



Women's Participation Pilot Project Learning Report



**International Organization for Migration (IOM)
and Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)
December 2017**



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

Background and Methodology

Between May 2016 and September 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, with technical support from the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), developed and delivered a 2 stage project in 5 different countries targeted at supporting opportunities for women's equal and meaningful participation in camp governance structures. The activities, delivered through a participatory approach that included developing community-designed and led empowerment strategies, were part of a broader global-level project aimed at reducing gender-based violence (GBV) risks in camps and camp-like settings. This is premised on evidence that scaling up women's agency in the public and private sphere is critical to social transformation and preventing violence against women and girls in all settings.

Assessments and activities were rolled out in:

1. Nigeria: Malkohi Camp in Adamawa State;
2. Philippines: Mampang Barangay, Zamboanga City in Mindanao;
3. Ecuador: Pedernales I and II IDP Camps in Manabi Province;
4. South Sudan: Bentiu Protection of Civilian (PoC) site in Unity State; and
5. Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal IDP sites in Ankawa District of Erbil.

The first stage of the project involved conducting qualitative assessments to map out existing governance structures in the abovementioned sites and learn how displaced men, women, and various at-risk groups, including adolescent girls and women and girls with disabilities, participated in camp life and camp decision-making processes. The assessments also examined the barriers and opportunities to increasing women's participation and improving their feelings regarding overall safety in the camp, and explored strategies that could facilitate this. The findings from those assessments were articulated in a Baseline Learning Report on Women's Participation in Camp Governance Structures (IOM/WRC) and can be found [here](#).

In line with the findings of these baseline studies, a number of the potential strategies put forward by participants were subsequently developed into pilot activities, which were implemented to differing levels in each site. While some activities were stand-alone and one-off, others lasted between 3-6 months and included a series of interventions, such as cumulative skills and leadership training.

In the Malkohi and Fufore camps in Nigeria for example, interventions included skills acquisition training in knitting, weaving, and tailoring; as well as two cycles of leadership training for IDP leaders and camp managers. Alongside these, GBV mainstreaming training, minimum lighting around key areas in the camps, and enhanced safety measures around the community kitchen were implemented to address safety concerns around the sites. Similarly, in Mampang Transitory site in the Philippines, GBV and Leadership training was provided for local authorities, camp managers, the host community, camp management support staff, women and IDP leaders, as was livelihood skills training - inclusive of business development training and start-up distribution - for a cohort of participants that included both Badjao and Tausog women. In Bentiu PoC site in South Sudan, interventions included mapping the existing women's groups in the PoC and building their leadership capacity, as well as providing financial and procurement support to selected livelihood-related Quick Impact Projects (QIPS) designed by women. As well as this, a cultural centre was established on site to support adult learning opportunities. Likewise in Ecuador, at the sites in Pedernales, a physical space was built for women to meet and to house project activities, which included training of women in hand-made soap-making and production of handicrafts (artisan jewelry and accessories), underpinned by training on entrepreneurship and microenterprise skills. A Women's Committee was also established, which included workshops on participatory approaches and building feedback mechanisms, leadership and self-esteem, and GBV sensitization. As highlighted above, the overarching goal of these activities was to improve the level of participation of

women in governance structures and contribute to attenuating perceived risks to the safety of women and girls.

The second stage of the project involved assessing whether or not the activities above had succeeded in fostering women and girls' participation in camp life and camp governance, and whether their participation led to any changes to their perception of safety. To achieve this, IOM and WRC developed a study design with a mixed methods approach that asked the following key questions:

1. Did the project activities contribute to improving women and girls' participation and sense of safety? How? If not, why not?
2. Did the project activities engage some women and girls but not others? Why?
3. How, if at all, did participation in the project activities improve women's feelings of representation? In decision-making in the camp?
4. What were facilitators and barriers to participation in project activities?

A series of end line projects were produced summarizing the outcomes of these studies in Nigeria, Ecuador, South Sudan and the Philippines. Broadly, the end line reports captured the findings related to changes in the governance structure since activities began; levels of participation in decision-making and in the pilot activities themselves; the impact of and factors contributing to, women's participation in activities; remaining challenges to participation; and key issues such as inclusion of marginalized groups and the relationship between participation and perceptions of safety.

