WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION

Understanding Past Experiences to Strengthen Feminist Responses to Crises and Forced Displacement

April 2021

MISSION

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From July 2020 to February 2021, the Women's Refugee Commission and a Core Working Group co-led a research study with the overall goal of understanding experiences of responding to crises and forced displacement, garnering insights into what the essential components of a feminist response could be. Using Active Sensemaking methodology, Core Working Group research collected over 100 experiences from individuals working globally in humanitarian response.

This report presents findings from the research as well as the process through which the project promoted a participatory approach to mixed methods research. The research findings provide insight into how to shift to a more inclusive, anti-racist, and feminist humanitarian response to crises and forced displacement. Notably, the research calls into question the utilization of terms such as inclusivity and localization, emphasizing the need to go beyond buzzwords and rhetoric to shift decision-making power. Key elements of success identified included flexible funding, engaging with civil society and affected communities before the onset of crises, and respecting the knowledge, skills, and expertise of organizations that may fall outside of the traditional humanitarian sector and engaging with them on their terms. Experiences reported as successful were predicated on prior trust and relationships as well as capacities, qualities, and expertise that arguably could not have been adequately developed in the moment to create an effective feminist response.

Equally important are the lessons learned from the research process; over the course of six months, the Core Working Group, composed of 17 experts and stakeholders from 14 countries, co-led the design of an innovative research tool and enriched the findings through a series of co-analysis workshops. This highly participatory approach to research serves as an example of how humanitarian actors can begin to shift power and advocate for others to do the same.

UNDERSTANDING PAST EXPERIENCES TO STRENGTHEN FUTURE RESPONSES TO CRISES AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

CONTEXT

In recent years, there has been an increased awareness of the longstanding need for a *systemic change in humanitarian response*; to shift from an inherently externally driven and neocolonial approach to one that is led by crisis-affected communities and, in particular, women, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups. An anti-racist, feminist response to crises and displacement is one that addresses structural inequalities based on gender, race, social class, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, and other axes of marginalization that shape the experience of, and responses to, crises and forced displacement.

To support anti-racist, feminist change, the humanitarian sector must attend to both *what* we do and *how* we do it. Arguably, the changes that would be necessary to create a feminist humanitarian response might require a different set of roles, capabilities, and structures. It may even call into question "who" is the humanitarian sector. Should there be a humanitarian sector that is distinct from those responding to crisis needs and situations? What does it look like to have a system structured for the purpose of a feminist response to crises and forced displacement?

To contribute to understanding what changes would be needed to create a feminist approach to crises and forced displacement, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and a group of 17 experts led a virtual global research project using active sensemaking methodology. QED Insight (w33QED)provided methodological oversight for the project. The Core Working Group collaborated on all phases of the research. The overall goal of the research was to *understand experiences of response to crises and forced displacement* and, in doing so, *garner insights into what the essential components of a feminist response* could be.

The specific aims of the project were as follows:

A. Use an innovative active sensemaking methodology to learn from a full range of actors who are engaged in humanitarian response, including feminist and other gender equality, anti-racist, and decolonizing actors and networks who respond to humanitarian crises but traditionally have not been consulted or resourced by the humanitarian sector.

B. Use the research process and analysis to contribute to building a strategic dialogue between humanitarian, feminist, and/or women-led actors and organizations.

C. Use a research methodology that enables all Core Working Group participants to be equal, giving the knowledge and perspectives of all the partners in the work the same weight and importance in shaping the research.

D. Use the research, and other evidence and experience, to co-create a Theory of Change for an anti-racist feminist response to crises and forced displacement.

E. Use the research to influence advocacy and dialogue with relevant networks and platforms.

This report presents findings from the research study, which was carried out from July 2020 to February 2021, and describes the process through which the project promoted a participatory approach to mixed methods research.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Core working group

The principles of meaningful participation and inclusion underpinned the research approach and methodology. A Core Working Group of 17 experts from 14 countries co-led this project, from creation of the instrument to dissemination of the questionnaire to analysis of data. Core Working Group members included individuals working in the areas of humanitarian response and policy, refugee networks, disability rights, feminist movements, women's funds, governance, and futures work. Annex 1 presents the bios of Core Working members. Members also played an essential role in fostering discussions between civil society and the humanitarian sector, ensuring that a wide range of actors shared experiences through the active sensemaking instrument.

Active sensemaking

Active sensemaking is an approach used to gain practical insights into complex human systems. By applying theories from psychology, sociology, and ethnography, the research methodology is used to understand situations where there are no right answers or clear solutions to problems. These types of challenges are found in Complex Adaptive Systems, where the whole is made up of parts that interact with one anther in ways that cannot be predicted due to infinite possibilities. Working with such problems or opportunities requires a research approach that matches the system's complexities. Though the research does not necessarily come up with a concrete answer or solution, it can provide a sense of what is happening in the topic space.

Active sensemaking focuses on people's experiences and their perceptions of these experiences. Questions used in a sensemaking research instrument are quite different from those in a traditional survey. It starts with a request for a story or an experience related to the research question—a request that is structured in a way that avoids the sharing of opinions, beliefs, or generalities. Based on the experience shared, respondents answer specially designed questions for which there are no right or wrong answers. In essence, responses to these questions are "coding," or giving more meaning to the experience that the respondent shared. Rather than the researcher determining what is meant by the shared experience, the respondents give this meaning. The results provide data patterns for researchers to review, question, and make sense of.

