



Women and Girls' Leadership

Lessons from CARE International in Uganda

This Knowledge Model paper on women and girls' leadership forms one of a series of papers developed by CARE International in Uganda to provide an evidence base of promising practices and models to inform future long-term development and humanitarian programming. The Knowledge Model papers identify lessons learnt and provide recommendations to inform the implementation approach of the recently developed Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP). WAYREP is funded by the Austrian Development Agency and aims to strengthen the resilience of refugee and Ugandan women, girls and youth to live a life free from violence in rural and urban contexts in West Nile and Northern Uganda.

The Ugandan Context: Why focus on women and girls' leadership?

Voice, decision-making and leadership are recognized as important dimensions of women's empowerment. A recent review of global evidence on the processes of change that enable women to have substantive voice and leadership in decision-making however concluded that 'women overwhelmingly still have limited access to positions of leadership'.¹ In the humanitarian context, the 2015 global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 by UN Women identified the humanitarian system's failure to recognize the ability of local civil society organisations (CSOs) and women and girls as partners², while recent applied research by CARE has also highlighted the many ways in which women's voices go unheard in humanitarian decision-making.³

The Government of Uganda is a signatory to several international and regional conventions for the protection and promotion of women's rights, which include provisions for encouraging women's leadership and participation in democratic governance. At the national level the government has also enacted laws and policies (e.g. the Uganda

¹ Domingo, P., Homes, R., O'Neil, T., Jones, N., Bird, K., Larson, A., Presler-Marshall, E., Valters, C. 2015. 'Women's voice and leadership in decision-making – Assessing the evidence'. ODI.

² UN Women. 2015. Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. See <http://wps.unwomen.org>

³ Mollett, H. 2016 'She is a humanitarian: Women's participation in humanitarian action drawing on global trends and evidence from Jordan and the Philippines'. CARE Gender in Emergencies.



National Gender Policy, the National Gender Action Plan) to advance the participation of women in public leadership, which have directed a process of affirmative action to ensure women’s increased representation in parliament and local government⁴. Despite this enabling policy and legislative environment however, **Ugandan women and girls’ meaningful participation in and influence over decision-making processes at levels affecting their lives (household, community and beyond) remains limited** as men and male youth tend to lead on making major decisions at household and community levels, and traditional social norms often act as constraints on women’s voice⁵. In the West Nile refugee settlements, opportunities for transformations in gender relations have arisen due to the large-scale displacement of refugees and associated shifts in gender roles, caused - for example - by women being registered as heads of households for relief distributions. However, as is the case in Ugandan host communities, the **strong influence of traditional norms** in the refugee settlements limits the extent to which South Sudanese women are able to engage with and contribute to decision-making processes, despite efforts being made to ensure their representation on the Refugee Welfare Committees.

CARE Uganda has accordingly identified the **strengthening of women and girls’ voices and capacity for representing their specific needs, priorities and interests in decision-making processes** as a priority for programming with both Ugandan and refugee communities for emergency response, peace-building and sustainable development. The Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP) will focus on promoting women’s and young women and young men’s empowerment in response to the combined challenges of the large-scale displacement of refugees from South Sudan into north-west Uganda and rapid urbanization, which processes often have particularly adverse effects on women and girls. The project will provide targeted gender transformative livelihood and protection support to vulnerable women and girls in two urban centres (the towns of Gulu and Arua) and in the refugee settlement of Omugo to promote increased self-reliance and personal wellbeing for project participants, their families and surrounding communities⁶.

The Women and Girls’ Leadership Model

CARE Uganda’s programming model for Women and Girls Leadership (WGL) provides **an integrated approach combining interventions to facilitate changes across all three domains of the CARE Gender Equality Framework** (see Figure 1). It aims to promote i) **changes in women and girls’ agency** by building self-confidence and self-esteem, encouraging assertiveness and developing speaking and leadership skills; ii) **changes in the relationships** (e.g. with male relatives, with the extended family, with peers, neighbours and the wider community) which shape a woman’s capacity for engaging in decision-making within and beyond her own household; and iii) **changes in structures** including the social norms (e.g. gender roles, division of labour) shaping the opportunities open to women leaders, their representation on formal and informal decision-making bodies and the social acceptance of women in leadership positions.

