



WOMEN LEAD IN EMERGENCIES IN UGANDA

LESSONS LEARNED: piloting the Women Lead in Emergencies approach in Omugo Zone Rhino Camp Settlement, January 2019 – March 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women Lead in Emergencies and why humanitarians need it

Women have a human right to participate in public life and decision-making, including in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, conflict and other crises. Yet, women directly affected by crises are still excluded from most humanitarian responses and from public decision-making more broadly. Women's participation in community responses and recovery saves lives and increases gender equality. Conversely, when women's voices are not heard, women's rights and needs are often not adequately met, and an emergency response can reinforce inequalities that perpetuate vulnerability, insecurity and poverty.

[Women Lead in Emergencies](#) is a CARE global programme that supports local women's groups to take a lead in responding to the crises that affect them and their communities. It is the first practical toolkit for frontline CARE staff and partners with guidance on how to promote the participation and leadership of women in communities at the forefront of crisis within humanitarian programming.

Learning from our experiences in Omugo zone Rhino camp settlement, West Nile Uganda

Components of the Women Lead in Emergencies model were initially piloted in 'Eua Island in Tonga during the 2018 Cyclone Gita response.¹ Since then, Women Lead pilots have been implemented in different emergency contexts in Colombia, Mali, Niger, the Philippines and Uganda, including with refugees, internally displaced people and communities experiencing cyclical climate-related emergencies.

This report synthesises learning from the Women Lead in Emergencies pilot in Omugo zone (4,5,6) of Rhino camp refugee Settlement in the West Nile. The research focuses on learning from the *process* of piloting the Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit between January 2019 and March 2020, and what it tells us about some of the assumptions underpinning the design of the Women Lead in Emergencies model (Figure 1) and toolkit for practitioners.

We explore four key learning questions from the Women Lead in Emergencies programme:

1. Are there preconditions for women's participation in community and public life and decision-making in humanitarian settings?
2. How do intra-group relationships and dynamics influence women's collective organising, planning and action in emergencies?
3. What role can peer networking play in strengthening the collective actions of women?
4. How does co-creation of group action plans happen in practice and what are the implications for the Women Lead in Emergencies toolkit?

Key findings

- **There are foundational conditions for women's participation**, and these should be explored during the initial stages of a Women Lead in Emergencies project. These can include but may go beyond: functional adult literacy, income generating activities, and psychosocial support. In addition, engaging men early in a Women Lead project is important to increase their support for women's participation.
- **Different groups have different needs and the toolkit must be used flexibly.** Groups that have formed themselves, whether prior to Women Lead activities or at the onset, appear to be more committed to collective planning and action than groups formed by CARE or implementing partners. This should be considered during design and start-up phases.

- **Peer networking and mentorship** between participating women's groups have been shown to play a positive and influential role in developing women's individual and collective confidence and power. Women Lead projects should consider facilitating such networks within future projects.
- **Collective planning and action** should be done in a flexible and participatory way that enables each women's group to progress at different paces, depending on their needs and preferences.

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INTRODUCTION

How does Women Lead in Emergencies work?

Women Lead in Emergencies (or Women Lead) works with groups of women and girls directly affected by crisis, rather than individuals, to build women and girl's solidarity and collective influence over the decisions that affect their lives. It does this by seeking out existing women's groups in the community, like refugee associations, solidarity groups, savings groups or faith-based groups, and inviting them to participate in Women Lead.

Women Lead is an approach with five distinct but iterative components that CARE and its partners use to support women to collectively act on the issues that affect their lives before, during and after crisis.

The Women Lead in Emergencies Model

Analyse: CARE and partners conduct a Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation with the affected community, including identifying barriers to and opportunities for women's voice and leadership, as the basis for discussion and planning with women's groups and other stakeholders.

Reflect: CARE staff, partners and women and girl's groups explore social norms and individual beliefs about gender, participation and leadership, and what community and organisational changes are needed to enable women's equal participation and leadership in their context.

Co-Create: Each participating women or girl's groups collectively identifies their goals for participation and leadership, the key barriers that need to be overcome, and the activities and strategies to achieve their goals – which are brought together in an Action Plan.

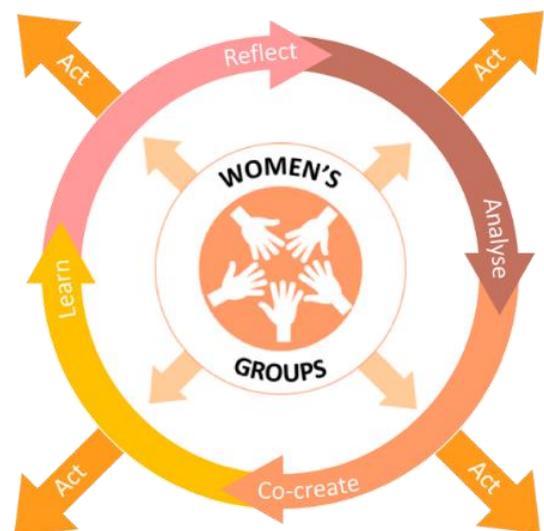


Figure 1: Women Lead in Emergencies Model

Act: Women's groups act on their collective strategies and activities for change with support from CARE and partners, using a dedicated flexible budget that they decide how to spend.

Learn: Women's groups participate in action learning to reflect on what is working and why, and to use this learning to adapt their change strategies.

Whilst these five components are core to Women Lead projects, the journey through them is not linear. For example, reflection and learning are continuous processes that happen in different ways throughout the project, and women's groups are also 'acting' in different ways throughout, from activities focused on building the collective agency and power of their group and networks through to specific action to participate in community life, emergency response, and to engage duty-bearers and claim their rights.

