	48	33	0	30		147
	Male	19	12	0	5		
	Total Female	123	63	7	68	2	263
	Total Male	24	35	8	23	0	90
	Total	147	98	15	91	2	353



### Field work locations

#### Iraq (Ramadi, Anbar Province)

NRC's Camp Management project is operating in two displacement contexts: urban 'informal settlements', and out of camp urban neighbourhoods. In both contexts there are a mix of IDPs and returning IDPs. The informal settlement targeted for this study is known as 'Kilo 7' and hosts 2,050 IDPs and returnees. While NRC had not yet formalised a site governance mechanism at the time of the field work, it had appointed 12 men and four women as volunteers who support care and maintenance, referrals, service monitoring, information dissemination, hygiene promotion, and awareness raising in the site. Some of these volunteers have subsequently become known as 'committees' and have signed a Terms of Reference. The out of camp component of the project consists of a Community Centre in

Ramadi city, and the establishment of committees in five surrounding neighbourhoods with a combined population of around 32,500 people. Committees comprise 31 male and 22 female members,<sup>121</sup> and they were all established within six months of when field work took place. Some have received basic training in problem solving and coordination; others are still awaiting their training. The Community Centre provides a central hub where committees meet with NRC and attend training or awareness sessions.

#### Afghanistan (Kabul and Herat)

The research focussed on NRC's Camp Management project in two locations: urban informal settlements in Kabul and newly established (2018) formal and informal sites in Herat. In Kabul, the project targets 20 settlements with around 36,000 conflict-induced displaced

<sup>121</sup> Female members of one committee were due to be appointed in August 2019.

persons; the settlements range in size (from dozens to hundreds of dwellings), in age (two to 20 years), and in conditions (e.g. quality of shelters and access to services). The project concentrates on establishing and building the capacity of representative site management structures, as well as provision of information, referrals, and support to coordination through physical Community Centres located within and between the targeted sites. In Herat, one formal site and several scattered informal sites host around 60,000 persons (numbers fluctuate) displaced by drought and conflict during the course of 2018. NRC's Camp Management response involves 'Community Tents' and mobile teams which provide communication with communities, coordination, and protection through protection monitoring and Individual Protection Assistance. NRC has identified IDP 'Focal Points' who support information dissemination to and from the community.

#### Tanzania (Nyarugusu Camp)

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At the time of this study, NRC was mandated to provide Camp Management in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, which accommodates more than 153,000<sup>122</sup> refugees of mainly Congolese and Burundian origin, since 1996 and 2015 respectively. The Camp Management project has many components including: site planning and improvements; Helpdesks and noticeboards for information provision, CFRM, and referrals; facilitation of coordination and service monitoring; support to community leadership structures; community mobilization and awareness campaigns; and NFI distributions. The refugee leadership structure in the site is well established and recognised; the female Camp President is supported by 14 Zone Leaders (mostly male) and 14 Vice-Leaders (mostly female), who in turn are supported by 144 Village Leaders, and finally 3,114 Cluster leaders. Village and Cluster leaders are roughly evenly split between genders.

#### Kenya (Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement)

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Kakuma Refugee Camp (established in 1992) and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement (2015) host a population of around 190,000 refugees from 19 countries out of which 38,000 live in Kalobeyi Settlement.<sup>123</sup> The majority (58%) of refugees come from South Sudan, while Somalis are also well represented, many having been relocated from Dadaab Refugee Camp. Camp Management is provided by the Kenyan Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), supported by UNHCR. In Kakuma Camp there is a male and female leader for each Zone (12 in total), supported by male and female deputy leaders and a secretary (male or female); at Block levels there is also a male and female leader. Various thematic committees (e.g. People with Disabilities, youth, GBV, WASH, etc.) also exist at different levels. In Kalobeyi Settlement there is a male and female leader for each 'Village' and each 'Neighbourhood', as well as thematic committees. Leaders are supported by Lutheran World Federation (LWF), as well as UNHCR and RAS; thematic committees are also supported by various NGOs.

#### Challenges and Limitations

Being a qualitative study without a representative sample of participants it was difficult to ensure that the 'data saturation' point was reached, particularly given a limited timeframe for data collection in the field. Nevertheless, the report concentrates on findings that were repeated multiple times by a majority of or all informants; findings that received less conclusive backing are highlighted as such.

With primary data collection taking place in four contexts, there is a limit as to how broadly findings can be extrapolated to other contexts. However, the study has nonetheless observed broad patterns across the different contexts investigated here which may well be applicable across many other

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<sup>122</sup> According to UNHCR, as of February 2019: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Tanzania%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January-March%202019.pdf>

<sup>123</sup> According to UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/kakuma-refugee-camp>.

contexts, as well as suggesting avenues for further investigation at the local level and possible tools to do so.