Figure 1: Key elements of CARE Uganda’s Women and Girls Leadership model mapped to the CARE International Gender Equality Framework



⁴ See <https://www.uwonet.or.ug/womens-leadership-democratic-governance>

⁵ CARE Uganda. 2017. 'Rapid Gender Analysis: South Sudanese refugee crisis, West Nile, Uganda.' CARE Uganda.

⁶ CARE Austria. 2018. Women and Youth Resilience Project (WAYREP) Programme Document. CARE Uganda.



The WGL model builds on CARE Uganda's programming experience from implementation of a holistic women's empowerment intervention model during phases I, II and III of the Northern Uganda Women's Empowerment Programme (NUWEP) from 2007 to 2016. Experience from the implementation of NUWEP at the community level highlighted the importance of combining psychosocial support (PSS) with engaging men and boys (EMB) and women's economic empowerment interventions for working with women and girls in a post-conflict setting characterized by high levels of displacement and gender-based violence (GBV). Development of this model has also been informed by the implementation of the Learning for Change (L4C) programme from 2017 to 2019 as an organizational-level intervention designed to build capacity for gender transformative programming by means of an integrated approach (see Box 1).

The model is now being implemented by CARE Uganda by the She Feeds the World (SFtW) project which aims to improve the food and nutrition security of poor rural households with a strong emphasis on women small-scale producers in western Uganda⁷; by the Women Adolescents and Youth Rights and Empowerment (WAY) programme which is being implemented in partnership with UNHCR to enhance women and young people's access and utilization of quality SRHR and GBV services across eight districts of Northern and northwest Uganda; and by the Women Lead in Emergencies pilot initiative being implemented in refugee settlements in West Nile and Southwest Uganda as a crosscutting component to promote women's meaningful participation in formal humanitarian decision-making spaces.

In terms of **strengthening women and girls' agency** the provision of **psychosocial support** (PSS) in several forms for women and girls is often the starting point for implementation of the model. Forms of PSS can include supporting women in a process of self-discovery involving reflection on personal aspects of leadership, encouraging women to build mutually supportive relationships of solidarity with other women through "circles of sisterhood", which are often associated with women's groups such as Village Savings and Loans Associations, as well as PSS in the form of counselling for women who have experienced GBV or other traumatic experiences. A strong focus on PSS reflects CARE Uganda's understanding that many women and girls experience considerable and sustained stress and anxiety due to the poverty and gender-based discrimination they face in their daily lives, and need support to manage those problems as the foundation for them to begin developing and exercising leadership skills in their homes, families and communities⁸. CARE Uganda's programming experience suggests that **PSS builds internal and external resources for women and their families to cope with adversity and provide for their basic needs, as well as helping to build resilience in the community.**

BOX 1: THE LEARNING FOR CHANGE (L4C) PROGRAMME.

L4C was implemented as a regional programme in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda from April 2016 to March 2019 with ADA funding. The programme aimed to promote meaningful participation by women in decision-making at multiple levels through organisational capacity development and advocacy relating to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the Great Lakes region, in Austria and at the European Union level. The integrated implementation approach was designed to address multiple barriers to gender transformation, by a combination of psychosocial support (PSS), women's leadership training, engaging men and boys (EMB) as well as advocacy and Gender Equity and Diversity (GED) capacity-building initiatives. Programme achievements included:

- Establishment of a pool of skilled GED trainers in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda;
- Development and implementation of trainings for promoting a conducive organisational culture for gender equality and psychosocial well-being, gender-responsive programming, strengthening women's participation at the community level and evidence-based advocacy;
- Enhanced capacities of more than 1,100 staff from 21 civil society organizations and government institutions as a result of L4C trainings and the implementation of corresponding Action Plans;
- More than 14,000 colleagues and multipliers (such as village agents, village activists, VSLA members, community activists etc.) were enabled to use L4C programme approaches at the community level by means of a cascading training approach.
- Application by trained partner staff and multipliers of new skills on facilitation, women leadership, psychosocial approach and engaging men and boys to reach more than 340,000 people. Success stories documented by the programme demonstrate impacts at household and community level.

Source: CARE Austria. 2019. 'Learning For Change: Strengthening Women's Voices in East Africa – Lessons from Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda 2016 -2019.'

⁷ CARE Uganda. 2018. She Feeds the World Proposal. CARE Uganda.

⁸ CARE Austria & ADA. Undated. 'Learning for Change Impact Stories'. ADA, CARE Austria.