The objective of this report, however, is not to provide an overarching summary of all the end line reports mentioned above. Rather, this learning report highlights key findings that have arisen as a result of both the assessments conducted and observations made throughout the project activities, and links them to the relevant body of research in order to analyze and articulate them as lessons for future projects.

Box 1: Iraq Assessments

In Iraq, the baseline assessment was conducted in July 2016 in two informal sites in Ankawa District of Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Following the baseline, activities were initiated, however the IDPs living in selected sites were forcibly evicted shortly after and relocated into to other informal sites in Erbil.

A second, abridged baseline assessment was conducted in another IDP informal site in the same district in March 2017. Project activities were subsequently implemented between April and September 2017 – focusing on skills development, livelihoods, strengthening governance structures, and site improvements. However, due to the short duration of the activities and the sudden return of the community to their place of origin, once again the team could not implement a full end-line study to measure change among women and girls. As such, Iraq is not included as an area of study in this learning report.

The situation illustrates the continuous fluidity of displacement in Iraq, and vulnerabilities of groups settled in informal sites that are exposed to forced evictions. Nevertheless the team managed to collect anecdotal findings that highlighted positive changes in perceptions of safety and participation, showing similarities with results from the end-line studies completed in other pilot countries.

Skills building schemes - particularly Kurdish language classes - resulted in an increased feeling of safety outside the informal site and increased confidence, and led to improved interactions with the host community. Engaging in small business schemes increased the self-esteem and self-confidence of women who participated, allowing them to anticipate accessing a form of livelihood upon their return. On the other hand, women and girls generally lacked an understanding of the benefits in strengthening participation in decision-making structures, with cultural and gender-related barriers in voicing their opinions and concerns remaining significant.

Key Lessons

Leadership, power and participation in militarized environments

It is clear from the range of assessments conducted that for women, the space to participate in militarized environments is particularly restricted – as either leaders or influencers of decision-making. This obstacle was specifically identified in Ecuador, Nigeria and South Sudan.

In Ecuador, for example, the camp governance structure, under military oversight, did not provide opportunities for meaningful decision-making for any IDPs, let alone women – despite the fact that each bloc was represented by both male and female leaders. Roles were task, rather than leadership, oriented, and perceptions of decision-making authority squarely related to military power¹. Similarly in Nigeria, SEMA and NEMA – the state and national emergency management agencies² - retain ultimate power to make decisions and have not taken the necessary steps to devolve power, and in South Sudan, the role of IDP camp leaders is limited to communication and information-sharing.

Developing and supporting opportunities for women's equal and meaningful participation in camp governance structures must therefore begin with an assessment of how power is manifested, exercised and varied in any given context. Analyzing power and its different manifestations allows practitioners to develop context-specific strategies that are targeted at responding to the most relevant, and accessible, forms of power brokerage as a first step towards transformative change. A commonly used framework³ for analyzing power in decision-making and participation classifies it as three distinct realms - as visible, hidden and invisible:

Box 2: Typology of Power and Strategies in Response

1. Visible power: observable decision-making. Visible power describes the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of political decision-making. It also describes how those in positions of power use such procedures and structures to maintain control.

Responding to visible power is usually about trying to change the 'who, how and what' of policy-making so that the process is more democratic, accountable and responsive to diverse needs. Visible power is countered with strategies of political advocacy and seeking access to formal decision-making processes

2. Hidden power: setting the political agenda. Powerful actors also maintain influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda. These dynamics operate on many levels, often excluding and devaluing the concerns and representation of less powerful groups.

Responding to hidden power focuses on strengthening organisations and movements of the poor, building collective power and leadership to redefine the political agenda, and raising the visibility and legitimacy of issues, voices and demands that have been silenced.

3. Invisible power: shaping meaning and what is acceptable. Invisible power shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation. Significant problems and issues are not only kept from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of those affected. By influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people's beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo. Processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe.

Responding to invisible power focuses on re-imagining social and political culture, and raising consciousness to transform the way people perceive themselves and those around them, and how they envisage future possibilities and alternatives.

¹At the time of the endline study in March 2017, a total of 235 IDP families with 949 individuals were residing at the two Pedernales camps. This included slightly over 51 percent of whom were females. Following the presidential elections in April 2017, the camps have been formally closed in May 2017. IDP families have transitioned out of the camps into permanent housing as they became available.