Working with men and boys is also a core component of the Women Lead approach, but *how* project teams do this is not predetermined in the approach and depends on the context.

Research and data collection

This research focuses on learning from the *process* of piloting the Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit between January 2019 and March 2020 and examines some of the underlying assumptions which underpin the design of the Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit for practitioners.

Key learning questions explored during this research were:

1. Are there preconditions for women's participation in community and public life and decision-making in humanitarian settings?
2. How do intra-group relationships and dynamics influence women's collective organising, planning and action in emergencies?
3. What role can peer networking play in strengthening the collective actions of women?
4. How does co-creation of group action plans happen in practice and what are the implications for the Women Lead in Emergencies toolkit?

Qualitative data for this research came from three sources:

- The Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation conducted in February 2019 and updated in September 2019 and March 2020 (see Box 1).
- Documentation from monthly team reflection sessions between the Women Lead project team and Women Lead Global Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator. Structured around key learning themes, these sessions provide an opportunity for the team to discuss and reflect on the previous month using activity reports and observation journals² from the project team's weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the women's groups.
- Specific focus group discussions were held in September and December 2019 with the four women's groups participating in the Women Lead project in Omugo zone by the Women Lead in Emergencies Global Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator. These groups were:
 - **Ngongi Kuyupet Women's Group** (formally called the Loketa Group), Village 5-tank 43 (26 female and 4 male members)
 - **South Sudanese Refugee Women's Association (SSRWA)**, Village 5-tank 45 (30 female members)
 - The **South Sudanese Women's Faith Group**, Village 6 (21 female members)
 - **Yoleta Group**, Village 4 (24 female members).

Group members are South Sudanese refugees, primarily from the dominant Kakwa, Bari (groups from Villages 4 and 5) and Nuer ethnic groups (Village 6 group). During discussions, a female group member or trusted female community member would provide two-way interpretation in Swahili or Arabic, Kakwa or Keliko, to English.

This process-focused learning is an important contribution to the refinement of the Women Lead in Emergencies model, toolkit and theory of change and to peer learning with the CARE Women Lead in Emergencies Network. **A companion learning brief** focuses on the achievements and results of the Women Lead pilot in Omugo Settlement.³

Women Lead in Emergencies in Omugo zone of Rhino camp refugee Settlement, West Nile Uganda

The South Sudanese civil war began in 2013 and has led to the internal and external displacement of nearly four million people. Nearly one million South Sudanese are displaced in Uganda alone, primarily living in settlements in the West Nile region. Women and children comprise 81% of the refugee population, with a high proportion of female-headed households.⁴

Box 1: How has crisis affected women's participation in Omugo zone (villages 4,5,6) Rhino Camp refugee Settlement?

Findings from Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation

A Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation is one of the first activities in a Women Lead project. It uses both rapid gender analysis⁵ and governance analysis tools to assess the impact of crisis on women's leadership and equal participation in community and humanitarian decision-making and action.

The Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation has three main objectives, to: (1) **analyse** crisis-affected women's access to, and influence within, public and humanitarian decision-making spaces in the project location; (2) identify promising **entry points** for working with women and girl's groups to increase their active participation and leadership in humanitarian decision-making, including mapping pre-existing women and girl's groups and/or women's participation and leadership interventions, and (3) identify **gaps** for further assessment to build a more comprehensive understanding over time of gender, power and participation. The Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation also provides a baseline of gender and power relations and women's access to leadership and decision-making in a specific location.

The first Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation was conducted in Village 5 and 6 of Omugo zone of Rhino Camp Settlement in February 2019. It found that, before their displacement to Uganda, women from rural locations in South Sudan were not able to attend or speak at community meetings. However, conflict and forced displacement appears to have disrupted these gender norms, with refugee women in Omugo having more freedom of movement within the settlement, being more likely to attend community meetings and take on informal leadership roles (e.g. as community-based facilitators) and with some refugee women now holding formal leadership positions (e.g. block leader or elected member of the Refugee Welfare Council).

At the same time, men continue to dominate formal and informal decision-making in Omugo, with the Rapid Gender Analysis identifying many continuing barriers to women's meaningful participation in community life and decision-making. This includes their primary or sole responsibility for domestic, reproductive and care work, illiteracy and lack of access to information, financial dependence and limited livelihood opportunities, lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, adverse socio-cultural norms and fear of stigma or gender-based violence. Adolescent girls face additional barriers to participation because of the intersection of gender and age-based discrimination.⁶

With funding from Global Affairs Canada, CARE Canada and CARE Uganda have been supporting refugees and the host community in Rhino Camp and Impevi Settlements since 2017 through a multi-sector programme that provides lifesaving shelter, sexual and reproductive health services, and protection/gender-based violence prevention and response. Women Lead in Emergencies was added in the second phase of the programme (April 2018- March 2020), with activities beginning in January 2019 in three villages in Omugo zone (an extension of Rhino Camp settlement). Women Lead activities have been extended to Siripi Settlement in the current, third phase of the programme (April 2020-March 2021).



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Are there preconditions for women's participation in community and public life and decision-making in humanitarian settings?

The Women Lead in Emergencies projects aim to enable women in communities directly affected by crisis to *meaningfully* participate⁷ in public discussion and decisions within their community and about the design and implementation of humanitarian response and assistance. Women Lead projects do not predefine what activities will support this goal. Instead, participating women group's *themselves* define what participation and leadership means for them in their context, what their goals are for participating in or leading humanitarian action, and what needs to change for them to exercise their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. At the same time, when developing the Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit, the CARE team reflected on the types of goals, barriers and activities women *might* prioritise when co-creating action plans. Are there preconditions for women's participation in community and public life and decision-making in humanitarian settings?