CARE Uganda's Learning for Change programme (see Box 1) developed a participatory approach for **building understanding of concepts of gender justice, transformative change and PSS, strengthening communication skills and attentive listening, as well as building and redefining agency and self-esteem** as an approach for promoting WGL⁹. L4C activities with the staff of partner organisations included leadership workshops and Training of Trainer (ToT) workshops on women's participation to enable partner organisations to integrate elements of the L4C approach in their activities at the community level. The L4C WGL approach is now being used in ongoing long-term and humanitarian response projects being implemented by CARE Uganda (see discussion of lessons learnt).

In addition to PSS and leadership training, CARE Uganda is now piloting an approach for providing **mentoring support** to vulnerable women and girls from rural, urban and refugee communities in Uganda through the Women and Youth (WAY) project. This approach involves the selection of particularly vulnerable women and girls (e.g. child mothers, GBV survivors, girls who have dropped out of school or who are at risk of school drop-out etc.) who are then linked with mentors – experienced and knowledgeable women and girls who are considered as role models in their communities – to meet weekly and discuss topics and issues selected by the mentees. The mentoring relationship is intended to support mentees in their personal development, through building life skills and social networks. Women mentees walk a journey of self-discovery with the support of their mentors¹⁰.

In terms of changing relations, CARE Uganda's programming experience of promoting women and girls' leadership in the post-conflict setting of Northern Uganda has clearly demonstrated the importance of engaging men and boys in support of women's empowerment and leadership development processes. **CARE Uganda's engaging men and boys approach involves working with men as social agents of change, as psychosocial community facilitators and as clients with their own needs for PSS, by training Role Model Men (RMM) to engage in community outreach activities in support of gender equality**¹¹. The engaging men and boys approach has been found to be effective in changing women and men's attitudes and behaviours relating to GBV and gender equality. A mixed methods impact evaluation of the Women's Empowerment Programme *Roco Kwo* implemented in Northern Uganda from January 2013 to March 2016 found that women in households that had received the support of a RMM reported more progressive attitudes towards women's ownership and controls of assets, more positive relationships and reduced conflict between family members, and were more likely to report participation in decision-making processes at household and community levels¹².

To promote changes in how women relate to each other, the CARE Uganda WGL model also focuses on **building circles of support or sisterhoods** by bringing women together in safe spaces of different kinds (e.g. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), leadership workshops, Farmer Field Business Schools etc.) to engage in honest and critical self-reflection and discussion of gender equality and leadership issues, to share their experiences and to learn from their peers and mentors. The experience of CARE Uganda's L4C programme has highlighted the value of these sisterhoods in breaking isolation, building solidarity, fostering mutual learning and support and enhancing the sustainability of feminist movements¹³. This aspect of the model links to the ways in which CARE Uganda's programming for women and girls' leadership also promotes processes of structural change through the establishment of women's groups (e.g. the VSLAs or Farmer Field and Business Schools) to provide an enabling environment for individual and collective actions that encourage women and girls' social, economic and political empowerment (see CARE Uganda's Knowledge Model paper on Women and Girls' Economic Empowerment for further discussion).

The **Women's Safe Spaces** being created by the Women and Adolescent Youth Empowerment and Rights (WAY) programme in refugee settlements and host community settings in Northern Uganda are another type of community structure designed to provide targeted support for women and girls on issues of gender equality. The Women's Safe Spaces are formal or informal places (which are not necessarily physical locations – they can also be groups that meet regularly) where women and girls or youth feel physically and emotionally safe and are able to express themselves

⁹ CARE Austria & ADA. 2019. Training of Trainers (ToT): Tools and methods for strengthening women's participation & agency. ADA, CARE Austria.

¹⁰ CARE Uganda, UNFPA. 2018. 'Mentorship Guidelines: Inspiring Lives through Mentorship.' UNFPA, CARE Uganda.

¹¹ CARE Uganda. 2016. Northern Uganda Women Empowerment Programme: Description of the Engaging Men and Boys (EMB) Model. Learning brief, CARE Uganda.

¹² CARE Austria. 2017. 'CARE Austria Framework Program Phase III – Program Overview and Lessons Learned from Uganda.' ADA, CARE Austria

¹³ CARE Austria & ADA. Undated. 'Learning for Change Impact Stories'. ADA, CARE Austria



freely and without fear of judgment of harm¹⁴. The Women's Safe Spaces provide a setting where women and young people can access information and services (e.g. PSS, legal and medical services), learn new skills and socialize and develop their social networks.