Instrument co-creation

In order to create the research instrument, QED brought the Core Working Group together to partake in a series of exercises in which participants reflected on key questions to explore topics related to the research question and the field of humanitarian response. Topics included hopes, signs of progress, opportunities, courageous conversations, things to stop doing, important questions, significant challenges, and action or practices to help move things forward. Core Working Group members then shared experiences and themed responses, identifying emerging patterns as part of this process. The information gathered from these workshops was synthesized by QED to form a group of themes, displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: THEMES

A. Big questions
B. Tolerance of diversity (dignity)
C. Collaborations—working together to build inclusive networks
D. Empowering and amplifying voice and agency
E. Accountability and responsibility
F. Crises and challenges are complex and interconnected
G. Funding matters
H. Shifting paradigms

Based on these themes, QED drafted the questions in the instrument. The drafts were reviewed by the Core Working Group and an instrument was created with six triangle questions, five slider questions, and one Marbles canvas (see Figures 1, 2, and 3), each of which was tied to a theme listed above. The instrument also included multiple choice questions and participant demographics—age, gender, location, and profession.

Data collection

The active sensemaking instrument was tested with eight people for feedback on language and item comprehension. From there, the instrument was set up on the Spryng software platform and pilot tested twice, with approximately 20 respondents each time. A second pilot was run after adjustments were made to the instrument based on the outcome of the first pilot. After changes were integrated from the second pilot, the instrument was translated into Arabic, Spanish, and French, and then back-translated into English. Back translations were reviewed for consistency with the English instrument and changes were made to finalize the instrument in the three languages. The instrument was launched on November 6, 2020 and disseminated to individuals and networks through email and social media. Respondents targeted were professionals working in humanitarian response. A total of 105 entries were captured over a three-week period.

FIGURE 1

*A triangle question has three balanced endpoints. Each respondent's story dot is positioned within the triangle based on their individual perceptions of a shared experience. Collective responses plotted within the triangle begin to identify common characteristics and themes of the shared experience.*

In the experience shared, funding decisions were reflecting . . .

Actual needs

Emergency needs

Power relationships
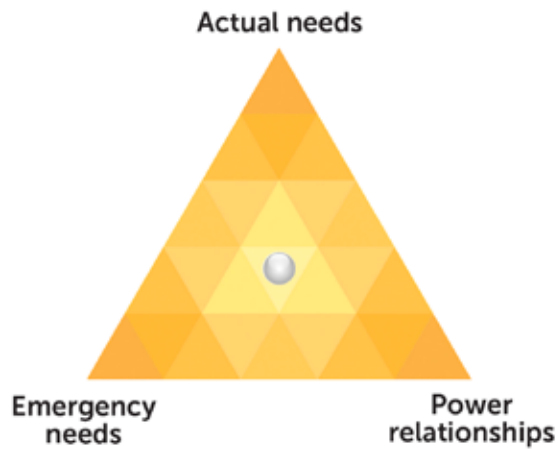
FIGURE 2

A slider question has two polar endpoints. Depending on the prompt, one end could be desirable and one undesirable, or one endpoint could represent excessive presence and the other absolute absence. Responses evaluate where an experience falls along the continuum.

When reflecting on the outcomes of the experiences, the effects were...

Slow and steady; an incremental approach

Fast and new; never seen before

☐ N/A
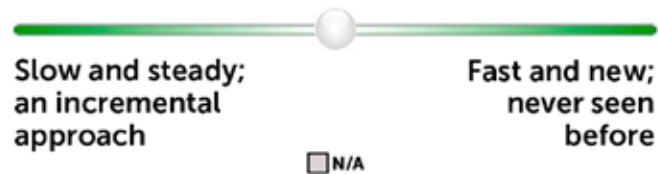
FIGURE 3

A marbles question looks at a variety of influencers or items related to the shared experience and how they were perceived by respondents.

Donors

Affected Communities

Women Community Leaders

Government Authorities

INGOs

Private Sector

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

Very High

None At All

Expertise

Power

DECISIONS WERE BASED ON . . .
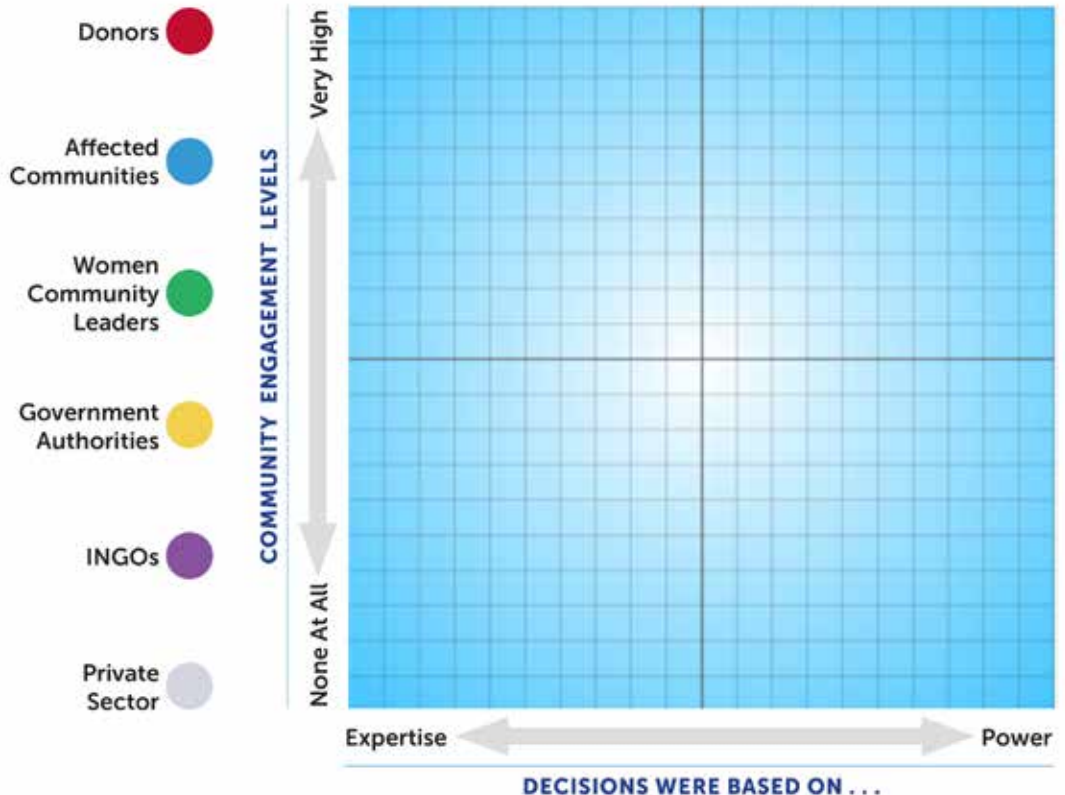
Co-analysis