A challenge faced during field data collection stemmed from relying on non-professional interpretation through members of the local NRC teams. This is likely to have led to certain nuances becoming lost in translation. Nevertheless, this approach was chosen for the following reasons (a) to build the capacity of the staff themselves in consulting with the community in this level of detail; (b) to enable a degree of control and spontaneity by the researcher during the data collection – being qualitative, it is important to enable flexibility in questioning to explore avenues that may not occur to a local enumerator who has less understanding of the broader research objectives. The challenge was mitigated by ensuring ongoing dialogue between the researcher and interpreter(s) – both during the FGDs/ interviews, and immediately afterwards.

Field work in Tanzania was significantly restricted since the Consultant was unable to obtain a camp entry permit from the authorities. Moreover, due to a sensitive camp population verification exercise that was still ongoing at the time of the Consultant's trip, it was not possible to collect data directly from the population – even through local enumerators. As such, the Consultant was restricted to collecting information and reflections from staff of NRC and other organisations; as well as referring to the findings of a Community Engagement study conducted by NRC in the same location at the end of 2018. The trip to Kakuma camp in Kenya was organised as a result of the lack of access in Tanzania, to ensure that direct data from displaced communities could be collected in a formal camp setting. However, due to the shortened timeframe, FGDs and interviews could not cover as much detail as for the Iraq context, and the most essential questions were thereby selected for the data collection. Moreover, for Part 2 (older women topic), participants were primarily selected from one nationality group (South Sudanese) in order to compare among different demographic groups with a similar cultural background. Only one FGD (adult women) contained mixed nationalities – this

approach was then discontinued due to interpretation challenges and time-constraints.

For Part 1 of the study (women's role in coordination), measuring the extent to which women's participation in coordination has enabled them, specifically, to have an influence on outcomes of coordination was challenging, especially since the study took place at a single point in time rather than assessing the situation before and after certain initiatives or activities have taken place. Nevertheless, the research tools employed used a 'most significant change' methodology, asking the community themselves to explain where they felt they had an influence. This was then further corroborated through discussions with service providers that have engaged with women in coordination, as well as Camp Management staff have observed changes in the camp/neighbourhood over time.

For Part 2 of the study, a challenge – though also a finding in its own right – during field data collection in Iraq was that the 'older' women who agreed to participate were primarily on the younger end of the 'older' scale. Indeed, a majority were under the age of 60 (the UN definition of 'older'). This makes it more difficult to extrapolate from this population group (aged 50 to 65) to the rest of the older community. Nevertheless, questions to all participants (older and younger) were phrased in such a way as to glean information about *all* older women – not just the 'younger older' that happened to attend the discussions.



## ANNEX 2: CREATING A WOMEN'S COORDINATION NETWORK

### 1. Role of the Camp Management Agency

- ➔ Define the geographical area to be covered by the Women's Coordination Network (or multiple areas).
- ➔ Establish or identify the physical location(s) from which the coordination will take place – this could be rotating or static; a public building or private space; run by an NGO or by another stakeholder (e.g. authorities). The most important thing is that it is accessible for women.
- ➔ Identify and invite a broad range of members, all of whom are motivated to participate. These could include women who:
  - Are members of neighbourhood or settlement committees, supported by a Camp Management (or other) agency.
  - Are influential in their extended family/ neighbourhood/wider community.
  - Lead or participate in volunteer groups, or volunteer with a local or international NGO
  - Work in local authorities.
  - Work in local or international NGOs.
  - Work in or own businesses.
- ➔ Organise and facilitate workshops, trainings, and meetings. These would serve a range of functions including: establishing a Terms of Reference, mapping out the networks of the members, identifying and prioritising problems to solve, linking to relevant stakeholders, and building skills in networking and negotiation. A sample 'Session Plan' for an introductory "launching" or "scoping" meeting is included below.
- ➔ Second a female staff into a local authority or local organisation, who then takes on responsibility for the Women's Coordination Network – this may not be appropriate to all contexts, and would always need strong

follow-up by the CM agency in the early days of its formation, as well as full assessment of local authority structures and consensus-building to obtain approval and recognition of the role.

- ➔ Liaise with relevant local authority, humanitarian, and development stakeholders to ensure awareness of the Women's Coordination Network, and to make sure that other community leadership or volunteer structures are connected into the Network. Note: even if the Network is comprised of and aimed to support women, this shouldn't preclude its members from coordinating with men. Indeed, the Network should open up as many channels of coordination as possible by expanding women's networks beyond what they have already.