Lessons Learnt

Most of CARE Uganda's programming on women and girls' leadership to date has been with adult women in rural areas but the country office is now starting to apply the model with women and adolescents in both urban contexts and refugee settlements through the WAY programme and the Women Lead in Emergencies initiative. These interventions are however currently at a relatively early stage of implementation, with limited documentation available for lessons learnt, knowledge generated and impacts delivered to date. Organisations such as the Centre for Women in Governance (CEWIGO), Akina Mama wa Afrika and the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) that are working at the national level to promote women's leadership in the urban context in Uganda are engaging mostly with women students, professionals and parliamentarians rather than poor urban women and girls. This analysis of lessons learnt from the adaptation of CARE Uganda's model for women and girls' leadership in the urban and humanitarian contexts therefore draws primarily on interviews and discussions held with programme and partner staff during the short in-country visit carried out as part of the research process for the meta-analysis.

What aspects of the model can contribute to its success in urban and humanitarian contexts?

Key positive lessons learnt from the implementation of CARE Uganda's women and girls' leadership model in rural contexts which are also relevant for programming in urban and humanitarian contexts are as follows:

- i. **Promoting women and girls' leadership involves processes of male and female personal transformation, which center on changing the power relations that perpetuate gender inequality.** For women and girls, this involves finding and developing the power within themselves, as well as finding power with others and developing their power to engage in decision-making and leadership processes.
- ii. **Building understanding of women and girls' leadership** as a concept that goes beyond the idea of women and girls taking political office or leading in large organisations but that is also about enabling women to achieve their potential and improve their life prospects both in the professional and domestic sphere is empowering and confidence-building for women and girls participating in this process of personal and social change.
- iii. **Promoting women and girls' leadership therefore requires the adoption of an integrated programming approach** which combines the provision of psychosocial support in different forms with women's leadership training, as well as activities for engaging men and boys, and working through community structures to create an enabling environment.
- iv. **Providing psychosocial support for women and girls is a key strategy for strengthening agency and building women and girls' confidence and capacity to participate in leadership activities.** While PSS is important for participants of both humanitarian and long-term development interventions, this component of the WGL model is particularly vital in the humanitarian context, given the widespread experience of trauma due to displacement, poverty, violence and sexual violence among refugee women and girls.
- v. Women and girls organizing with other women and girls is essential for building women and girls' political consciousness and advancing women's rights. **Promoting solidarity or building sisterhood by bringing together groups of women leaders** sometimes from different backgrounds or levels has been found in CARE Uganda's L4C programme and SFTW project to be an effective approach for enhancing women and girls' individual confidence and enabling mutually supportive networking.
- vi. **Engaging men and boys to support and promote women's leadership is also vitally important** particularly in contexts where men and boys are experiencing disempowerment and frustration because they have lost their jobs and sources of livelihood, are unable to provide for their families and are adopting negative coping strategies involving alcoholism, substance abuse and/or violence, and where as a result the risk of backlash against women

¹⁴ UNFPA. 2018. 'Women and Youth Safe Spaces in Refugee Settlements – Guidance Note'. UNFPA.



and girls' participation in decision-making and leadership initiatives may be high. For example, experience from the implementation of the Women's and Youth Safe spaces to date indicates that the sustainability of those spaces requires the input and support of husbands, parents and community leaders. CARE Uganda's approach for engaging men and boys is designed to address the critical needs of men and boys for emotional and psychosocial support, as a means of encouraging their buy-in to and support for broader goals of women and girls' empowerment.

Working in urban contexts

Discussions with representatives of the municipal authorities for Gulu and Arua and with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in those contexts highlighted the limited coverage of government and NGO programming targeting the urban poor in those settings¹⁵. **Most programming to date with urban poor target groups has focused on promoting women's economic empowerment, youth skilling and functional adult literacy rather than on women and girls' leadership**¹⁶. The Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) conducted by CARE in Arua and Gulu towns as one of the formative studies for WAYREP highlighted the dominance of men and male youth in decision-making at household and community levels in those urban settings¹⁷. However, the RGA also found that some women are taking on roles at the community level through cultural, faith-based and local government institutions, although teenage adolescent girls were identified as having little or no voice in decision-making at any level. The RGA also highlighted the particular needs, coping strategies and vulnerabilities of poor urban women and girls in Gulu and Arua in terms of access to education, water and menstrual hygiene management, with urban poverty being identified as a key driver for GBV and transactional sex being identified as a common coping strategy among female youth for meeting basic personal and household needs.

