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CHALLENGE BRIEF DRA CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON SAFETY AND PROTECTION

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**1. MAIN DETAILS**

CARE Nederland

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**2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

**“How to improve approaches to addressing social/gender norms (harmful) & power structures in humanitarian settings”**

**3. CURRENT CHALLENGE**

Uganda has seen a massive increase of refugees who fled conflict in DRC. The rapid influx of refugees has over stretched services and resources, resulting in unmet needs in protection, including Gender Based Violence (GBV). Women and girls comprise nearly 50% of the refugee population, yet they are often caught up in a humanitarian system that falls short of upholding their rights and needs. Research shows that local community structures, including local women’s groups or women with constituency, are often among the first responders in times of crisis or displacement. They often provide different types of support to individuals and communities, including those that experience protection risks such as Gender Based Violence. Although women may in principle have the same rights to public participation and leadership, including in humanitarian settings, in practice they face many barriers to their accessing and claiming these rights. Gender and power norms shape the lives of women and girls, and present a fundamental barrier to their participation in decision making in an equal basis to men.

**Women and girls are often overlooked as first responders and agents of change, even though they are best positioned to determine their different needs and protection risks in humanitarian settings.** It is easy for humanitarian actors and sector leads to lose sight of the complexity of people’s lives and realities. This may result in assumptions of protection risks which are not context specific and fail to understand gendered power relations, resulting in compromised accountability in line with core humanitarian principles and standards. Women and girls have their own understanding of protection, the risks associated and their respective priorities. Their understanding is both deeply personal and highly context specific, influenced by different factors that may shape vulnerability. Their participation is also challenged by a diversity of practical, structural and specific barriers. Opportunities to transform unequal gender relations and shift harmful gender norms are often lost and not given priority, although it can be life-saving for women and girls if considered in all stages of the humanitarian program management cycle.

In Uganda there are a variety of power holder and decision making bodies. Among them, there are refugee welfare councils, local councils, block leadership by villages, traditional leadership, community committees, and faith leadership groups. Women holding formal or informal leadership positions in these groups can potentially inform decisions that affect their lives, but women can also influence by interacting with such power holders and decision making bodies either as individual women or in groups. The same applies for their

engagement with humanitarian systems for accountability mechanisms, as these are often connected to the local decision making bodies and power holders. There is an evident opportunity to further explore promising entry points and directions for increasing women's meaningful participation and leadership in decision making in their communities and for humanitarian action.

#### 4. IMPACT GOAL

**Women and girls, including women's groups, feel better connected and able to influence coordination and decision making processes in all phases of a humanitarian programme management cycle.** Meaningful participation means that women are able to be active in public decision making, feel free to voice their opinions, and have actual influence over the decisions that are taken. Having the time is equally important to women and girls, as they are often double burdened with their reproductive and productive roles.

Reaching this impact goal implies putting in place and supporting inclusive and meaningful local approaches which uphold women's rights and needs where they are most under threat—in conflict and emergency settings. It would contribute positively to a necessary systemic change whereby humanitarian action reflects and understands women's experiences and lifesaving priorities, supports local solutions that ensure women's voices are heard and ensures analysis of protection needs based on a context specific understanding of gendered power relations. To change the current status quo, inclusive and meaningful local approaches should therefore be in place and supported. It also implies working towards a community which values the contribution of women at all levels of society, facilitating an increase in women's active participation and leadership in communities and in humanitarian action.

CARE expertise in emergencies has resulted in pilots like "Women Lead", as a means to ensure that women's voices are heard and that analysis of risks is grounded in context specific understanding of gendered power relations. While the approaches are focused on women's agency, linking to power relations and structure, this also entails working in parallel engaging male relatives and leaders due to their important role in changing community norms around women's participation and mitigating risks to women who do participate in public life. A particular interest is to better connect such pilots and approaches with humanitarian coordination and action processes in all phases of the humanitarian management cycle.

Despite the challenges, the humanitarian situation in Uganda presents an opportunity for improving and innovating existing approaches for the engagement with women's meaningful participation, decision making and leadership.

#### ASSUMPTIONS MADE

The challenge is based on the assumption that all community members will embrace the need for the involvement of women as equal partners in all spheres, so as to ensure that the community is free from any form of violence. It is assumed that protection partners will support community approaches and capacity strengthening for the establishment of structures that will enhance participation of women. Women leadership in emergencies and engaging men and boys' approaches are accepted and mainstreamed into all protection and safety interventions so that the process will be beneficiary led. Grass root women responders have access to more marginalized populations; bring contextual understanding to the needs and realities of different groups, how they engage with stakeholders, and how to respond to

barriers; may reach other women; are able to raise women's voices and leadership; provide solidarity to other women and girls; contribute to interventions being more gender transformative.

## **5. RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE**

Risk mitigation strategies would be needed to ensure that the initiatives do not do harm or further worsen the situation for women and girls. Likelihood of a mass influx of new refugee arrivals may affect the already established systems and ways of tackling the current prevailing problem of protection in the community. Low level of commitment and recognition of the problem by humanitarian partners and targeted communities would pose delays in pursuing this challenge. It's necessary to ensure quality and safe multi-sectorial referral services are available to address GBV. Likewise, the lack of safe and confidential spaces for women to speak amongst each other would impose limitations. There is a risk of men failing to meet their obligations to the family in the pretext that the women should assume the additional work load and responsibilities, with no equal division of tasks. Parallel efforts to engage men and boys are necessary, the absence may result in increased GBV, as men and community members may view the emancipation of women as a means of undermining traditional customs and practices. There is a high risk of concealment of harmful practices that are orchestrated by the influential community members. This often hinders and affects the progress made towards addressing gender constraints in the community.

## **6. NEXT STEPS**

Analyse emerging initiatives, best practice, research and perspectives of affected communities themselves to provide recommendations and practical tools for local humanitarian actors to put women's' and girls' rights and agency at the centre of humanitarian response.

Expand consultations with local partners, including private sector to explore opportunities to improve and innovate the five step approach to Women Lead pilots, with special attention in connecting to humanitarian coordination and management cycle.

Continue to build on gender-sensitive needs assessments and gender analysis to gain a better insight into, the roles, access to resources, existing inequalities and supportive local structures, specific needs, vulnerabilities, risks (such as sexual and gender-based violence), coping strategies and capacities of women, girls, boys and men.

Collaborate with grassroots women responders by expanding the understanding on how women organize and what do women do to protect themselves and others. Explore how different protection interventions engage with and support grassroots women responders; Jointly map and understand the context based on existent sources; identify partners including those with expertise in protection or gender equality; among other key actions.

Consider monitoring and feedback mechanism to ensure real time inputs and participatory approaches to facilitate for co-design/co-creation throughout the process.