Initial analysis conducted by QED identified patterns and nuances that emerged from the triangle, slider, and marbles questions. In preparation for the group co-analysis and sensemaking, data summaries were prepared using SPSS statistics, R, and Tableau software.[1] Based on data patterns and variations, QED prepared data visualizations and selected 72 experiences for story theming. The Core Working Group met in seven sessions over a two-week period to co-analyze and make sense of the story data. In these sessions, participants read select stories and experiences and analyzed data from the triangle, slider, and marbles questions. Co-analyses were conducted through a mix of individual, small-group, and large-group activities whereby participants discussed their own interpretations of the data vis-à-vis respondents' interpretation of their experiences. Through this process, Core Working Group members identified themes and patterns in the data and provided insights into the meaning behind them.

KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings and key themes from the 105 stories collected with the sensemaking instrument were extracted and then co-analyzed by Core Working Group members in a series of sensemaking workshops as described above. The insights and discussions that emerged from these workshops form the analysis presented here.

Characteristics of respondents and experiences

A total of 105 stories were shared. The characteristics of the experiences, as described by respondents, are presented in Table 2, on the next page. Of note, almost 50 percent of the experiences shared were considered positive by respondents, and 38 percent an overall success. Close to 50 percent of the experiences happened on the continent of Africa.

Respondents were also asked a series of demographic questions. The majority of respondents were women (66%) and between the ages of 25 and 44 years (64%). One-third (39%) work for international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and most reported working at the international or national level. One-third of respondents reported that they were forcibly displaced from their homes at least once (see Table 3).

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1   IBM Corp. Released 2020. IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, Version 27.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp. R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing, version 3.2.4. Vienna, Austria. Analysis of the data was done using the ggtern package (v3.3.0; Hamilton & Ferry, 2018).Tableau Software, Released 2020. Tableau Desktop Version Professional Edition for Macintosh, Version 2020.3.3., Seattle, WA.

Table 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENCES

	N	%
Type of experience described (select up to two)		
Responding to a crisis	30	29%
Dignity of affected persons	27	26%
Integration and inclusion of affected people	26	25%
Local voice and empowerment	20	19%
Collaboration between stakeholders	16	15%
Location of power and responsibility	13	12%
INGO practices	13	12%
Socio-economic empowerment	12	11%
Gender equity	11	11%
Effecting positive change	10	10%
Funding practices	7	7%
Peace & justice	6	6%
Dealing with politics	5	5%
Building connections and networks	3	3%
Racial or ethnic biases	3	3%
None of these	1	1%
Emotional tone of the experience		
Strongly positive	31	30%
Positive	18	17%
Mixed	26	25%
Negative	8	8%
Strongly negative	21	20%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Characterization of experience shared		
Overall success	40	38%
A bit of both	36	34%
Overall failure	26	25%
Prefer not to say	3	3%
How common is the situation described?		
It happens all the time	17	16%
It happens regularly	28	27%
It happens time to time	39	37%
It is very rare	20	19%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
The experience occurred in ...		
Africa	48	46%
Asia	32	30%
South America	10	10%
North America	6	6%
Prefer not to say	5	5%
Europe	4	4%

Table 3: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

	N	%
Respondent identified as		
Woman	69	66%
Man	35	33%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Age		
18 to 24	5	5%
25 to 34	34	32%
35 to 44	34	32%
45 to 54	17	16%
55 to 64	8	8%
65 to 74	7	7%
Ever forcibly displaced from home		
No	69	66%
Yes	33	31%
Prefer not to say	3	3%
Primary role		
INGO worker	41	39%
Community-based worker	20	19%
Researcher	19	18%
Social movement activist	13	12%
Donor/funder	5	5%
Prefer not to say	3	3%
Government representative	2	2%
Private sector worker	2	2%
Primary level of work		
International	41	39%
National	28	27%
Community	22	21%
Regional	10	10%
Sub-national	3	3%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Where respondent is from		
Africa	34	32%
Asia	24	23%
North America	24	23%
Europe	13	12%
South America	10	10%

Localization and inclusion

> "[T]he planning process did not include input from refugees, especially women, and peace faltered as a result."

> "[R]efugees have travelled for several hours to attend this coordination meeting on recurring safety and protection challenges for children and youth in the settlement. The meeting has been going on for four and a half hours by now, and it is running on over time. The refugees have patiently been awaiting the last point on the agenda where they are supposed to present their input. After the first refugee lists his concerns, the UNHCR officer suggests that we conclude the meeting, in the interest of time. This is when [one of the refugees] … says: 'You cannot squeeze us like that! You need to build us into the programme!'"

Essential to shifting power in humanitarian response are the concepts of empowerment, voice, and agency. In particular, this research sought to understand the extent to which women from affected communities were involved in decision-making processes, and which voices most influenced decision-making in humanitarian response. Respondents were asked if, in the experiences they shared, local women were leaders, influencers, and/or contributors. Of the 77 percent of respondents who answered this question, about half felt that local women were at least "contributors." Those respondents with stories that they characterized as positive described local women as contributors, leaders, AND influencers (see Figure 4).