Our assumption was that women's groups would identify activities *directly* related to their ability to engage effectively in decision-making processes and/or influence decision-makers. For example, leadership and life skills training, networking with other women, access to information, provision of childcare or transport costs to enable them to participate in meetings and/or brokering access to humanitarian duty-bearers/decision-makers.

However, piloting of the Women Lead model in Omugo suggests that women in emergency contexts may need to overcome more foundational or 'first order'⁸ obstacles to participation – relating to:

1. Male relatives' control/power over women's choices
2. Other community members' perceptions of women's credibility as leaders
3. Women's own psychological readiness for participation in public life

The experience and decisions of the participating women's groups in Omugo indicates that these types of barriers arising from women's subordination and insecurity in the household and immediate community, combined with the gendered effects of conflict and displacement, need to be tackled first or in conjunction with activities that directly increase women's access and influence within community and humanitarian decision-making.

Below we outline in more detail how these issues presented themselves in context and how they have been addressed.

Addressing men's resistance to women's participation in civic and leadership activities

Men's behaviour and expectations about gendered cultural roles are a critical barrier to both gender equality and women's empowerment – making activities with men essential to safe and sustainable programming in this area.⁹ This is why engaging men and boys is a mandatory activity in all Women Lead projects, regardless of whether women's groups themselves identify men's engagement as a priority in their action plans. However, the Omugo pilot shows that women may also prioritise activities to involve their male relatives and leaders.

Women's groups in Villages 4, 5 and 6 identified involving men from the community in the project to be important for their own active and safe participation in Women Lead activities and public life more generally. The women shared that male relatives' lack of understanding of Women Lead meetings may make them suspicious and try to prevent women from attending. Women were also concerned that men's suspicion or fear of women organising with other women, or taking on new leadership roles could result in violence towards them.

To address this, each of the women's groups chose to have 'orientation' sessions with men from their household to introduce them to the concepts and objectives of Women Lead, and for male relatives and influential men from the community to be included in the women's literacy classes (see below). The women's groups also supported an extension of CARE's Role Model Men and Boys programming¹⁰ to Omugo and nominated which men were invited to participate in the project – rather than the selection process being led by men in the community, as is more often the case.

Addressing functional adult literacy

All the women's groups raised the issue of literacy as a prerequisite for their meaningful participation in decision-making spaces. The women noted that being able to read, write and present themselves in English is an unofficial precondition for being able to meaningfully participate in community meetings and other decision-making spaces within the settlement. Being able to sign and write one's name was also noted as important for gaining respect and influence within the community – as well as for women's own self-confidence.

Each of the women's groups in Omugo determined during their Reflect and Co-Create sessions that their Women Lead activities should include literacy classes for their groups, but that men should also be able to participate in these classes. Access to literacy classes for male relatives and leaders was important to the women as it benefited their whole household and was a way to gain support from the men for the women's continued participation in the group. The women explained that men would see this as a benefit the women had provided, and they would then be more supportive of their attending group meetings and their activities to advance women's voice and leadership.

Men's support was therefore important not only to mitigate risks of increased violence in the home but also, for some women, to be granted permission to leave the home and to gain support from others with

household chores. Once the classes started, there was high demand to join from other women in the community. Seeing this as an important contribution to the community, the women's groups chose also to expand access to the literacy classes to women who are not members of their groups.

Addressing women's access to income

The importance of having some form of income generating activities was raised as a precondition for participation in community/public life by women in each of the Omugo groups. The women expressed that they need to be able to address their financial concerns to be able to attend group meetings, meaningfully participate in decision making spaces and take on other leadership roles.

Women's groups were clear that with financial resources comes influence and power and, without them, they would not be taken seriously by their community or by decision-makers. In addition, women shared that participation in the Women Lead group meetings and activities is time that they would otherwise spend on household chores or income-generating activities for their family. Many women stated that they need to prove to their husbands or men in their household that their time investment in Women Lead is worthwhile – and that this is most often assessed in financial terms. To address this barrier, all the women's groups have chosen to prioritise savings and loans, business training and/or seed funding for their groups.

Healing from trauma

The initial Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation identified the need for psychosocial support for women in the community due to the trauma they had experienced in South Sudan during the conflict and during their journey to reach the Omugo Settlement in Uganda. This trauma had been identified as one of the barriers to women's active participation in the community and household. Women interviewed reported that conflict-induced trauma led to excessive drinking, violence and other negative coping mechanisms. During the co-create sessions, women from each of the groups expressed interest in a session on healing from trauma.

In response, a session on healing from trauma was organised for the participants of the first Women's Conference, held by the Women Lead project in October 2019, themed 'South Sudanese Leadership, Peace and Reconciliation among Tribes'. During the conference the women engaged in a form of group therapy through which they discussed the trauma they had experienced and how it had affected them. The lead psychologist, CARE and the women participants determined it would be important to hold a separate full-day session for women focused on psychosocial therapy and ways forward to heal from their trauma.

Since that session in December 2019, all the women's groups have indicated the importance of both the session on healing, as well as participation in their group activities, in supporting them to gain confidence and overcome their trauma, as well as reducing negative coping mechanisms. For example, one woman from Village 5 reported that she no longer drinks alcohol and instead supports her neighbours with counselling to heal from trauma. She noted that beyond the psychosocial support she received, it was also the work with the women in her group and meeting each week that has increased her confidence and encouraged her to stop drinking and to support others to do the same.

How do intra-group dynamics influence women's collective organising, planning and action in emergencies?