Implementation of the WAY programme since January 2018 across eight districts has involved the establishment of Women's Spaces and mentoring groups in several peri-urban and urban divisions. The programme has found high demand for Women's Spaces and mentoring groups across both the urban and rural implementation areas, which has resulted in the establishment of additional groups at some locations. The Women's Spaces and mentoring groups established by the WAY programme enable the delivery of PSS and awareness-raising activities on GBV and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues by the Women's Space facilitators and mentors, as well as providing a space in which women participants can engage in small-scale income generating activities. The WAY programme is also working with Role Model Men and boys in Male Action Groups, and several other community structures or platforms, including Youth Savings and Loan Associations (YSLAs), Farmer Field Business Schools and SASA! community activists to create demand for GBV and SRH services. WAY programme staff report that the programme implementation approach in rural and urban settings has been broadly similar overall, although some specific suggestions for its adaptation to the urban context are emerging¹⁸ (see box).

Adapting the WGL model for Urban Programming

- **Mobilisation through existing urban leadership structures** is key to reaching the most vulnerable.
- Urban programming interventions need to **work with women at locations where women already meet** (e.g. markets, faith centres).
- **Childcare provision at the Women's Spaces** is needed to facilitate women's regular attendance.
- There is high **demand for VSLA from users of the Women's Spaces**: VSLA potentially provides an entry point for promoting women's leadership in urban settings although it may need to be combined with a cash transfer approach to reach the most vulnerable.

¹⁵ Interviews with Community Development Officers in Arua and Gulu Municipalities (05/09/2019).

¹⁶ Presentations by Arua and Gulu municipalities from the Urban Programming Knowledge Harvesting meeting, Kampala (05/09/2019)

¹⁷ CARE Uganda. 2019. Rapid Gender Analysis and Gender-based Assessment in Arua District and Gulu Town. WAYREP, CARE.

¹⁸ Interview with Patricia Avaako, WAY programme Training Coordinator, CARE Uganda (09/09/2019).



What have been the challenges of the model in urban contexts?

Learning from the implementation of the WAY programme to date shows that **poor urban women are busy, mobile and dependent on cash income for their day-to-day survival**. They are most interested in engaging with programming interventions which help them to meet their basic needs for survival, as reflected by the demand from women attending the Women's Spaces for support in establishing VSLAs. Experience from the WAY programme to date has also highlighted **the need to understand the structures that act as gatekeepers to the community in urban settings**, and the bureaucratic procedures to be followed in engaging with those actors. The implications of this learning for the implementation of the women and girls' leadership model as part of an integrated programming approach by WAYREP are discussed further below.

Working in humanitarian contexts

CARE Uganda is currently implementing the women and girls' leadership model in refugee settlements through the WAY programme - discussed above - which is working across all five refugee hosting districts in northern Uganda, and the Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) initiative being implemented by the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) project in Omugo settlement. The WLiE initiative is a cross-cutting component of the two-year GAC project which is working in the sectors of shelter, prevention and response to gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and women's leadership. **The Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) approach is designed to ensure women's voices influence every level of humanitarian decision-making** based on a flexible, women-led, four-step process involving a combination of Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA), women-led action planning and action plan implementation, and action learning¹⁹. The process involves engaging with women's rights organisations and women-led organisations as well as with affected communities and humanitarian actors.

On-the-ground activities for the WLiE initiative in Omugo settlement began in January 2019 with a Rapid Gender Analysis on Power to build an analysis of the opportunities and barriers shaping crisis-affected women's access to, and influence within, decision-making processes of different kinds in the settlement²⁰. The RGA on Power also provided practical programming and operational recommendations to support women's participation and leadership in decision-making, including gaps to be addressed by further assessment and analysis. Since completion of the initial RGA on power, the WLiE initiative in Omugo settlement has been working with three of the existing women's groups identified in the RGA, as well as supporting the formation of an inter-denominational faith-based women's group. **Women from the groups being supported by the WLiE initiative have recently participated in women's leadership training, and exchange visits**, as a result of which they are planning to hold a Women's Conference in Rhino Camp in October as a forum for bringing refugee women from different settlements together with representatives from UNHCR, OPM and the development partners involved in the humanitarian response²¹. **The Women's Conference will provide an opportunity for promoting vertical and horizontal networking between women in Omugo and other settlements**, the lack of which was identified in the RGA as a constraint on women's ability to build relationships of understanding, trust and solidarity across different identify and socio-economic groups. At the same time as these activities targeting