> "As part of a long-term relationship with a displaced community on the Thai-Burmese border, we have supported local displaced partners to start building their own health research capacity. Our partners perceive this as a form of self-determination—to set their own priorities independent of the traditional Western academic partners, and then to learn to ask and answer questions on their own."

Co-analysts noted how the findings reflect the reality of local women often contributing to certain processes but *not actually influencing decisions*. There was surprise among co-analysts that experiences with women as contributors but not as leaders were largely coded as "positive." Discrepancies between what co-analysts deemed positive or successful stories and how the respondent coded their experience were common, reflecting the complexities and nuances of what constitutes success in humanitarian response.

Accountability and transparency

> "The Dalit community agreed to get our support and selected a design of house according to their needs and aspirations, along with their capability to add additional budget to complete [a] safer house.

True ownership and decision-making in humanitarian response require accountability and transparency, especially with regard to financing. Respondents were asked about financial accountability with a triangle question: "In the experience shared, it was important that financial accountability be … " (see Figure 5). The preponderance of experiences reported having "clear and transparent" financial accountability, and nearly all of these stories were themed as positive

FIGURE 4

## T2. In the experience shared, local women were . . .
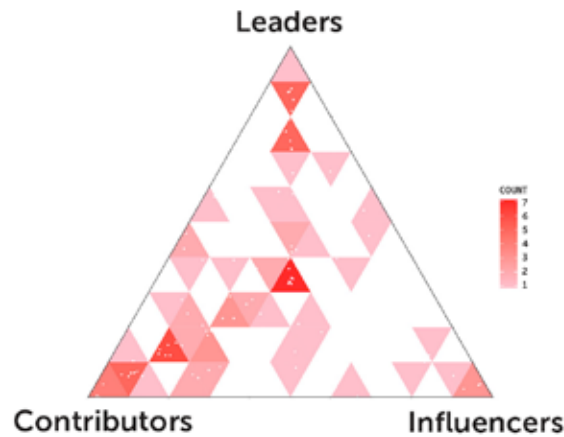
experiences. Experiences where financial accountability was embraced at every level were coded by respondents as both positive and negative, and as both successes and failures.

In analyzing findings related to financial accountability, co-analysts found it interesting that positive experiences were more likely to be categorized as "clear and transparent" as opposed to "fair and just." They noted that "clear and transparent" financial accountability reflects some movement toward equality but is not as progressive as being "fair and just." In other words, clear and transparent may be a stepping stone toward being fair and just. Further, co-analysts expressed that accountability and transparency in humanitarian response may be necessary but may not always be sufficient for meaningful collaboration with affected communities.

FIGURE 5

T3. In the experience shared, it was important that financial accountability be . . .
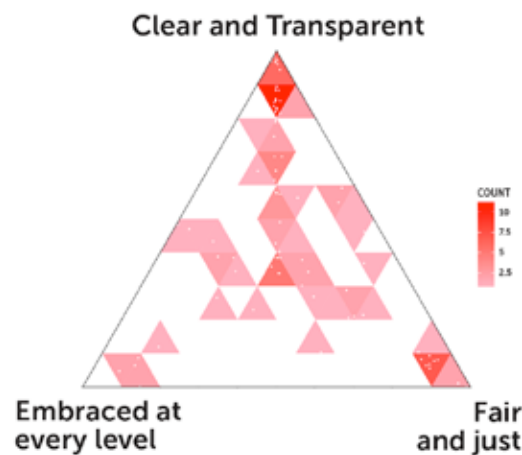
## Responding to the needs of affected communities

> "Considering the suggestion from [focus group discussions], organization[s] provided food vouchers where beneficiaries could buy green vegetables, meat, eggs from the vendors. ... This helped to meet the dietary diversity of beneficiaries at the time of crisis. Also, cash [for] work was conducted in the community through which participant[s] from each household [were] engaged in communal work for 15 days and they were paid based on the wage rate of the government. The cash they received was helpful to meet other necessities which no [other] organizations were providing. The single women, women-headed households, [and] different[ly] able[d] people were prioritized in the response. ... Overall, having cash also promoted the dignity and choice of the beneficiaries."

Whether humanitarian response meaningfully responds to the needs of affected communities—and how it does so—was explored through a question about the hopes, ambitions, and goals of experiences. The majority of respondents (85 percent) felt that their experience reflected respect for the affected community's dignity, was marked by inclusivity, and/or was the result of a co-created response with all stakeholders. Positive experiences were overwhelmingly categorized as "respecting the dignity of affected communities," reflecting the importance of dignity in humanitarian response. Experiences in which hopes, ambitions, and goals were co-created with all stakeholders were also more likely to be categorized as "positive."

Co-analysts were surprised that "negative" and "mixed" experiences were also reported to be "inclusive" or "respecting the dignity of affected communities," (see Figure 6). It was noted that processes *can be inclusive but without meaningful listening to those who are included.* The scarcity of experiences coded as "co-created with all stakeholders" highlights the gap between intentions of inclusivity and actually enabling affected communities to lead response. Generally speaking, and more particularly with the current stress on inclusion in humanitarian response, these results suggest that we need to go further in understanding the importance of inclusion. In other words, who determines who is included, who is being included, and why?