Intergroup networks and intragroup dynamics have a significant impact on the way in which activities are planned. In particular, we identify factors that have determined the different ways in which groups have engaged with the Women Lead in Emergencies approach:

- Whether the group is newly formed or existing can have an impact on how quickly the group can mobilise and the amount of effort required to build group cohesion.
- Presence of an experienced leader or activist in the group can be highly beneficial in terms of organisation but can also have risks when the group comes to depend on a single person
- Intergenerational dynamics can hinder the extent to which all women participate equally.

The Women Lead guidance recommends inviting informal, voluntary women's groups that are already meeting regularly and independently to participate in the project. This assumes that pre-existing groups will be more prepared for collective action and public participation because they already have a group identity, working relationships and trust between members. Another assumption is that these groups will be more able to sustain their collective participation and leadership beyond the project because their group is not dependent on Women Lead (or other project) funding or support.

Women Lead guidance also recommends that the project team pays close attention to intra-group dynamics and to facilitating all members to participate equally in group meetings. The assumption here is that there will be important differences in women's individual power within the groups because of the intersection of different forms of structural disadvantage and discrimination (e.g. based on age, disability, education and other socio-economic or identity characteristics).

The Omugo pilot has shown that group dynamics and power relations between women do affect how groups make decisions and how they approach co-creation of their group's action plan. Below we explore three elements of group dynamics – the maturity of the group, leadership within the group and inter-generational power relations within the group – as well as the interactions between women's groups.

Newly formed vs pre-existing women's groups

Four out of the five groups that initially participated in the Omugo pilot were already meeting as informal savings and loans groups prior to their involvement with Women Lead. The other group was a newly formed group of women leaders from different church denominations in the community in village 6, invited to participate by the Women Lead team based on feedback and information collected during the initial Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation.

Most of the groups that were meeting prior to engaging in Women Lead activities had a greater sense of unity and trust and met more regularly independent of Women Lead facilitators than the newly formed group. The exception was the Tomore group in Village 4. Rather than being self-initiated by the group members themselves, this group (Tomore) had been formed by CARE in early 2018 as part of the GBV component of the wider programme. Some members of the Tomore group already had limited commitment to group activities before they began participating in Women Lead and, midway through 2019, the Tomore group dissolved. Members of Tomore who were committed to Women Lead formed a new Yoleta Group and invited new women to join. The Yoleta group has been enthusiastically meeting each week since then and acting collectively within their community – for example, one of their achievements has been to work with

male leaders and successfully petitioned humanitarian agencies to move their food distribution point closer to their village.

Another pre-existing mixed gendered milling group (15 women and 15 men) in Village 5 were invited and participated in WLiE activities but struggled with issues of distrust and unrealistic expectations. This led the group to eventually dissolve and, unlike Yoleta, they did not regroup.

In Village 6, the newly formed group South Sudanese Women's Faith Group also struggled initially to find a sense of trust with one another at the beginning of the Women Lead project. The members of the group were women leaders from churches of different denominations, and they needed time and support to develop common understanding and working relationships.

Recently, CARE Uganda has expanded Women Lead to a new project site in Siripi zone of Rhino Camp Settlement in West Nile as well as expanding WLiE activities to Adolescent girls in Omugo zone village 6 for the Nuer tribe because of the finding of the update to the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation in October 2019. Women had arrived from the DRC to the settlement in 2020 but had not formed groups – either with other Congolese women or with South Sudanese refugee women already settled. The Women Lead team have therefore taken a different approach to identifying women to participate in the project than in Omugo. CARE met with women in the community to present the Women Lead objectives and approach, and encouraged women with an interest in participating to form their own groups.

These initial discussions were more time intensive than in Omugo, as the newly displaced women were less organised and more focused on how to meet their initial needs for income generating activities. Women formed themselves into groups with membership changing over the course of a few weeks, as women understood more about the process and objectives. The final group membership appears to be made up of women who, having self-selected to remain in the group, have an interest in and are committed to the Women Lead objectives. Early indicators are that this self-selection approach is more promising in terms of member commitment and collaboration than having CARE, or an implementing partner, invite particular women to form a group. The activities with groups in Siripi Settlement have only recently begun and will be explored further in upcoming learning reports.

The Omugo pilot demonstrates that identifying pre-existing women's groups may not be possible in all circumstances for a variety of reasons, including whether women had opportunities to form groups before the crisis and the disruption of social networks during displacement. It also shows that the dynamics within women's groups are not static and groups may dissolve and reform and/or membership of groups may change as individuals work out if they want to commit to the group and/or Women Lead activities.

At the same time, the Omugo pilot does support the assumption that working with pre-existing groups is likely to be a more effective strategy than working with newly formed groups – but with the caveat, *if the project is of short duration*. In contexts where there are no pre-existing groups or those present do not want to participate in Women Lead, it is possible to explore whether new groups want to form with the support of the project. However, sufficient time must be built into the project for these groups to establish their governance structures and build common understanding *before* groups are ready to embark on core Women Lead activities, such as collective analysis of barriers to participation or co-creation of group action plans.

Presence/absence of an experienced leader or activist in the group

Members of the women's groups in Omugo independently chose a leadership structure similar to one another and that reflected the typical community/settlement governance structure, with a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretaries and Treasurer as the leadership positions. Formally, the groups are participatory and non-hierarchical in their decision-making process, with final decisions determined by majority vote. At the same

time, the Chair plays an influential role in this structure, through organising and motivating the group members.