Adapting the WGL model for Humanitarian Programming

- **Working with existing women's groups/ collectives** to encourage sustainability.
- **Forming new affinity-based women's groups**.
- **Engaging men and boys through activities with leaders and with younger men** who are not in couple-based or family relationships.
- **Women mentors supporting unaccompanied or orphan children** and working with and through Women's Spaces.
- **Extending the circle of sisterhood beyond the group** (exchange visits, the Women's Conference).
- **Linking women and girls' leadership programming to economic empowerment**

¹⁹ CARE Uganda. 2017. 'Lifesaving Shelter, Gender-based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health Support for South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda 2018 - 2020'. Project proposal, CARE Uganda.

²⁰ CARE International. 2019. 'Rapid Gender Analysis on Power – Omugo settlement, CARE Uganda West Nile'. CARE International, CARE Uganda and CARE UK.

²¹ Interview with Carol Aol, WLiE coordinator, CARE Uganda (11/09/2019).



women, the WLiE initiative in Omugo has also initiated EMB activities to promote an enabling environment for women's leadership in the settlement.

Experience from the early stages of implementation of the WLiE initiative suggests that **women in the refugee settlements are interested in organizing collectively to raise their voices and participate in decision-making processes, despite the barriers they face in doing so** (see below). Members of the South Sudan Refugee Women's Association (SSWRA) – one of the groups that the WLiE initiative is working with – who participated in a focus group discussion for the meta-analysis expressed their appreciation for the women's leadership training they had received from CARE, while also making suggestions for how it could be further strengthened in future (such as, for example, inviting husbands and male relatives to attend part of the training, and integrating activities to promote women's economic empowerment as part of the women's leadership initiative).

What have been the challenges of implementing the model in the humanitarian context?

There are **multiple social and practical barriers to women's participation in decision-making and leadership in the refugee settlements** – many of which stem from **the persistence of gender and power norms relating to women's mobility, roles and domestic responsibilities**, with acts of violence against women who transgress those norms being reported²². Although South Sudanese women in the West Nile refugee settlements are reportedly participating more in decision-making at household level due to their greater access to resources (i.e. distributions and opportunities for participation in development programmes) and some are also participating in community meetings and even holding some leadership positions such as block leader, **men continue to dominate all formal and informal public decision-making bodies in Omugo settlement despite comprising less than 19% of the settlement population** – often even in households where they are working outside the settlement or abroad. The RGA also found that **men are highly suspicious of women's participation and leadership activities that exclude them** and are able to prevent women from participating in community governance activities. Given the reported widespread tendency for men and boys to engage in negative coping strategies such as alcohol and substance abuse, gangs and violence, there is clearly a significant **risk of backlash against women and girls engaging in leadership activities** in the refugee settlements.

Experience from the implementation of the WLiE initiative to date reflects the challenges of promoting women's leadership in the refugee settlements: **WLiE participants have consistently highlighted the need for integrating economic empowerment activities as part of the women's leadership initiative on the grounds that such activities will encourage the support and respect of their male relatives**. Women who participated in the FGD for the meta-analysis also recommended that their husbands or male relatives should in future be allowed to attend or participate in some shared sessions as part of leadership training, to promote awareness-raising and discussions with men of the training content²³. The report that a woman leader from one of the Women's Space committees had been beaten by her husband as a result of malicious gossip from other men in the community regarding her leadership activities highlights the very real risk of backlash that women leaders can face.

Other significant challenges for the implementation of the women and girls' leadership programming model in the humanitarian context include:

- **Language and literacy barriers:** Many refugee women have low literacy levels as a result of which they are not confident in their ability to speak up and lead. As leaders are expected to be literate and speak English well so that they can represent their community, language is often also (although not always) a barrier for refugee women taking up formal leadership positions.
- **Time and mobility constraints** associated with the double burden of women's reproductive and productive roles limit the ability of women to take on leadership roles which involve time commitments that may prevent them from being able to meet their domestic responsibilities.

²² *Ibid*: CARE International. 2019.