### 2. Launching/Scoping Workshop Agenda

#### Workshop objectives

- ➔ To introduce active women in the community to each other and encourage networking.
- ➔ To improve understanding of 'coordination' and discuss ideas for how women can be more involved in coordination.
- ➔ To discuss some of the communal problems or issues that women might be able to solve through coordination with each other or with other stakeholders.

#### Participants

- ➔ Female staff from NGOs (local and international).
- ➔ Female volunteers from voluntary associations and groups.
- ➔ Female staff from authorities.
- ➔ Female members of community governance structures (committee members, leaders, etc.).
- ➔ Camp Management / Community Centre staff.

## Agenda

Session #	Time	Section	Remarks
1	30 mins	Introductions	Review of agenda and objectives Ice-breaker
2	30 to 90 mins	Service Provider presentations	5 mins each on the services they provide and how they can be contacted plus Q&A
3	30 to 60 mins	What is 'Coordination'?	Presentation with slideshow
4	45 to 60 mins	What is a 'Network' and who is in our network?	Network mapping activity (group work) and debrief
5	60 to 90 mins	How we can solve problems through coordination	Brainstorm on problems Brainstorm on stakeholders that can help
6	30 to 45 mins	Feedback and action points	Feedback from action planning, action points
7	20 to 30 mins	Development of a Women's Coordination Network	Discussion on next steps for the Women's Coordination Network
8	5 to 10 mins	Wrap-up and closing	Questions and concluding remarks

### Workshop outputs

- ❶ Network 'maps' and new connections between women in the community.
- ❷ Actions points/plans for solving problems in the community (together).
- ❸ Contact list of women that would like to continue meeting/working together.
- ❹ Agreement on next steps for the Women's Coordination Network.

### 3. Facilitation notes for launching/scoping workshop

#### Preparations

- ➔ The Camp Management team should identify potential attendees and send out invitations at least one week in advance, with a clear explanation of the purpose of the workshop (e.g. including the agenda with the invitation).
- ➔ Total number of participants should be between 15 and 25. Ideally there should be two facilitators (a lead and an assistant), as well as an assistant to support with logistical arrangements.

- ➔ Timing and location should be arranged to suit as many attendees as possible, taking into account cultural considerations.
- ➔ Appropriate refreshments and transportation should be arranged, as well as equipment and materials (e.g. projector, stationary, laptop).
- ➔ The session plan/agenda is a guide only, and timings will need to be adjusted according to the context – including adding appropriate breaks into the schedule. It may also be preferable to split the workshop into separate sessions held on different days, so as not to take too much time. Suggestions for adjustments are included in the session instructions, below.

#### Session Instructions

##### Section 1: Introduction

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- ➔ The facilitator(s) should introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the workshop (objectives) and the agenda.
- ➔ The facilitator should provide an ice-breaker activity to enable participants to introduce themselves/each other.

## Section 2: Service Provider Presentations

- ➔ Staff from NGOs, voluntary organisations, or authorities should provide brief (5 to 10 minutes) presentations about their services and how they can be reached.
- ➔ Length of this session will depend on how many service provider staff are attending. These staff should be briefed in advance about their need to prepare a presentation.

## Section 3: What is “Coordination”?

- A Defining ‘Coordination’:** Either in groups or in plenary, ask the participants to try and define or explain “coordination”; you could ask them to draw a picture or diagram to explain the concept, or simply to describe it verbally. After some discussion, read them the definition from the Camp Management Toolkit: “planning together and sharing information in the pursuit of shared goals”. This could also be written on a slide or flipchart.
- B Coordination Activities:** Make a slideshow of photographs or set of posters which illustrate the activities that might be involved in coordination, including: attending/organising meetings; making phone calls; making and sharing service mapping; doing referrals; monitoring; joint assessments; making information products (reports, factsheets, site profiles, etc.); collecting and sharing data; collecting feedback and complaints. Try and use photos from a range of real contexts, and explain the examples being presented.
- C What makes good coordination?:** Make a slideshow of photos with pictures to illustrate the different components of ‘good coordination’ – show the pictures first, and facilitate a discussion on what each picture might mean.

## NOTES:

- ➔ Parts B and/or C could be delivered during a subsequent workshop.
- ➔ Part C – if delivered in a separate session – could also be expanded to include further practical hints and tips on coordination techniques – e.g. how to chair a meeting; how to take minutes; how to prepare an agenda; etc.
- ➔ CCCM Cluster Training Module 8 may also provide further inspiration on how to present this topic.