²NEMA stands for National Emergency Management Agency, SEMA is the State Emergency Management Agency.

³Lukes, S and Gaventa, J, *Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis*, in *IDS Bulletin Volume 37 Number 6* Institute of Development Studies, London, November 2006. This analysis was in turn adapted from VeneKlasen, L, Valerie Miller, Debbie Budlender, and Cindy Clark. *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Bourton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire, U.K: Practical Action Pub, 2007.

Militarized contexts typically restrict the capabilities and actions of civilian actors in shaping observable, public decision-making, even in situations where formal access to positions of authority exist. Camp leaders may be elected or designated and even supported, but their ability to exercise visible and formal power is virtually non-existent.

It is clear then that short-term projects geared at improving women's access to power in these conditions must primarily consider how their activities can help shape responses to hidden and invisible power. As is discussed in more detail below, strengthening grassroots collective power, network building, improving local leadership skills, and influencing community-held perceptions of social and gender dynamics and boundaries for inclusivity, are all critical steps in shaping alternative forms of power and moving towards challenging undemocratic and discriminatory power brokerage.

Box 3: Militarisation as a source of violence

Living in militarized environments creates concerns for women and girls that go beyond their inability to lead and participate equally. Often, the presence of military personnel poses a specific physical risk to women and girls' safety.

In Ecuador, military personnel working in camp management has been highlighted as a significant safety concern for women and girls. Women and girls reported that the military often gave preferential treatment to women they had relations with, which from December 2016, when the new contingent arrived, included adolescent girls. Harassment, including sexual harassment, is rife, and there are reports of goods being exchanged for sex. These findings support other assessments made in the area, which pointed to the presence of Armed Forces personnel within the camps as *"creating a militarized environment in which (women) felt intimidated and did not feel safe, not being conducive to women reporting cases of sexual violence, especially if these were committed by public officials or members of the Armed Forces"* (IFRC, Ecuador Country Case Study: Effective law and policy on gender equality and protection from sexual and gender-based violence in disasters, Geneva 2017)

Women's participation projects, in particular those focusing on leadership, governance and communication, must integrate confidential feedback and complaints mechanisms to receive and investigate requests, grievances and allegations in the camps at the interagency level.

2. Beyond Visible Power

Not all decisions that affect women's lives are being made at the formal, public level. Arguably, *'supporting women's local level participation and leadership is crucial (precisely) because it is at this level that many of the decisions that affect women's lives are being made.'*⁴ The assessments demonstrated that scaling up women's leadership and building collective informal power is not necessarily restricted by a lack of high-level decision-making capacity.

In both Nigeria and South Sudan, women leaders reported increased 'leadership capacity' related to their training on leadership skills, and highlighted their improved communication skills with the population as an example. Community members supported this by stating that leaders were in fact more responsive. In contexts where baseline participation levels was stronger, such as the Philippines, leadership skills-building has reportedly increased women's ability to voice their requests, and have them met— asking for CCCM meetings to move so that participation of more women could be guaranteed. The community also reported that their leaders have become more effective at disseminating information about rights and more confident about speaking out. If leadership can be defined as the individual and collective capabilities to "mobilise people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of particular ends"⁵ then the ability of women leaders to respond to community concerns, co-opt

⁴ Hunt, A. *Moving forward: Recommendations for the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security*. London: Womankind Worldwide, 2014

⁵ Lynne De Ver, H. 'Conceptions of Leadership'. *Background Paper 4. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Programme, 2009*

allies, build support, and secure outcomes through contestation and negotiation⁶ is key to building leadership capacity and effecting change.

Participation in informal spaces can also promote and strengthen public perceptions of women as influencers and leaders, and build collective power as women's voices coalesce and are multiplied. In South Sudan, although no changes were noted in the proportion of women representatives in the formal committees, overall increases were noted by the community in the total number of women representatives in other formal and informal structures. In Nigeria, the involvement of women in sub committees and parallel structures allowed for more involvement and incremental influencing in decision-making, even if not affording women ultimate decision making power. In Ecuador, livelihoods activities in soap-making developed into a women's association that provided the necessary scaffolding to support women in becoming visible leaders in the camp, enabling them to take on a key bridging role between the military and the population.

