



Strengthening Women-Led Organizations' Meaningful Engagement in Humanitarian Settings: Year 1 Learnings

A Four-Country Program

Women's Voice and Leadership in Humanitarian Settings (WHS) is an innovative program focused on capacity-sharing, learning, and grantmaking for women-led organizations (WLOs) in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Nepal. In each country, project partners have selected a cohort of 15 WLOs who are receiving sustained support throughout the project. Now at the conclusion of the project's first of five years, project partners in each country have highlighted learnings from their own contexts in case studies, and this learning brief aims to draw out cross-cutting themes and learnings from project coordination at the global level.

In **Afghanistan**, project partners grappled with the need for a sudden shift to entirely online activities after the de facto authorities' December 2021 decree barring women from working in NGOs. In **Colombia**, partners dove into the work of three cohort members to understand the histories of their formation, their current motivations, and their plans for the future. In the **DRC**, partners assessed two cohort members' advances as a result of capacity-strengthening activities that have

been implemented so far. In **Nepal**, partners highlighted both the learnings of six cohort members as well as the histories of some of the local government stakeholders with whom the project is coordinating. And at the **global** level, project coordinators are reflecting on factors that have contributed to smooth project implementation and positive feedback from participants, seeking to inform other pilot projects based on equal partnership principles.

Project Satisfaction at the Global Level

81%

of project participants report satisfaction with the support provided by project partners

Global Learnings SPACES FOR COLLABORATION

A significant learning from this project is the importance of having spaces for cross-country collaboration among partners to enhance program coordination and mutual learning. The project does this via regular calls among lead partner organizations, learning partners, and



with the donor. In addition to these spaces (where CARE also participates), partners have appreciated the flexibility to hold conversations among themselves, without CARE or the donor present. Interpretation is provided in all spaces, and therefore language inclusion is another important facilitator of collaboration. These spaces allow project partners to jointly develop solutions to challenges in project implementation and collectively reflect upon feedback received from participants, adapting their planning accordingly.

FEMINIST EVALUATION PRACTICES

Another critical learning is the value of feminist evaluation practices. As partners carried out the baseline studies in each country in early 2023, evaluation practices and methodologies were importantly contextualized from one country to the next. This led to rich, differentiated findings in each country, which – while not in line with the standardized, clean processes that are generally expected by international NGOs – allowed for the generation of vital information, situated within the local context. WHS partners presented on this project’s feminist approach to evaluation at the American Evaluation Association conference in October 2023.

MULTI-LEVEL ADVOCACY

The WHS project has also demonstrated the importance of advocating for women’s voice and leadership in humanitarian structures at local, national, and international levels. Partners have increased their direct contact with global donors and humanitarian stakeholders, as demonstrated when partners in **Afghanistan** convened over 15 high-level representatives from donors, governments, UN agencies, INGOs, and academia at the

international level to launch a roadmap for international engagement on women’s rights. In **DRC**, partners increased connectivity with donors directly, strengthening a cohort member in order to bring them into their consortium for a Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund grant. Partners have also engaged with UN OCHA directly at both national and local levels, and in **Colombia**, partners’ and cohort members’ advocacy resulted in not only their contribution to the Humanitarian Needs Overview analysis, but also plans for their direct inclusion in the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan. Finally, partners’ and cohort members’ advocacy on the inclusion of WLOs in humanitarian structures has led to great successes, including municipal and district level government stakeholders in **Nepal** recognizing cohort members as actors working on humanitarian response and appointing them to disaster management committees in several municipalities.

“With the feminist approach and collaborative learning, only in the first year of project implementation, it has been possible to incorporate women’s voices in the humanitarian response mechanisms. This project will definitely help to shift the power to WLOs from its local to global advocacy strategy”

– Project partner from Nepal

Humanitarian Sector Engagement

27%

increase documented in WLOs’ participation in humanitarian sector-level processes