## Section 4: What is a “network” and who is in our networks?

### A Networking activity – group work:

- ➔ Divide the group into mixed groups (combining NGO staff, authority staff, and community members) of around six people per group – possibly organised by neighbourhood or site/block. Ensure that each group contains at least one literate participant, who can be the appointed scribe.
- ➔ Give each group a flipchart with the following matrix, and ask them to list all the *individuals* (not organisations) that they have contact with.
- ➔ Ask them to put an “M” next to all the men and an “F” next to all the women listed (or equivalent mark – e.g. tick/cross or coloured marks), and (at the end) to count up how many men and women they have contact with in each category. **Note:** *this activity also helps the facilitators to understand how much contact women have with men in different categories of stakeholders.*

List NGO staff that they know	List authority staff that they know
List useful/skilful/influential community members that they know	List volunteers/voluntary groups/donors that they know

## B Plenary discussion:

- ➔ Bring the group back together and put all the flipcharts together at the front of the room. This should illustrate the size of the collective network of the women in the room. Ask for reflections on the exercise.
- ➔ Facilitate a discussion on how the participants could build/develop their network, using prompting questions such as:
  - How can more influential/professional women (e.g. from authorities) support non-professional women e.g. committee members?
  - How can male relatives/family members help (or how can we help them)?
  - How can male leaders/volunteers (e.g. committee members) work with women?

### Section 5: How we can solve problems through coordination

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#### Identifying problems, solutions, and influential stakeholders

- ➔ Divide the participants into the same groups used in Session 4, and give them a flipchart with the below matrix drawn up. Ask them to discuss a few communal problems at the neighbourhood/site/block level and how these could be addressed. They should choose up to three problems to focus on.
- ➔ Each problem should be described in detail, and some possible solutions should be suggested. In the last column, they should list the specific individuals that might be able to help them address their problem through the proposed solutions (or otherwise). Encourage them to think about how they can help *each other*, and to think about the last activity they did where they mapped out their networks.

Problem	Solution(s)	Who can help?
1		
2		
2		

- ➔ During the group work, the facilitators should circulate among the groups and ask probing questions to ensure that problems are described/understood adequately, and that solutions are creative and realistic.

### Section 6: Feedback and action points

---

- ➔ Bring the groups back together in plenary, and ask a volunteer from each group to choose one problem to present back. Others in the room should be invited to provide additional suggestions for solutions and contacts of people who might be able to help.
- ➔ For each problem, the facilitators should help to identify a few action points or next steps for addressing the issue through coordination with the identified stakeholders – e.g. arranging a meeting; preparing a letter or petition; collecting more information; sharing contact details; etc. A note-taker should be assigned to list these action points.

### Section 7: Development of a Women's Coordination Network

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- ➔ Facilitate a plenary discussion about the idea of a Women's Coordination Network, using the following questions to guide the discussion:
  - Are these women interested in continuing to meet on a regular basis?
  - What would be the purpose of a more regular forum/meeting?
  - What support would they need to keep this going? (From the CM agency or others)
  - Is there anyone that would like to take on an organisational role?
  - How frequent should the meetings be, and where should they take place?
  - How should the women stay in touch between meetings? E-mail, Facebook, Whatsapp?
- ➔ Agree on a few next steps/action points, and ensure these are noted down.

## Section 8: Wrap-up and Closing

---

- ➔ Summarise the key action points and next steps.
- ➔ Ask if there are any final questions or reflections from participants.
- ➔ Provide some concluding motivational remarks/reflections about the workshop.
- ➔ Invite participants to provide their preferred contact details for follow-up after the workshop.