²³ Focus Group Discussion with WLiE participants (South Sudanese Women Refugee Association members) in Omugo Settlement (07/09/2019)



- The **risk of backlash against RMM** who may be ostracized or face negative reactions both from their peers, wives and the wider community as a result of their progressive behaviours, which may make it difficult for them to sustain their activities.
- The **risks of inter-communal violence** due to existing tensions within the South Sudanese refugee community and **conflicts with the host community** also have potentially significant implications for the security of women engaging in leadership activities in the West Nile refugee settlements. Women interesting in taking on more leadership roles or volunteer positions fear that doing so will attract men coming to their homes at night, ostensibly for help, thus putting both themselves and their reputations at risk.
- **Issues of menstrual hygiene management**, which can be a significant constraint on women's mobility, have also been reported as a barrier to women taking up leadership roles in the refugee settlements.

Programming implications for WAYREP

CARE Uganda's programming experience has shown that the WGL model is relevant and appropriate for building the confidence and leadership skills of women by means of a combination of psychosocial support, leadership training and mentoring activities, which activities can help women to participate in decision-making processes within and beyond their own households and communities. The model's integrated approach, which incorporates components for engaging men and boys and organisational capacity-building, is also intended to promote an enabling environment for women's leadership, through the establishment or strengthening of community-based structures such as Women's Spaces and engagement with local governance institutions. As such, the model can potentially contribute to addressing both life-saving and urgent needs of vulnerable women and men (e.g. through meeting needs for psychosocial support and reducing protection risks in the short-term) while also establishing the foundation for building a more equitable society in which women and men can support each other in building peaceful and productive relationships in their homes and communities.

WAYREP is designed to promote increased self-reliance of Ugandan and refugee community members in West Nile and Northern Uganda, particularly women and female youth. Working with refugee and national women and female youth to build women and girls' leadership capacity will contribute to: Outcome 1, 'Enhanced safe, sustainable and dignified livelihoods/incomes for women and female youth', specifically their increased capacity to engage in economic activities and access financial services; and Outcome 3, 'Enhanced psychosocial support for survivors of GBV and abuse and exploitation', specifically in building their confidence and hope for the future.

Based on this meta-analysis, programming implications for WAYREP to consider as it refines its implementation approach include:

Engage with women and men opinion leaders from the beginning and throughout programming interventions to promote women and girls' leadership: Engaging with opinion leaders, i.e. leaders from formal community governance structures such as the Refugee Welfare Councils or slum-dweller associations, service providers and cultural and faith-based leaders through a process of dialogue and skills building is a key strategy for building an enabling environment for WGL programming at the community level. Opinion leaders should be engaged as the starting point for the process of mobilising women and girls to participate in WGL programming interventions as well as for engaging men and boys, and thereafter at key points of the programming intervention (e.g. by participating in capacity-building or training inputs, by their inclusion in community dialogues etc.).

Ensure a Do No Harm approach for implementation of the women and girls' leadership model: Given the strong influence of conservative social norms among both refugee and Ugandan national communities, risk mitigation strategies are needed ensure that interventions designed to promote women and girls' voice, participation and leadership do not result in increased risks for women and girl leaders. In this context, WAYREP will need to ensure a strong focus on engaging men and boys, including male leaders in challenging social norms relating to gender equality and GBV, as a means of mitigating the risk of backlash against women and girl leaders. Interventions for engaging men and boys in the West Nile refugee settlements need to specifically target the male leaders of settlement governance structures (the Refugee Welfare Committees at different levels) to build understanding of the barriers constraining



women's participation in decision-making processes and to provide positive incentives for them to support more women joining Block Leadership roles and bringing their issues to the RWC.

Ensure a focus on appropriate forms of PSS as a key foundational element for women's leadership: Many or most of the proposed WAYREP impact group of vulnerable women and youth in urban settings and refugee settlements are likely to have experienced disruptive or traumatic events and so to have needs for psychosocial support. WAYREP should prioritise meeting women and men's needs for PSS in safe spaces (e.g. through the Women's Spaces, mentoring, or in Male Action Groups) run by appropriately trained Community-based Facilitators as an entry point for the delivery of subsequent programming interventions relating to women and girls' leadership, economic empowerment, GBV prevention and response and youth skilling. Implementation of this element of the WGL model by WAYREP will need to be informed by the understanding that PSS needs to start from a process of self-discovery and confidence-building, but also involves encouraging solidarity among women (the "circles of sisterhood" concept) as the basis for strengthening women's voice, participation and leadership within and beyond their own households.