The project team's observation of the women's groups indicates that having a Chair/group leader with experience in mobilisation, advocacy and influencing work can both positively and negatively affect a group's collective decision-making and action. Groups benefit from having someone who knows how to motivate a group to act around a common agenda when their leader is an experienced activist. On the other hand, a single charismatic or dominant leader can co-opt the decision-making process by steering the group to decisions they personally desire, ultimately weakening the participatory decision-making process and opportunities for all members to develop their problem-solving and negotiation skills.

This was seen in the women's group in village 5. The group founder, an experienced community leader, assumed the position as their Chair and was initially effective at motivating the group. However, the project team observed that the Chair steered the group towards her desired decisions rather than collective group decisions. The Chair also often travelled back and forth to South Sudan and, in her absence, it became evident that the group struggled to make decisions. Group members noted during one of their Reflect sessions that they felt they were stagnant and had not advanced enough on their action plans in recent weeks. Upon further reflection and discussion as a group, they agreed that they needed to hold a new election within the group to change their leadership. By contrast, in the other groups where the Chair is a less experienced leader, the process of group planning and decision-making has progressed more slowly and has required more support from the project team but has also been more collaborative and participatory.

Finding the balance between leadership that motivates and inspires the group but does not hold too much individual ownership of the decision-making process is important. The Omugo experiences demonstrate that Reflect sessions with group members - with facilitation by the project team where needed - provide an opportunity for the group to discuss their leadership structures and/or individual leaders and to find alternatives where they are not serving group objectives well.

Inter-generational perspectives

Power dynamics between adolescent girls, adult women and more senior women may affect how participatory and inclusive a group's decision-making is. Women in each of the groups noted how paying respect to one's elders is very important in their cultures and this means that younger women are expected to leave the talking and decision-making to more senior women. However, the women from Village 5 also noted that it is often the younger women who are more likely to know English and thus the older women may rely on them to interpret for them during community meetings. Reflect sessions provide an opportunity for Women Lead teams to facilitate discussion of these cultural and intergenerational power dynamics and how the group can create a safe space for the participation of all members.

Communities expect South Sudanese girls' to take on household responsibilities at a young age, both because of cultural norms and crisis and displacement. Young women in Omugo often get married and/or become pregnant and take on household chores and responsibilities of caring for the family at an early age. It is important that these young women are also given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and equally participate in collective actions. Through the scalable work with adolescent girls in Omugo 6, WLiE activities provide opportunities for future learning on effective and safe ways to support girls' collective action and leadership in emergency contexts and what adaptations to the Women Lead model are needed.



What role can peer networking play in strengthening the collective actions of women?

The Omugo pilot has also shown that providing opportunities for dialogue and capacity-sharing *between* women's groups, exposing women to other role model women leaders, and mentorship between women's groups is an effective way to inspire women and develop their 'power within', as well as to build collective 'power with' solidarity between women from different locations, identity groups and backgrounds.

During Reflect and Co-Create sessions, women's groups expressed the desire for more collaborative platforms to enable women to network, share experiences and identify common concerns for actions. Women Lead has therefore supported various activities to facilitate networking and dialogue between women from different groups and/or between women's groups and women in leadership positions. This has included:¹¹

- bilateral exchange visits between participating women's groups and/or between groups and elected women leaders,
- two Women's Conferences bringing together women's groups, role model men, Refugee Welfare Council leadership (RWC), cultural and tribal representatives as well as other humanitarian actors where their voices can be heard,
- Women's Forum community events during '16 Days of Activism' and International Women's Day celebrations.

This has had the effect of providing spaces/opportunities for:

- sharing of common experiences and exploring common needs and alternative actions,
- cross-group learning and inspiration,
- women aspiring to be role models and receiving mentorship from role model women leaders in the community,

- facilitating peaceful co-existence through inter-tribal reconciliation processes,
- group psychological healing from traumatic experiences.

Networks provide spaces for sharing common experiences and exploring common needs

As part of their action plan, the South Sudanese Refugee Women's Association worked with CARE to organise the first Women's Conference in October 2019, themed '**South Sudanese Leadership, Peace and Reconciliation among Tribes**'. The conference brought together almost 100 refugees from the women's groups as well as representatives from the dominant Nuer and Dinka tribes, who were opposing sides in the South Sudanese civil war and who clashed within one of the refugee Settlement in 2018. Women explored conflict mitigation skills that they could apply within their homes, communities and places of influence, leading to a network of women with a strengthened voice to advocate for change. The women networked, learned, laughed and cried together and expressed their many common experiences and needs.

Networks mean women's groups can inspire and learn from one another

The newly formed South Sudanese Women's Faith Group initially struggled to build trust across women from different churches and to work together towards common objectives. However, after interacting with a more cohesive and active women's group from another village in the settlement, they were inspired to become more organised and unified. Following the Women's Conference, the group (all Nuer women) have been working together to initiate a process of reconciliation between Nuer and Dinka tribes in the settlement.

Networks help to provide role models for women's leadership

Some women have reported being more motivated and encouraged as a group and as leaders after meeting with other female leaders within their community, and several women said they were inspired to run for elected leadership positions after meeting with and hearing the story of an elected female leader within the Refugee Welfare Committee II of Omugo zone as whole. Women have also been encouraged to aspire to even more influential elected positions. During the second Women's Conference in March 2020, themed *#WomeninLead*, women practised presenting their campaigns to an audience of nearly 150 participants in preparation for the upcoming elections in the settlement. After one woman (Tirupania Nyoka) presented her manifesto, the representative from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) asked her about the position she was campaigning for and she replied, 'Block Leader'. The audience booed at this and encouraged her instead to put herself forward for the higher position of a chairperson of the Refugee Welfare Council.