## Follow-up and Next Steps

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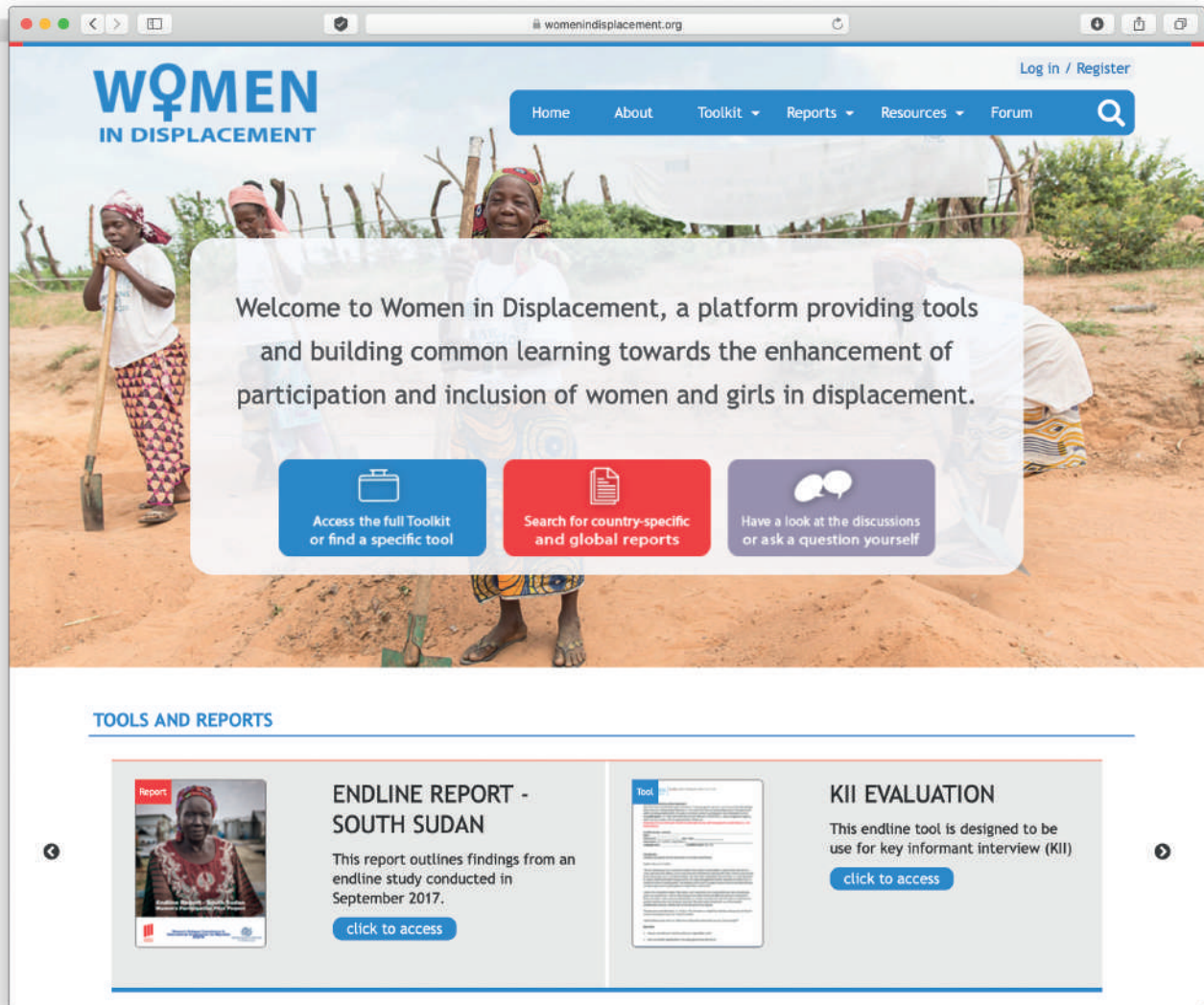
Depending on the outcome of session 7, a number of different steps may be required, including:

- ➔ Writing up the notes and action points from the workshop and sharing with participants.
- ➔ Identifying a location for the next meeting (if not the same as the one already used), and setting the date, time, and agenda of that meeting.
- ➔ Drafting a Terms of Reference for the 'Women's Coordination Network' that can be discussed and endorsed in the next meeting.
- ➔ Setting up a contact group for participants – e.g. Whatsapp, Facebook, etc. (depending on the preference of participants).
- ➔ Following up with individual participants on action points raised, and supporting if required.
- ➔ Sensitising other stakeholders about the existence of the Network.

## ANNEX 3: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND OLDER WOMEN ANALYSIS TOOL



Available for download at:  
<https://womenindisplacement.org>.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Women in Displacement website. The header features the logo "WOMEN IN DISPLACEMENT" on the left and a navigation menu with "Home", "About", "Toolkit", "Reports", "Resources", and "Forum" on the right. A search bar is also present. The main content area has a background image of women in a rural setting. A central text box reads: "Welcome to Women in Displacement, a platform providing tools and building common learning towards the enhancement of participation and inclusion of women and girls in displacement." Below this are three buttons: "Access the full Toolkit or find a specific tool", "Search for country-specific and global reports", and "Have a look at the discussions or ask a question yourself". The "TOOLS AND REPORTS" section below features two cards: "ENDLINE REPORT - SOUTH SUDAN" with a "click to access" button, and "KII EVALUATION" with a "click to access" button.





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Postboks 148 Sentrum, 0102 Oslo, Norway  
[www.nrc.no](http://www.nrc.no)