3. Building networks – the importance of coalition building.

Building networks is as critical as building skills. Informal coalitions that bridge and link female social capital are both a significant benefit of increased participation, and a necessary step towards attaining economic and decision-making power. Increased social support and expanded networks lead to improved information-sharing, access to services and resource pooling that fosters both collective and individual social and economic empowerment. Participants across the pilot activities reported satisfaction with their expanded networks of social support, and the direct relationship of those expanded networks to an improvement in their access to goods and services and economic opportunity. In South Sudan, women spoke of appreciating that the '(trainings) brought women together to share different ideas' while in Ecuador women acknowledged that they "feel really good as a group". In both these countries women were planning or had set up associations to expand their business. Strengthening their networks has led to a strengthened ability to grow a business and become financially more secure.

Increasing self-esteem and resilience. Expanded networking is not only key to improving access to information and material assets, but the social interaction at the heart of networking determines the level of well being for the whole group – critically leading to improved mental health outcomes for the involved population⁷. As one participant from Ecuador explained "(through this project) I grew stronger with my friends, and I started to think outside my own fears".

Likewise, the reported feelings of individual-level improved self worth, self-esteem and self confidence that resulted from participation in the activities across all assessments, alongside increased engagement and sense of purpose noted by the participants, contribute to the improved subjective and social wellbeing⁸ of the group.

Women's own perceptions of their role and value to the wider community has been impacted by participation in livelihoods projects that enabled them to engage in camp life outside of their traditional home domain, expanding the scope of their participation from home to camp sphere. In Nigeria for example, a key informant noted that women's self-esteem was influenced by their ability to "meet with the authorities", which made them feel that "they are engaged into something important in the camp."

⁶ O'Neil, T. And Pilar Domingo "The Power to Decide: Women, Decision-making and Gender Equality" ODI London, 2015

⁷ See for example the arguments put forward in Friedl, L, *Mental Health, resilience and inequalities*, WHO Geneva 2009

⁸ Mental health literature broadly distinguishes between two different realms of well-being or positive mental health: Hedonic, referring to categories of subjective wellbeing such as life satisfaction and happiness; and eudemonic, linked to social wellbeing, for example positive functioning, engagement, fulfilment, and sense of meaning. The combination of the two is commonly referred to as a 'flourishing' state. See for examples Keyes 2002; Huppert 2005; Lyubomirsky et al 2005; Carlisle 2006; Samman 2007; Ryan and Deci 2001

Emotional and social wellbeing has value in itself, but for women in displacement communities affected by violence, the contributors to improved mental health outcomes are critical protective factors in relation to GBV risk mitigation. Being part of functioning and loving relationships; being supported by family and community; having access to essential resources—income, housing, employment; and having self-confidence and self-esteem, are documented examples of the protective factors that contribute to individual resilience and the ability to recover in the face of violence and trauma.⁹ In short, “mental health is a fundamental element of the resilience, health assets, capabilities and positive adaptation that enable people both to cope with adversity and to reach their full potential and humanity.”¹⁰ Activities focused on increasing participation of women across levels must examine and replicate the positive outcomes resulting from building blocks of participation, and not limit their analysis by examining final outcomes in isolation of this process.

4. The importance of livelihoods: economic empowerment from household to community

The development of women’s livelihoods activities – through training and project support on knitting, weaving, tailoring, hairdressing, and setting up food stalls, many with the help of start-up grants - led to a number of reports of actual and speculated improved ability to meet individual household financial needs, and in some cases, of increased prospects for economic security across the community. For example, participants in Nigeria reported being able to better provide not only for their own families, but also an increased ability to support the wider community through skills sharing and teaching. While the majority of women respondents framed the benefits of their participation in livelihoods activities through the lens of network-building and increased self-esteem (see above), male respondents tended to focus on the material and economic benefits, whether actual or anticipated, of livelihoods projects. For example, in South Sudan, a male respondent noted that his wife’s business was ‘generating profits to sustain the family...’ while in the Philippines, another husband acknowledged that his ‘wife helps support my children (and) provide for their needs.’

Indeed, global evidence points to the fact that women’s access to livelihoods reduces the likelihood of household poverty, and resources in women’s hands have a range of positive outcomes within the household:¹¹ women are more likely than men to invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families, choosing to invest in their children’s education, health and nutrition.¹² In protracted displacement settings, where access to cash, resources and job opportunities is limited, the ability of women to access capital can be truly transformational.