FIGURE 6

T4. The hopes, ambitions and goals in the experience shared were . . .
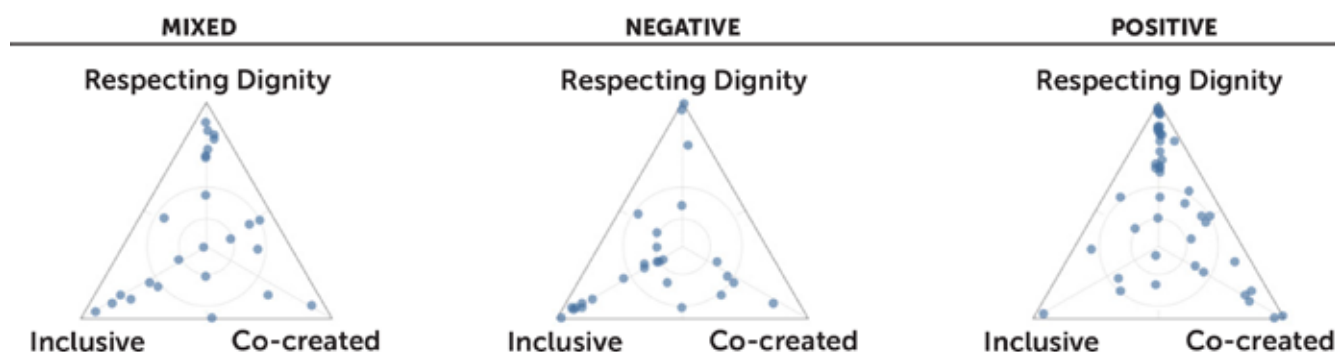
Who and what is "local"?

> "... ended up reinforcing patterns of exclusion. Majhis are typically older men with more 'traditional' values geared toward gender inequity. Majhis have been known to prevent women and girls from accessing services without any accountability, transparency, or representation of community members."

> "On a project that focused on inclusion of persons with disabilities into programming, the project initially engaged formal organizations and committees within a camp context, but it turned out after community engagement that there was a vibrant informal committee made up of persons with disabilities that had better access to all members of this group. This group was unfortunately excluded from project design and implementation; ... [instead] we relied on local knowledge of camp managers (higher-level staff, sometimes ex-pats) rather than those who were closest to the affected population and other networks of committees that may have had better access and on the ground knowledge of the groups we were interested in engaging."

The concepts of "local" and "international" were explored through two questions in the instrument. The first was a slider where the experience had endpoints of "local leadership" and "international expertise" (see Figure 7).

The second was a triangle question asking about voices that made a difference; its endpoints were "outside organizations," "affected communities" and "local leadership." Almost all respondents responded to this question (93%), indicating that these concepts were important to the experience they had shared. Positive experiences heavily skewed toward affected community voices making a difference while negative experiences skewed toward outside organizations' voices making a difference (see Figure 8).

These findings show that the concept of *local* is highly contextual and dependent on perspective. Everyone is local somewhere. What does it mean to be *in* a place versus being *of* a place. Of those actors who are of a place, where do they sit in the hierarchy? Within the system of patriarchy? What is their relationship to those who are in but not of a place?

Negative experiences such as international organizations parachuting in and dismissing local leadership and expertise were recognized as common.

FIGURE 7

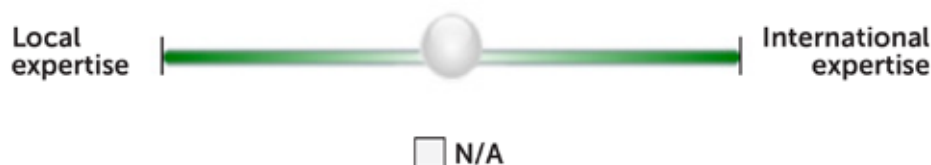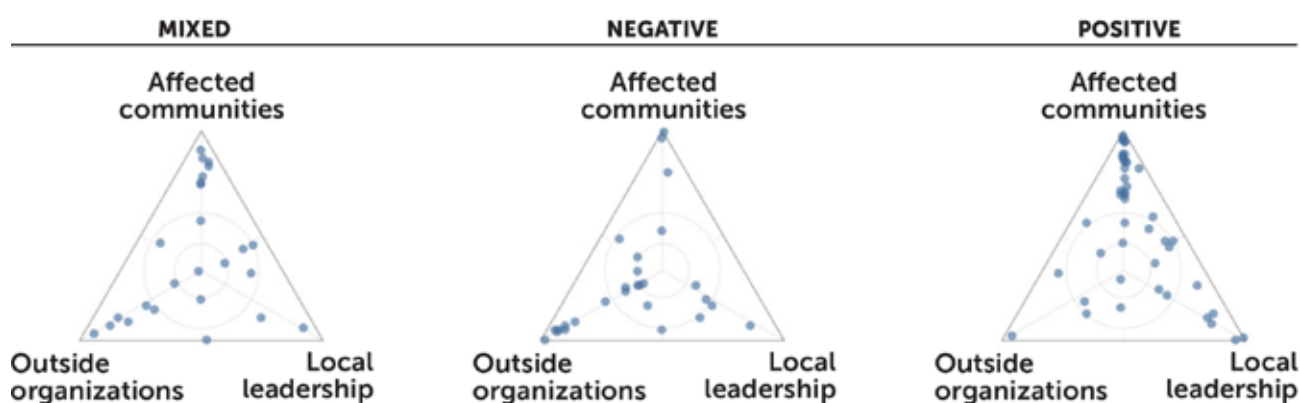The experience shared emphasized realiance on . . .

Local expertise — International expertise

☐ N/A

T5. In the experience shared, the voices that made the difference were . . .

"Accountability to affected communities remains ... a major challenge in humanitarian response works in Nepal. Because the affected communities are not adequately involved in decision-making processes, particularly in the early phase of the response. There is some sort of lacking in coordination among local governments, civil society actors, and communities in identifying beneficiaries, undertaking initial rapid need assessments, and multi-purpose initial rapid needs assessments."

Co-analysts were hopeful, however, that many respondents felt that affected community voices made a difference. At the same time, co-analysts were skeptical of always categorizing "local" as good and "outside" as bad. Reflections emerged that indicated "local" has different meanings in different experiences, and that we cannot assume that "local" means representative or equal. In some instances, for example, "local" meant a small group of individuals, usually older men, who had power but did not represent the needs of those displaced. We have no reason to believe that "local" is any less patriarchal or exclusionary than any other place. In fact, to assume that "local" is homogenous and equitable is to create an "other" that is not based in reality. This can be dangerous. It serves to consolidate external power over affected communities by imagining that there is one local where the many are not considered. It also means that those who are in and of the local are not also, for better or worse, outside of a particular situation of humanitarian need or response.