Link women and girls' economic empowerment and/or youth skilling activities with activities for strengthening women and girls' voice, participation and leadership: Evidence from CARE's programming in Uganda and elsewhere highlights the importance of economic empowerment as the foundation for promoting women and girls' voice, participation and leadership. When women and girls are able to contribute economically to their households, they are more likely to be able to raise their voices and have a say in decision-making processes within and beyond the household. An integrated approach for promoting women and girls' leadership which combines a focus on economic empowerment (through multi-purpose cash transfers, VSLA, business skills training etc.) with PSS, women's leadership training and activities for engaging men and boys is needed to mitigate the risks of backlash against women taking up leadership responsibilities.

Establish Women's Spaces as community-based structures for integrated programming, i.e. as Community Spaces: WAYREP should consider prioritising the establishment of multi-functional Women's or Community Spaces as the primary mechanism for the integrated implementation of project activities for promoting women and girls' leadership (including PSS) and economic empowerment, engaging men and boys and promoting processes of wider community dialogue and awareness-raising relating to women's rights, gender equality and GBV. In this way, the Women's/Community Space would provide way of delivering a flexible "menu" of project activities whereby Women's Space Facilitators (or Change Agents) would work with user groups of women, men and youth to identify needs, priorities and support processes of action planning, as the basis for defining activities to be undertaken by different groups. Drawing from the experience of the WAY programme, Women's/Community Spaces could potentially be established as groups of women who meet regularly rather than actual physical spaces. The experience of CARE Rwanda's Agents for Change project suggests however that having a physical space for such spaces can be advantageous in terms of enabling community outreach activities on an ongoing basis. Engaging men and boys activities conducted at the Women's Spaces could target the spouses or male relatives of women using the space through couple seminars conducted during trainings for women and girl leaders and spouses or female relatives in the case of trainings for role model men. Activities such as drama, sport and community celebrations could also be organised through the Women's/Community Spaces to promote a community-wide process of engagement.

Expand the WGL model to include a literacy/language training component: Experience from CARE Uganda's WLiE initiative to date has shown that low levels of literacy and language barriers among refugee women of all ages present significant barriers to their participation and leadership, and that women's groups in the refugee settlement have identified their need for functional adult literacy classes. WAYREP should consider including the provision of adult literacy and/or language training to prospective women and girl leaders, as a form of PSS for building confidence and life skills to enable refugee women to improve their access to services and opportunities for engaging in employment, leadership and business activities within and beyond the settlement.

Develop a WAYREP Learning and Communication System: the WAYREP program represents a unique opportunity to achieve deep impact at significant scale and therefore the production of knowledge and a strong learning agenda should be at the heart of its implementation. Developing a clear and focused learning and communication system around a set of core learning themes (based on assumptions and knowledge gaps) to generate evidence will support



this. Core learning themes in relation to women and girls' leadership could include: 1) piloting an approach for including functional adult literacy and language learning activities as part of the women and girls' leadership model and documenting the effectiveness of such an approach in promoting women's participation and leadership; 2) exploring the added value of mentoring in terms of empowerment outcomes for vulnerable women and girls: do women and girls who receive mentoring support develop greater self-esteem and confidence than those who don't? Are they different in terms of their sense of having community support and/or their behaviours (e.g. school attendance, participation in savings groups, participation in other community forums)?



KNOWLEDGE MODEL PAPER SERIES

This knowledge model paper is part of the following series:

1. Women and Girls' Economic Empowerment
2. Youth Skills Development
3. Women and Girls' Leadership
4. Community-based Gender-Based Violence Mobilisation and Prevention

CARE INTERNATIONAL

CARE is an international humanitarian aid organisation fighting global poverty, with a special focus on empowering women and girls to bring lasting change to their communities. CARE International has implemented development and humanitarian assistance projects in Uganda since 1969, targeting the most vulnerable communities, with a special focus on poor women and girls, who are the most at risk of rights' abuse and exploitation. Reaching 705,000 direct beneficiaries to date, our three programs, across 62 districts, consistently address the key drivers of poverty and social injustice in Uganda, namely prevailing gender inequality, widespread corruption and poor governance, and lastly the growing threat of climate change.

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