Nevertheless, livelihoods interventions should not be generically developed and implemented, nor reductive or potentially unsafe or unsustainable for women, and families, to pursue in the long-term.

Firstly, sound analysis of existing market systems and their contemporaneous demand for labour, products and services must be carried out. This will ensure practitioners avoid the common mistake of over-focusing on supply side to the detriment of their understanding of what markets need and demand.¹³

⁹See for examples: *Health and Human Rights Info, Mental Health and Gender-Based Violence: Helping Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict – A Training Manual*, Oslo, 2014 and *Ferro Ribeiro, S and Van der Straten Ponthoz, D, International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict: Best Practice on the Documentation of Sexual Violence as a Crime or Violation of International Law, Second Edition London 2017 Chapter 10: Trauma*

¹⁰*Supra note 6, p.III (Summary)*

¹¹*Kabeer, N. Women’s economic empowerment and inclusive growth: Labour markets and enterprise development, London, SOAS, 2012*

¹²*Department For International Development (DFID) Agenda 2010: The turning point on poverty: background paper on gender, DFID, London 2010.*

¹³*For guidance and tools see Guide to market-based livelihood interventions for refugees, International Labour Office (ILO); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Geneva: ILO, 2017.*

Practitioners must also implement population-based assessments, which are key to determining the risks and obstacles in developing and sustaining livelihoods interventions for particular population categories.¹⁴ This will allow practitioners to identify specific protection risks linked to certain activities or their interruption, and ascertain which individuals or groups are unable to participate in livelihoods interventions, and why.

5. Social norm change – enabling participation?

Refashioning women as economic providers and community agents can also significantly effect shifts in gendered social dynamics, and begin to challenge social norms, at the household and community level. In the Philippines, one male respondent exemplified this shift explaining that since the activities began, he had “become the housekeeper: fetching water, washing the plates” while one woman acknowledged that while she attended camp meetings “her husband is the one who does the household chores”. In South Sudan, this shift was evident at the community level, when one male respondent claimed that “(the women) are now able to run businesses and compete for leadership positions in the community.”

Yet...social norm change is not linear. Challenging the discriminatory social norms and stereotypes that influence women’s ability to be autonomous, have access to resources, and to influence, participate and lead decision-making processes that shape their lives is widely recognized as a key factor in enabling equal and meaningful participation. “Discriminatory social norms, including attitudes towards women’s participation in decision making, act as a fundamental barrier to women’s influence in public and political life”¹⁵ But social norm change should not be conceptualized as a linear process, or as an outcome that naturally and immediately follows increased representation and economic empowerment, nor should it be expected within the timeframe of a short project such as this one.

As the assessments suggest, a broad range of activities, interventions and enabling factors must coalesce to produce evidence of micro-shifts in the direction of social norm change and greater equality. Within the parameters of this project, the combination of individual economic empowerment, leadership skills and confidence-building, expanded networks and formation of collective social capital, set against a backdrop of enabling factors such as presence of humanitarian actors and increased self-reliance, produced some, albeit limited, evidence of change: In the Philippines, shifts were noted in the male perception of women’s role in the camp, as male respondents reported feeling proud of the new leadership roles taken on by their wives. In Ecuador, men remarked on the changes they saw at the community level “now that women are taken more in consideration.”

However, it is still the case that in the majority of situations assessed, the key barriers to significant increases in participation were still related to unchanged social norms. In Nigeria, one woman articulated these barriers to participation as follows “we cannot talk because it might lead to being chased from the camp...so we keep quiet.” In South Sudan, women complained that “men do not like females to go outside in public, because when women go out, there will be no one to do the household work”. A key informant in Ecuador similarly disclosed that “the husbands don’t permit (their wives) to participate, there is machismo role in the family...and others, they can’t leave their little children alone.”