These findings shed light on the ways in which the concept of local is contextual and contested. Given the importance of and considerable resources invested in the localization agenda in humanitarian response, these findings illuminate why this concept can be problematic.

Community engagement and decision-making

> "Local [refugee] community cannot participate in decision-making process and they cannot access any project's information. Those project-affected communities' land, farming, agriculture, livelihood, culture, environment, and other values of resources. Most of them are becoming jobless, land lost, losing home and dignity."

> "[T]he main organization in charge was an INGO based in NY who is also a donor who sub-granted to a US-based communications firm to go to Kenya and create the messaging campaign using the approach they use in the US. They created a core advisory group made up of Kenyan civil society experts and activists, which mostly served as window dressing and a way to get buy-in for the project."

The level of community engagement and the extent to which decisions were made based on power or expertise was explored through the "marbles" question. The question asked respondents to place marbles representing different types of "decision-makers" on a matrix with "level of community engagement" on the y-axis and "basis for decision-making" on the x-axis (see Figure 9). In experiences where female community leaders or affected communities made decisions, respondents categorizing decisions as being made based on expertise, and community engagement was more likely to be high. Conversely, when government authorities, donors, or the private sector were decision-makers, decisions were more likely to be based on power. Less clear patterns were seen for international NGOs (INGOs) as decision-makers; respondents were fairly split across the spectrum, classifying decisions being made based on expertise or power.

FIGURE 9   **How much did STAKEHOLDERS engage the community and on what did they base their decisions.**
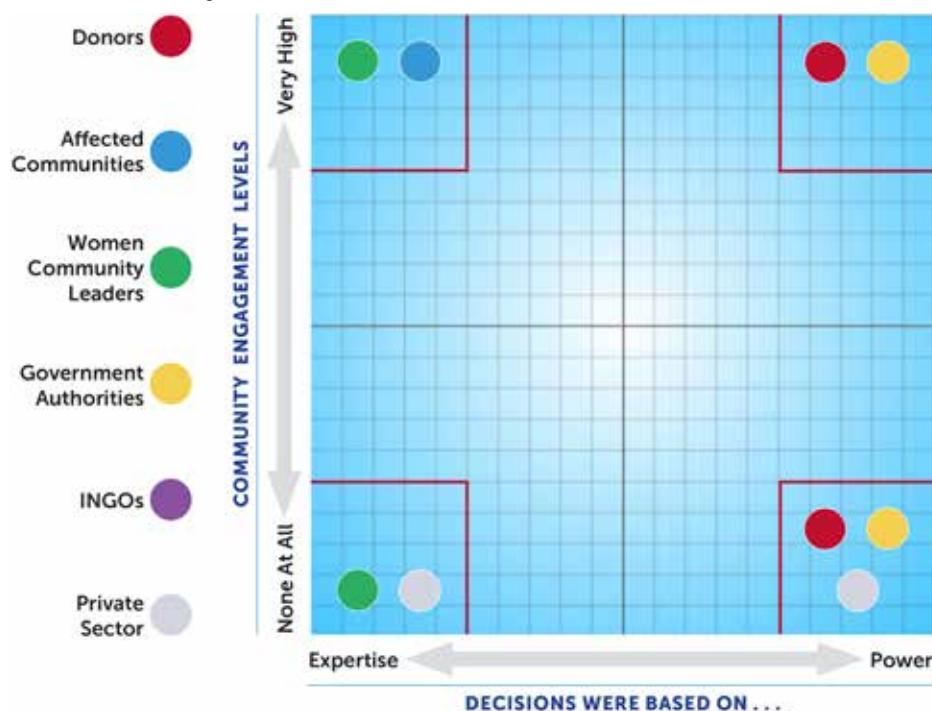
To further explore these concepts, co-analysts themed stories that came out of the four corners of the marble board. These "corners" were selected for analysis due to the high concentration of experiences that were categorized as displayed in Figure 9.

Interestingly, community engagement was just as likely to be reported as "very high" when decisions were made based on expertise versus when decisions were made based on power. For example, as seen in Figure 10, 24 percent of the affected communities' decisions were based on expertise with very high levels of community engagement.

Experiences where decisions were made based on power were much more likely to involve government authorities or donors. Figure 11 shows that decisions made by government authorities were based on power with 12 percent having no community engagement and 14 percent showing "very high" engagement. These experiences reflected how power dynamics play out negatively for affected communities. Even where there were high levels of community engagement, input was not taken seriously or did not have an impact on decision-making. Further, in cases where community engagement was categorized as "high" but decisions were based on power, "engagement" and "participation" were viewed as buzzwords without an actual understanding of what real inclusion means.

Conversely, experiences in which decisions were based on expertise were more likely to be those involving community leaders and affected communities. As noted previously, experiences where