The four initial Women Lead groups are now playing a key role in mentoring other women and girls' groups in the settlement – both groups participating in Women Lead and informal groups in their communities who are indirectly connected to the CARE project. Capacities are therefore being cascaded beyond the original women's groups, contributing to a sustainable, locally led embedding of women's empowerment actions.

If you vote for me, I will work with the leaders to include many women in leadership and improve their living conditions. A lot of women are not educated. I will work with several organisations to prioritize adult literacy in our community just like CARE is doing.. I will work with men and women to further reduce alcoholism that leads to domestic violence and poverty in the community.

Tirupania Nyoka, 35yr old woman, Village 5

How does co-creation of group action plans happen in practice?

As the Omugo pilot has progressed it has become clearer how, in this context, collective planning and action within these communities happens. In particular:

- Co-creation of action plans differed among different groups, along with the extent to which groups found it helpful to stick closely to the set of activities and timings the Women Lead toolkit suggests
- Groups took different approaches to action planning with some groups looking to achieve some 'quick wins' to help strengthen the group and build trust prior to advancing larger action goals that required more time and planning to implement
- Co-Create activities therefore require considerable flexibility and tailoring to the needs, characteristics and choices of specific groups.

The Co-Create component is at the heart of the Women Lead model: it is where women's groups identify their common objectives or goals, what activities or support will enable them to achieve them and how they will spend the Women Lead budget allocation for their group's activities. The tools for the Co-Create phase of Women Lead are based on CARE's approach to community action planning in development programming.

We focus on two assumptions that the Women Lead Team made when beginning the Omugo pilot:

1. The Co-Create phase would build directly on the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation and on the Analyse and Reflect sessions with women's groups to explore, amongst other things, how gender norms shape their power and participation, who is making decisions in Omugo over different types of resources, and what the obstacles are to women having a greater say or role in humanitarian action and how this might change. These Reflect activities would then provide a platform for women's groups to have more focused discussions about their specific goals and strategies to achieve them.
2. Co-Create sessions with women's groups would lead to a time-bound action plan that would be documented in some form (but not necessarily a written document) to aid agreement, transparency and accountability between members of the women's group, and enable the project team to track and support group action plans for implementation.

The project activity plan and timeline for Omugo was based on the expectation that groups would reach the Co-Create stage within the first 6 months. In practice, the timing for the development of common actions varied for each group, with some groups more ready to do this after 6 months but others, including a newly formed group, needing more time (e.g. 8-10 months), more support and a more incremental approach to action planning.

The approach taken by the Women Lead team and the groups to develop common actions also evolved organically during the pilot. Some of the women's groups were more comfortable focusing first on smaller one-off activities that would benefit the group prior to developing full action plans that would address changes for the community. Examples of activities identified by women's groups that were not part of the more systematic action planning process included:

- the installation of a pit latrine at the Women's Centre (constructed under the GBV component of the project) so the women did not need to use latrines in neighbouring houses,
- putting in fencing and shrubs around the Women's Centre to create privacy and claim it as a space for women to be proud of. This led to a revision of all CARE's guidance relating to construction of Women's centres/ spaces to include pit latrines and fencing,

- tilling and farming a piece of land together for household consumption and to sell remaining produce at the market.

These activities were important for building the confidence and self-efficacy of the groups prior to progressing on larger action goals that required more time and planning to implement. These larger activities included holding women's forums and conferences, organising literacy classes for women's groups and others in the community, lobbying humanitarian agencies to claim the right to accessible food distribution, and working with male leaders to promote peace and reconciliation between ethnic groups in the settlement.¹²

During the co-creation process, the form action planning took also evolved, with women's groups' action plans initially being discussed and agreed verbally and progress reflected upon during regular group meetings rather than documented in writing. Recently, however, the group members have started to journal their individual and group activities, identifying one or two literate group members to document this work for them. The Omugo pilot is now also exploring the use of videos and voice messages to document actions taken as a group.



The Omugo pilot reinforces that **adaptation must be a core principle in the implementation of the Women Lead in Emergencies toolkit.**

The Women Lead in Emergencies approach already contained adaptive components, including the provision of activity budgets controlled by women's groups and without predetermined activities, a focus on women-led action planning where women's groups set their own objectives and activities, and group's regular reflection on their progress and any changes needed to reach their goals.

However, the findings on how women in Omugo are experiencing collective planning, participation and action provides insights on how the Women Lead approach has been adapted to the Omugo context and women's groups – and allows us to also identify recommendations for further refinement of the approach for other pilots.

Key takeaways

1. **Livelihoods, psychosocial support, and non-formal education for women and men** in the community are not the activities that we might expect to see in a project primarily focused on promoting women's voice and leadership and inclusive governance. Yet **women groups have identified these as necessary activities to overcome structural barriers to their right to meaningful participation** in household and public decision-making.
2. A goal and principles of Women Lead is to support the *collective* empowerment, leadership and action of women's groups at the forefront of emergencies – with an intentional focus on women's collective power rather than promoting individual women leaders. The Omugo pilot shows that **group dynamics and power relations shape the way different groups work together**, including their effectiveness in participatory decision-making process and collective action planning. For all members' voices and interests to be heard, **Women Lead teams should use methods that support equal participation and consensual/non-hierarchal decision-making and action planning.** But **Women Lead teams need to adapt Co-Create tools to fit the needs of group members** and not impose a single or 'right' way of going about developing, documenting and monitoring action plans.
3. The Omugo pilot challenges the assumption that there will be pre-existing women's groups for Women Lead in Emergencies to work with, or that pre-existing groups will necessarily be more cohesive or effective than new groups. At the same time, there are indications that self-initiated groups may have higher levels of commitment and dynamism than when humanitarian actors select

participants for group activities. **Women Lead teams therefore need to be flexible in their approach to groups selection and, even in a single location, be prepared also to tailor approach, activities, and timeline to the needs and preferences of specific groups.**