Partly changing social norms at the public level does not mean changes at the household level. The perceptions of male relatives in relation to women’s new roles and positions, as described above, routinely surface as a positive or negative factor impacting women’s agency. This should be noted, because perceptions of increasing equality in the community do not

¹⁴ For an example tool, see the *Cohort Livelihoods and Risk Analysis approach (CLARA)* developed by the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) at <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/empower/resources/1231-clara-tool>

¹⁵ *Turning Promises into Progress Report Gender and Development Network, Gender Action for Peace and Security, UK SRHR Network, London, March 2015. p 47*

automatically equate to equality at home, and externally facilitated shifts in traditional roles run the risk of having only limited influence over intra-household gender dynamics. For example, in Ecuador, female participants reported that they succeeded in gaining 'permission' from their husbands to participate in the pilot project only because of the potential for added income for the household – a dynamic that calls into question the authenticity of perceived gains in autonomy and equality that have been made through these activities.

The central role of the household as a primary shaper of broader gender relations in the community cannot be overemphasized. The household has tellingly been articulated as the “basic unit of society where individuals both cooperate and compete for resources, (and the) primary place where (...) individuals confront and reproduce societal norms, values, power, and privilege.”¹⁶ In relation specifically to women’s leadership, one study summarizes this relationship as follows:

“Family attitudes and environment are key to women’s leadership, from childhood through to adolescence and adulthood. In many settings, women who are politically active and who take on responsibilities outside the home transgress ideas about what women should do. But so often do their parents and partner – whether this is a father who supports his daughter’s education or encourages her to speak up, or a husband who shares domestic responsibilities.”¹⁷

Interventions targeting women’s political and economic empowerment in the community both affect and are affected by the gender relations inside the home. Intra-household disempowerment creates risks for women that extend beyond a lack of ability to gain public autonomy in any meaningful way - several studies have noted that while increased access to resources can indeed increase women’s decision-making authority at home, women have also “reported increased levels of humiliation and anger leading to domestic conflicts and violence as men fail to adjust to losing their role of the main provider.”¹⁸ **Engaging men through women’s participation projects is therefore critical to both bolster women’s opportunities to challenge social norms but also as a way to mitigate potential domestic conflict.**

Positive social norm change reduces violence...in the long term. The increased risk of further violence that can result from challenging prevailing social norms has been characterized as “inevitable but manageable”¹⁹ and accepted by some practitioners as an insufficient impediment to continued efforts to effect social change. This is because “gender inequality and unequal power relations between women and men are the root cause of violence against women and girls, (and therefore the) social change that shifts these is vital for reducing and ultimately eliminating violence against women and girls.”²⁰

However, due to the short term nature of the project, only one country assessed demonstrated limited positive links between social norm shift and reduction in violence: In Nigeria, key informants disclosed links between women’s increased earning capacity and a decrease in exposure to risks at home as they were less financially dependent on their husbands. As the respondent noted, “husbands and wives used to fight but there are no more reports. Men now know their wives are important since they are supporting the family financially, and women now know their rights.” In the other target countries, enhanced perceptions of personal safety were expressed as extensions of increased self-confidence (in South Sudan women claimed to feel “safer” when speaking in public, but upon examination this was related to feeling emboldened and less shy), or as related to being part of a stronger support networks (in Ecuador, a key

¹⁶Narayan, D *Can Anyone Hear Us? Voices from 47 Countries*, World Bank Group, PREM 1999. Chapter 5: *Changing Relations in the Household*, p 135

¹⁷O’Neil, T. And Pilar Domingo “*Women and Power: Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence*” ODI London, 2016, p10

¹⁸Supra 12

¹⁹Action Aid, *Gender and Development Network “A Theory of Change for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls”*, London 2012 p3

²⁰*Ibid*, p9

informant reported that women felt safe because of “the security of belonging to something”.) Perceptions of safety were also impacted by women’s increased awareness of services to turn to in the case of violence, as expressed in the Philippines by a participant that claimed women now “know where to go if they need help.”

Crises can shift social norms – but backward as much as forward. Practitioners often discuss conflict, emergency and/or displacement in terms of their role in destabilizing gender norms and providing prospects for incremental social norm change. Narratives are framed around the opportunities presented to women to be leaders, workers and providers when faced with situations in which men are missing, fighting, or stripped of their own traditional livelihoods. However, the assessment in Nigeria specifically has demonstrated how fragile that relationship is – and how reversible. In this case, the interruption of food distribution during the project timeline led to women having to step back from their role in participation and leadership activities to take on the lion’s share of the responsibility to source firewood, prepare food and feed the family.