FIGURE 10

How much did the AFFECTED COMMUNITIES engage the community and on what did they base their decisions.
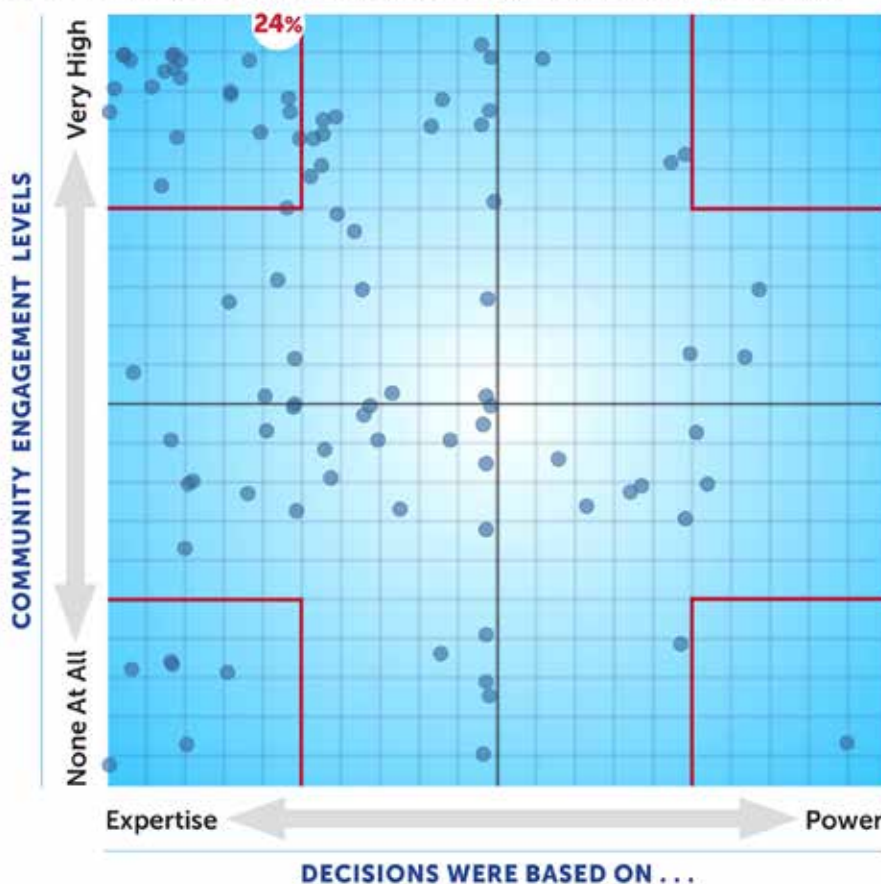
decisions were made based on expertise were not necessarily more "positive," even with high levels of community engagement. Co-analysts still observed issues of undervaluing local knowledge, lack of accountability, and top-down approaches in these experiences. The humanitarian sector's focus on localization and inclusion can lead to the commodification of affected community knowledge, expertise, and networks without attention to the *ways* in which they are engaged and ensuring that social and economic rights are upheld.
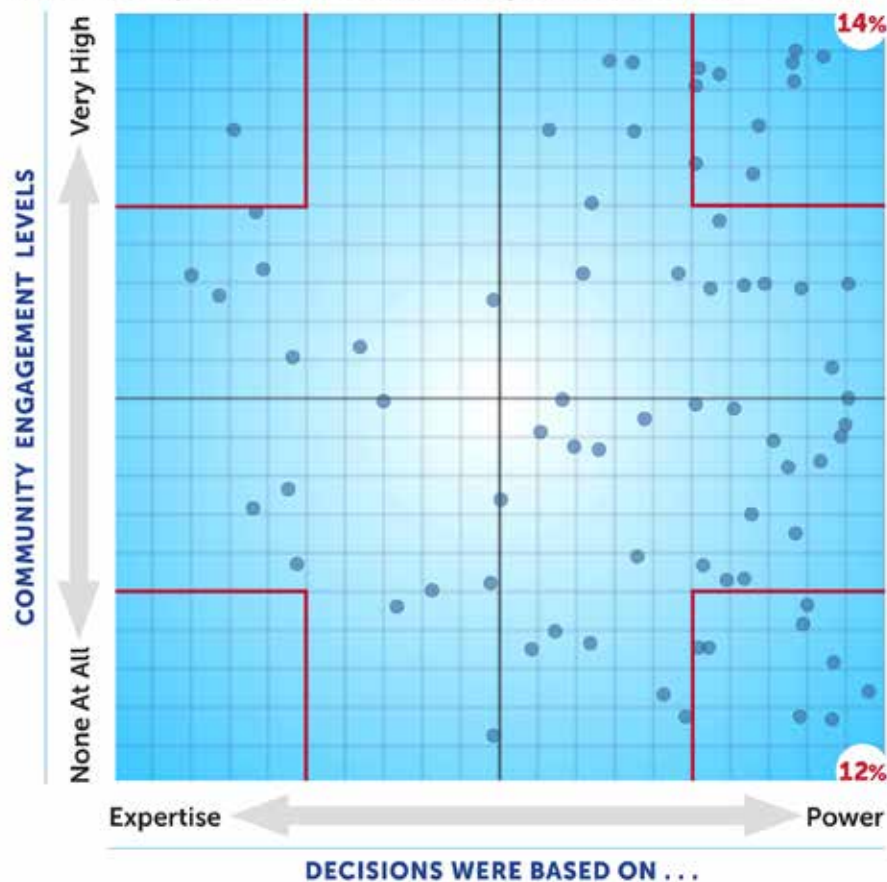
> "[P]aid volunteers [in refugee camps] were engaging in work relationships beyond their contract stipulations, and not receiving due benefits: contracts were always set at three-month periods under the position that work contracted was not considered full-time, ongoing work. In practice, 90 percent of these contracts were renewed for almost two years. In each three-month period, a paid volunteer would receive no more than two days paid leave, which could not be rolled over if the contract were renewed."

What does an equitable and inclusive response to crises and forced displacement look like?

Respondents' experiences were selected and analyzed for key themes from the story prompt: "Share an experience where meaningful progress was made toward the kind of response that you would like to see OR one in which there was a failure to make progress. What happened?" Their

FIGURE 11

How much did GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES engage the community and on what did they base their decisions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEVELS — Very High / None At All

14%

12%

DECISIONS WERE BASED ON . . . — Expertise / Power

stories were further divided into those that were categorized as "failures," "successes," or "mixed" (containing aspects of both failure and success).

