

Women's Role in Coordination

Improving the participation and protection of displaced women in camps, informal sites, and out of camp urban neighbourhoods

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Camp Management agencies have a critical role to play in addressing the cultural, structural, and capacity-related barriers to women's participation in coordination. When these barriers are addressed, women's role improves the well-being of the whole community, as well as the safety of women and girls.

About the research

NRC has conducted a global qualitative study, which presents practical recommendations for Camp Management agencies to improve the contribution that displaced women can make to the coordination of humanitarian responses in camps, informal sites, and urban out of camp neighbourhoods. The research was conducted as part of a broader project managed by the International Organization for Migration, as the global co-lead of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster. This wider project explores how women's participation in community governance mechanisms, both inside and outside camps, contributes to enhancing women's safety.

Ensuring the meaningful and equal participation of men and women in decision making is a fundamental responsibility of Camp Management

agencies, alongside ensuring efficient and *inclusive* coordination of assistance and protection at the level of a camp, informal site, or neighbourhood. Moreover, while there is strong empirical evidence that women's inclusion in leadership improves humanitarian outcomes, it is also a well-known fact that women participate less than men in the public sphere in almost all contexts. While various research studies have explored how women's participation in humanitarian response can be improved generally, none have looked specifically at the role of displacement-affected women in coordination, nor the role of a Camp Management agency in facilitating this. 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.

The objectives of this research were therefore threefold. First, to understand the contributions that women can make to coordination and the impact they can thereby have on their communities, and especially on women's safety and protection. Second, to analyse the barriers and enablers to women's participation in and influence on coordination. And third, to suggest *practical* steps that Camp Management agencies can take to dismantle the barriers while enhancing the enablers to women's role in coordination, across a range of displacement settings and cultural contexts.

How women can contribute to coordination

The study highlighted many encouraging examples of how displaced women in formal and informal governance structures – with the support of Camp Management agencies – are involved in coordination and thereby having an influence on services provided in their communities. For example, in Afghanistan, women's committee members from informal settlements in Kabul managed to coordinate with local authorities and businesses for the provision of literacy and vocational training for women; in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp, female leaders were coordinating with Peace Committees and authorities to resolve conflicts in their blocks; in Iraq women committee members from an informal settlement in Ramadi were collecting and sharing information on needs of vulnerable households, and monitoring provision of waste collection services by the local authority.

Across all contexts, women leaders and committee members were 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 safety issues facing women. Service providers consistently agreed that women were more interested than men in supporting their wider communities, and more able to articulate the specifics of problems as well as suggesting creative solutions.

Barriers to women's role in coordination

The study highlighted ongoing barriers to women's participation in and influence on coordination. These barriers are combined and intersecting, but all stem from the same root: a pervasive patriarchal culture. Culture, in many contexts, leads to men more often playing an external role and becoming the default problem-solvers and interlocutors than women, both before and after displacement; in some cases, women are also forbidden from meeting with non-family member men, or from leaving their homes. While this is not a new observation, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how precisely culture affects women's participation in coordination.

On the one hand, culture leads to women's *structural exclusion* from humanitarian coordination processes and mechanisms; on the other hand, it means that women often lack the *capacities* that enable their male counterparts to have influence through coordination. 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 contexts. On the capacities side, men often possess 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 educated and therefore literate, as well as more likely to be able to speak the language of coordination.

These cultural, structural, and capacities challenges are often reinforced by humanitarian agencies, whose internal staffing structures

frequently 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.

Enablers to women's role in coordination

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 (detailed in Box 1, recommendations 1 to 6), and second, women's capacity and resources for coordination must be built (detailed in Box 2, 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 agencies seeking to mainstream women's participation and ensure safe programming.

Additional recommendations are also provided to enable Camp Management agencies to use women's role in coordination to address women's safety and protection specifically; these are set out in Box 3.

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.

Box 1: Recommendations for creating and supporting representative coordination and governance structures

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

Box 2: Recommendations for building women's capacity and resources for coordination

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*
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*
9. Provide material resources that facilitate coordination activities, and facilitate access to livelihoods/economic empowerment opportunities, or consider approaching current or previous beneficiaries of such activities for inclusion in coordination and governance structures – *strongly advised*

Box 3: 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 from overarching camp/site/neighbourhood governance structures.
- B. Facilitate meetings in which women leaders can meet with service providers who implement services that impact on women's safety and protection.
- C. Train and support women from governance structures to map safety risks and to present these in coordination forums, and consider assigning specific in-kind or cash-based resources for responding to issues raised through community-led initiatives.
- D. Ensure that women from governance structures are introduced to women's protection agencies, and trained on GBV response and prevention, including referral principles and pathways.
- E. Set aside specific meetings, or time-slots within meetings, for gender segregated discussions with leaders.

Link to the full report: [\[pending\]](#)

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