Overall, the mixed results can also be attributed to the projects’ broadly irregular approach to social norm change. A more systematic methodology, one that supersedes instrumental approaches that target only women, will benefit future activities. This could include designing and implementing a consistent framework across country activities that seeks to transform the relations and norms that multiply and sustain gender inequalities, including context-specific gender analysis and involving men from the outset of activities.

6. Equality for all, not some

Although none of the studies conducted in depth research of barriers to participation related to vulnerabilities, minority status, or marginalization, it is clear from the broad assessments that participation in activities, and the leadership roles and formation of networks resulting from this participation, was generally limited to older, able-bodied women from homogenous ethnic groups. This restrictive form of participation is undoubtedly problematic, as women’s interests and priorities are not homogeneously defined primarily by their gender. The most significant concerns for women can also develop as a result of their class, origin, race, age, religion, or economic status, whether they are single parents and/or heads of household, or whether they have physical or mental disabilities, among many other concerns. Ensuring that women of all ages and backgrounds can participate in leadership and livelihood programmes, activities and structures is key to representing a broad age of interests and furthering a collective and inclusive agenda for all women.

Adolescent girls in particular must be heard. The inability of project activities to ensure the participation of adolescents was evident across some country projects. In Ecuador, for example, adolescent girl respondents chose not to report substantively on participation in pilot activities, which they complained were not accessible to them. Instead they shared broader concerns, in particular related to a general lack of support for adolescents in the camp. In relation to the activities themselves, girls expressed dissatisfaction with the project model and its perceived inability to develop the long-term skills they felt they needed to attain. In South Sudan, the lack of youth committees and activities for girls was highlighted, as the ones in place were mostly targeted at young boys.

The importance of engaging adolescent girls cannot be overestimated. In *Adolescence: Age and Stage: Understanding the golden threads that connect the adolescent girl experience worldwide*, Robert Bloom reminds us that “we now understand that adolescence creates a window of opportunity – a second chance– to ensure that young girls enter adulthood healthy, empowered and with the agency to achieve their full potential.”²¹ Programmatic targeting of young girls in conflict and disaster affected regions is of particular importance, as heightened vulnerabilities specific to adolescence are evident across crises settings.

²¹ Bloom, Robert WM, *Adolescence: Age and Stage: Understanding the golden threads that connect the adolescent girl experience worldwide*, Girl Effect and John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2017

Gender and SGBV analyses and assessments conducted in Nigeria, South Sudan, Ecuador and the Philippines between 2006 and 2017²² highlighted a number of risks particular to young girls in these emergency settings. Adolescent girls are routinely exposed to risks of forced and early marriage as a negative coping mechanism, and are on average 30% less likely to attend school. Girls entering early adolescence are particularly susceptible to disempowerment, as in many cultures, reaching puberty often means a restricting of mobility and agency and taking on a disproportionate share of domestic work while adolescent boys are encouraged to take risks and develop their full potential. Health and hygiene services in displaced settings lack consistent targeted interventions for young girls, including specific menstrual hygiene management (MHM) interventions. Moreover, girls between the ages of 10-19 can experience disproportionate levels of SGBV, and a 2011 survey conducted in Ecuador specifically found that 69% of girls aged 10 to 15 have been victims of gender-based violence, particularly sexual abuse.²³

Disability does not mean inability. The inclusion of women with disabilities in pilot activities was similarly varied, and would benefit from a more rigorous approach. In Ecuador, women with disabilities reported that they could not access activities. There was however, evidence of more promising practice: in South Sudan, support to persons with disabilities was in place as a result of the existence of an informal ‘War and Disabilities Committee’ and the efforts of the implementation team to include women with disabilities. One woman in South Sudan noted, “if there is a common problem among those of us with disabilities, we will group together and go to the CHC (Community High Committee), or go to IOM”.

The ability to participate is valuable in and of itself. The act of including previously discriminated against groups is valuable at the onset of activities, enabling a showcasing of abilities, skills and experience, and creation of social connections that can trigger a process of normalization of the ‘other’ that is crucial to inclusion. In the Philippines, this change was acknowledged in relation to ethnic minority women from the Badjao community. One key informant expressed this change, reflecting “before, in my experience dealing with Badjao, they were really shy. They didn’t say much...(now) I can really see a change. They are really capable of voicing their concerns.”