4. The Omugo experience demonstrates that the different components of the Women Lead model are highly fluid and mutually reinforcing in practice. It challenges the assumption that Co-Create will be a discrete or time-bound activity and reinforces that the activities and focus of the Reflect sessions with group members needs to be tailored to each group's needs and priorities. This means that **more time investment may be required than initially envisioned to work with groups before they progress to co-creation activities** – time for Women Lead project teams to build trust with women's groups and for members of women's groups to build trust with each other, and to introduce and discuss concepts of women's rights to participate and gender equality. **This time should be appropriately built into budgets and implementation plans to ensure the process is not rushed.**
5. **Written documentation of action plans is essential for monitoring and evaluation of Women Lead at both project and global levels.** Women's groups should have the freedom to choose how they want to capture their action plan and its progress. However, whatever format they choose, Women Lead project teams are responsible for transferring that information to written documentation of the action plans, the process followed to create them, key stakeholders, progress markers and other relevant information to support the group's reflection, planning and learning processes, as well as to support the global Women Lead learning objectives. **The Global Women Lead team is also learning through the pilot what type of templates and support, project teams may need or find useful to manage this process.**
6. The Omugo pilot reinforces the assumption that Reflect sessions/activities with individual women's groups are an important part of the process of co-creation of common goals and planning. However, the pilot has also provided new insights into the **potential contribution of reflection and exchange between women's groups to the co-creation process**, as well as group exposure to women leaders and mentors. Exchanges support mentorship and inspiration between women's groups at different stages of maturity that can be important for their own group development and planning. Networking between women's groups can support their identification of overarching common concerns and objectives in ways that build broader solidarity and which might provide a platform for groups to take action together to claim rights and lead or influence humanitarian response. Given this, **should networking between women's groups be a standard component of the Women Lead in Emergencies model, with its own activity budget outside of the individual women's groups budget lines, or should these activities be left to come organically from the groups themselves?**

Recommendations for refinement of the Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit

The findings and learnings from the Omugo pilot are informing the design of additional pilots and the refinement of the Women Lead guidance materials and tools for tracking output and outcome data. Learning and discussion spaces will continue to be organised for Women Lead practitioners, providing opportunities for teams to network globally and to share their experiences, challenges and achievements. This cross-project learning supports refinement of both individual programme strategies and the global Women Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit. Specific recommendations from implementation of Women Lead in Emergencies in Omugo zone of Rhino camp settlement are:

1. **All five components of the Women Lead model should be followed with women's groups, but project teams should tailor how they are implemented**, their sequencing and duration to their context. Detailed planning of activities should be led by the women's groups, including discussions on what they consider to be indicators of success as individuals and as a group. In addition to activities, timelines and resourcing should all be tailored to the nature and needs of specific women's groups.
2. **Do No Harm principles should be applied to all Women Lead activities**, including for the monitoring and data collection approaches. Steps should be taken to mitigate the risk of violence against women in the household and community, which may increase when women are questioning or transgressing the social and cultural norms of their community and/or begin to take on more and new leadership roles and become more active in public life.
3. The **foundational conditions for participation should be explored for each Women Lead project** through the initial Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation and discussion with women's groups at the onset of activities. The foundational conditions identified in the Omugo pilot have included **functional adult literacy, access to cash, and healing from trauma**. When drafting Women Lead proposals, it is suggested that proper budgeting for such foundational activities be included. The refinement of what activities look like under each component can be done during the Analyse, Reflect and Co-Create stages with the women's groups.
4. **Engaging men in the Women Lead 'orientation' and other components should also be viewed as a pre-condition** for women's participation and factored into activity budgets and timelines, and **men should be engaged early** in the project. Meeting with the men from the women's households once participating women's groups have been identified to explain what Women Lead in Emergencies is and the benefits it can provide has been shown to be an effective approach for securing men's approval for women's participation. Facilitate women from the groups to suggest which men to engage with and which approach they would like to take for men's involvement. **Link Women Lead to existing Engaging Men and Boys interventions where possible.**
5. Pre-existing groups that are formed by the women themselves, rather than a group created by CARE or implementing partners, have shown to be the most committed to working together to achieve a collective goal through Women Lead activities. During the inception phase, **time needs to be dedicated to selection of women's groups to participate in Women Lead. Where possible, work with pre-existing women's groups** that are also focused on VSLA, income-generating activities, or have another purpose for meeting, prior to their engagement with Women Lead. In the absence of any women's groups that have formed organically or during a prior intervention, seek input from community members before forming new women's groups or inviting women to form groups for the purpose of Women Lead activities.
6. Project teams should also be aware of how power dynamics and membership within a group influence their engagement with each other and Women Lead, that new groups will likely need time to solidify their group and means of collaboration, and that these dynamics may change over the course of the project. Therefore, teams must **consider how the maturity and internal dynamics of women's groups may affect their engagement with Women Lead**, including their likely readiness for different core activities within the five-parts of the Women Lead model, **monitor whether this changes during implementation, and adapt their approach accordingly.**
7. **Co-creation of Women Lead Action Plans should be done in a flexible and participatory approach that is decided by each of the women's groups.** The time needed by each of the groups to reach the stage of developing action plans may vary and that flexibility should be provided. **Documentation and monitoring of action plans in some form is important for transparency, accountability and learning but there is no 'right' way to do this.** Women's groups should be facilitated to take a role in

documentation without overburdening or overwhelming them, with overall responsibility remaining with the Women Lead team.