7. The need for long-term approaches

None of the above strategies can be followed in the short-term. Although some incremental shifts can be discerned as a result of short-term projects, real and lasting change that unequivocally shifts social norms in the direction of enabling greater opportunities and equality for women, as participants and as leaders, is the result of long-term investment.

The respondents themselves were quick to highlight this as a key concern. As discussed above, in Ecuador, adolescent girls complained of the short term nature of projects. And in South Sudan, a key informant observed that if activities were discontinued, the women that evidenced increased levels of self-confidence “(would) go back...we need to continue giving them the confidence to speak up and eventually they feel able to face the men”.

Recommendations

A. For camp managers

1. Ensure women’s participation projects implemented in militarized environments begin with an assessment of realistic opportunities and challenges for women to engage in meaningful decision-making. This means first and foremost analyzing how

²²Oxfam South Sudan Gender Analysis: A snapshot situation analysis of the differential impact of the humanitarian crisis on women, girls, men and boys in South Sudan, Oxfam 2017; UNFPA, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Assessment in North East Nigeria, New York, 2016; Dwyer, L and Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, Gender and Conflict in Mindanao, The Asia Foundation 2012

²³National Institute of Statistics and the Census (INEC) Men and Women in Figures III, Quito, Ecuador, 2012.

power is manifested and exercised, and exploring avenues for alternative power brokerage where formal, visible decision-making is inaccessible.

2. Support participation in informal as well as formal spaces, understanding that this is key to shaping alternative responses to visible power, strengthening public perceptions of women as influencers and leaders, and building collective power as women's voices coalesce and are multiplied.

3. Design projects that strengthen women's capacity to build networks as well as skills. Informal coalitions that bridge and link female social capital are both a significant benefit of increased participation, and a necessary step towards attaining economic and decision-making power.

4. Include increased self-esteem and resilience as activity objectives, not just by-products. Activities focused on increasing participation of women across levels must examine and replicate the positive mental health outcomes resulting from building blocks of participation, and not limit their analysis by examining final, quantifiable outcomes.

5. Ensure that women of all ages and backgrounds can participate in leadership and livelihood activities. This includes adopting a rigorous approach to engaging adolescent girls and women with disabilities. Ensure also that discriminated against groups are included in all types of activities, as this can trigger a process of normalization of the 'other' that is crucial to inclusion.

B. For the CCCM National and Global Clusters:

1. Develop field-friendly tools that can support partners in conducting timely power analysis that can help them understand the processes of dominance, alliance and exclusion that are key to paving the way for increased participation of women in decision-making in camps.

2. Advocate for livelihoods activities to always be included as part of projects to improve participation. Recognize the role of livelihoods as a critical enabler of participation, that women's access to livelihoods reduces the likelihood of household poverty, and that resources in women's hands have a range of positive outcomes within the household. However, livelihoods interventions should be done through conducting appropriate local market and population-based assessments to identify opportunities that, while considering what is culturally appropriate in the interest of women's safety, look to facilitate sustainable interventions beyond a gender reductive approach.

C. For donors:

1. Ensure social norm change is central to participation projects. This requires supporting partners to conduct context-specific gender analysis, and insist on including men from the outset of any activity. Social norm change is possible, but it is not linear. Refashioning women as economic providers and community agents significantly effects shifts in gendered social dynamics, and begins to challenge social norms, at the household and community level - a key factor in enabling equal and meaningful participation. However, perceptions of increasing equality in the community do not automatically equate to equality at home, and externally facilitated shifts in traditional roles run the risk of having only limited influence over intra-household gender dynamics. Engaging men through women's participation projects is therefore critical to both bolster women's opportunities to challenge social norms but also as a way to mitigate potential domestic conflict.

2. Understand that crises can shift social norms – but backward as much as forward.

Narratives that are framed around the positive opportunities presented to women to be leaders, workers and providers when faced with situations in which men are missing, fighting, or stripped of their own traditional livelihoods fail to take into account the fact that gendered social norms can regress as often as they progress.

3. Invest in long-term solutions. In the short-term, progress will be limited. Although some incremental shifts can be discerned as a result of short-term projects, real and lasting change that unequivocally shifts social norms in the direction of enabling greater opportunities and equality for women, as participants and as leaders, is the result of long-term investment.