8. **Women should determine the leadership structures within their group**, with support from the Women Lead team where requested/needed. **However, Women Lead project teams can actively facilitate discussion and reflection with groups about how their governance/structures are working** for the group and for individual members. One opportunity to do so would be when groups are developing their action plans and arrangements for implementation and appropriate time should be given to the process. Careful attention should be paid to whether a group leader dominates the decision-making process or hinders effective participation of all group members. Discussions could include the individual and collective roles and responsibilities of members, and group norms or ways of working that support all groups members to actively participate and allow for collective decisions to be reached. Another possible timing for this discussion is following a Reflect session, exploring how social norms affect participation and leadership for different women.
9. Both the Omugo pilot and wider research and evidence indicates that peer engagement and networking is an effective approach to building individual and group confidence, collaboration and collective power. **Women Lead teams should consider including women's networking activities in the project budget**, including peer-to-peer engagement between women's groups, their exposure to female mentors and role models, and connecting community women's groups with women's rights organisations.
10. **A gender-sensitive conflict analysis should be carried out at the beginning of implementation and should be updated on a regular basis.** Particular attention should be given to the potential to exacerbate conflict when organising events with multiple groups and with the wider community – and particularly when working with refugees and displaced communities. **Women Lead staff should have the opportunity to participate in a conflict sensitive analysis training**, if needed or requested. Such training should also be provided to each of the women's groups in an accessible manner.

Future learning

Findings in this brief were identified through the pilot in the Omugo zone of Rhino camp settlement in Uganda, but similar findings are also emerging from the pilots being implemented in different geographic locations and humanitarian contexts within the settlement and globally. Further cross-country/project analysis will be done through a multi-country evaluation in 2021, exploring the impacts and results achieved in other pilot locations, and further testing our assumptions for the Women Lead model. A refined Women Lead MEAL strategy implemented globally across all locations will also enable us to capture data on outputs, outcomes and learnings. Finally, future cross-project learning briefs will explore questions such as:

- What are the implications of expanding the Women Lead model to include adolescent girls? What would change for a Girl's Lead in Emergencies model and toolkit?
- How do different types of emergencies (e.g. natural disaster vs conflict) and timing of emergencies (e.g. acute vs protracted) affect the implementation and outcomes of Women Lead? How does working with different types of crisis-affected women (e.g. displaced populations that are more-or-less transitory or stable) affect implementation and outcomes?
- Do women need to have income or be involved in income-activities prior to participating in Women Lead or should income-generating activities (IGAs) be embedded as part of the women's group activities/action plan from the onset? How do Women Lead projects ensure groups with IGAs maintain their focus on participation and leadership issues?
- How can we improve the documentation of group action plans and ensure the process is grounded in feminist principles where women lead the process of co-creation of goals, action and learning?

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Key resources

- Women Lead in Emergencies on [CARE Insights](#) (public) and [CARE Shares](#) (CARE staff)
- Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation in Omugo, February 2020, v3
- Achievements and results from a pilot project in Omugo zone refugee settlement, 2019-2020. [Women Lead in Emergencies Learning Brief 2](#), January 2021.

Want more information?

For more information on Women Lead in Emergencies in West Nile, Uganda, email:

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CARE's Women Lead in Emergencies Programme is a joint initiative of CARE's global Gender in Emergencies and Inclusive Governance teams and has pilots in five countries. For more information, email the **CARE Women Lead Global Coordinators**:

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Notes

¹ Damon, C. (2019) 'Women Lead in Emergencies Pilot: Final Report.' CARE and MORDI.

² Observation journals were introduced in 2020

³ Aol, C., Bolton, T., Namukose, G. and O'Neil, T. (2021) 'Achievements and Results from the Women Lead in Emergencies Pilot in Omugo Settlement, 2019-2020.' CARE International.

⁴ Care International (2019) 'Rapid Gender Analysis on Power in Omugo Settlement'. CARE International, March (first version).

⁵ CARE's [Rapid Gender Analysis](#) (RGA) is designed to be used in the first weeks and months of an emergency to assess how crisis is affecting women, men, boys and girls differently, to provide recommendations for sector specialists on how to meet the needs of people of different genders and ages, and to update the analysis as more data becomes available. The Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation adapts the RGA Toolkit to focus specifically on how gender and other power relations affect women's participation and leadership before and during an humanitarian emergency.

⁶ See CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis on Power in Omugo Settlement (first conducted March 2019, last updated March 2020) for more data analysis of how crisis and displacement is affecting women's participation in Omugo Settlement.

⁷ Meaningful participation means that women are not only present within decision-making process or roles but that they have the information, capabilities and respect from others to be able to actively participate and have influence over the design of decision-making process and/or their outcomes.

⁸ Valerie Hudson and colleagues use the term 'first political order' to refer to 'the order of authority in the household that forms the basis for community and state action'. In their research, they find a strong and statistically significant association between the extent to which men's status in the household and community is predicated on the subordination and control of women (as measured by variables such as prevalence of men's violence against women, patrilocal and cousin marriage, bride-price/dowry and polygyny and women's personal/family rights) and levels of state-level fragility, insecurity violence. See Hudson, V. M., Bowen, D. L. and Nielson, P. L. (2020) *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*. New York: Colombia University Press.

⁹ For CARE resource on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality, see <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/in-practice/engaging-men-and-boys>

¹⁰ See CARE Role Model Men & Boys (RMMB) of Uganda at https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/in-practice/EMB/EMB_RoleModelMenandBoysofUganda_2019_CAREUganda.pdf

¹¹ For more information on these activities, see [Women Lead in Emergencies Learning Brief 2](#)



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