Successes

Co-analysts noted several important commonalities among *successful experiences* (see Figure 12), providing insight into actionable steps that can be taken:

- Meaningful collaboration between place-based and international organizations requires that affected communities are integrated into all components of a response, with financial resources to match their involvement.

- Power dynamics must be addressed with intention and a diverse set of "local" actors should be involved, including feminist organizations, civil society, and religious groups.

- Female leaders play a critical role in ensuring that women and girls' needs are addressed, and place-based actors often have credibility and are trusted by community members.

- Transferring ownership to place-based actors can result in greater impact and sustainability. This change has been demonstrated by the COVID-19 response and the success of community-based organizations in meaningfully meeting the needs of affected communities.

    "I worked with an initiative that makes investments in humanitarian innovations for conflict-affected communities. In July 2020, we held an online portfolio review that brought together bilateral funders, program staff, expert advisors, and a selection of innovators who have received funding from the program. This was the first time that the initiative took a participatory sensemaking approach to explore important strategic aspects of the portfolio of innovations and the first time that innovators themselves participated. The innovators were engaged early on to ensure they were prepared for the experience and that they felt they could raise their own questions and critiques of the initiative during the discussions. The centrality of innovators in this process made it more meaningful and grounded the conversations in their experiences in trying to innovate in extremely difficult contexts. It was an important shift in the initiative's approach to innovation portfolio management that positioned funders as learning from and with innovators rather than making disconnected decisions without innovators' input."

Failures

Experiences categorized as *failures* shed light on the key barriers to meaningfully shifting humanitarian practice (see Figure 13). The following points emerged as commonalities in "failure" experiences:

- Patriarchy was a common thread throughout, and co-analysts noted how patriarchy presents itself not only in communities but also in organizations, including donors.

- The power of donors to set the humanitarian agenda was seen in several "failure" stories, which were also marked by donors' struggles to adapt practices to meaningfully respond to shifting needs in affected communities.

- Some experiences reflected unintended consequences of humanitarian aid, including further marginalization of marginalized groups.

FIGURE 12

THEMES FROM 'SUCCESSFUL' PROJECTS

Efficacy of collaborative action (place-based / grass-roots / INGOs / local / national / global)

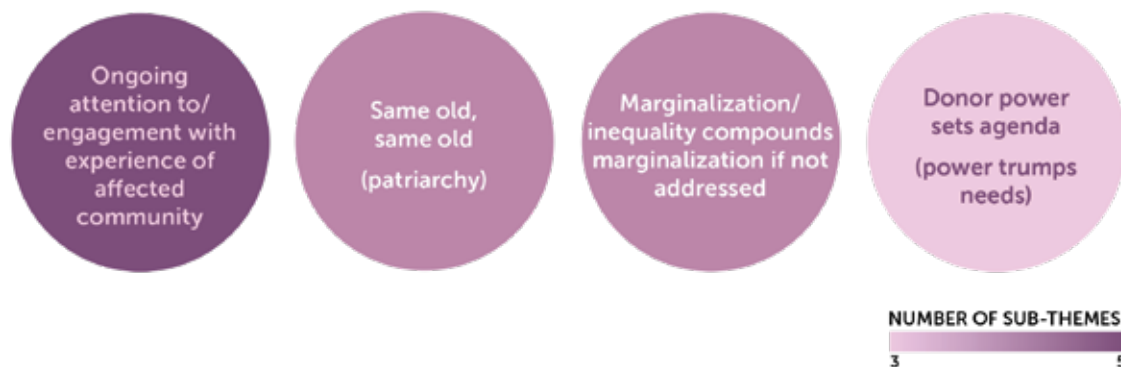Resourcing, recognizing, respecting, transferring ownership to 'local' / place-based actors

Critical role of women/ women-led CSO

Research is key to effective programming and change

Importance of gender power

Entrepreneurial approach to economic challenge

Holistic approach to programs—more effective and cost-efficient

NUMBER OF SUB-THEMES:

1   15

Themes that emerged from the "successful" projects are most in line with changes co-analysts would like most to see in the humanitarian system. There are three times as many success sub-themes (46 items) compared to the failure themes (16 items).

FIGURE 13

THEMES FROM 'FAILED' PROJECTS

Ongoing attention to/ engagement with experience of affected community

Same old, same old (patriarchy)

Marginalization/ inequality compounds marginalization if not addressed

Donor power sets agenda (power trumps needs)

NUMBER OF SUB-THEMES:

3   5

> "During the COVID-19 lockdown, … young girls were exposed to sexual and domestic violence and with increased domestic work, serving their household. They were cut off from friends which affected their mental health."

Mixed

Experiences that were *mixed*—having *some success and some failure*—demonstrated the complexities of shifting humanitarian practices. Co-analysts noted the following:

- Experiences reflected the importance of context and the complexities that exist in any community.

- It is crucial not to categorize displaced people as "other," or to group them into a homogenous category. Displaced communities should more often be viewed as part of the host community.

- Separating "humanitarian" from "development" contexts results in responses that are too slow to adapt and may lose sight of people and rights. There is a need to focus on the humanitarian-development nexus.

> "Women from ancestral communities did not want to resort to relocation. They did not see that as an option because for them, leaving the territory meant being uprooted and leaving everything (their territory, Mother Earth, culture, heritage, food, spiritual connection). Through them we learned about collective protection, a cultural practice that aims at protecting people of the communities and the common goods from those who want to do harm."

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research helps shed light on the complexities of change that are needed in humanitarian practice. As expected, there are no clear solutions for implementing an anti-racist, feminist approach to crises and forced displacement. However, through the stories shared by respondents and the analysis conducted by a range of experts, we can draw out some key implications for a shift toward a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable response to crises and forced displacement.

Most notably, the research suggests how we need to define and implement the localization agenda in humanitarian response. On one hand, the need for place-based civil society organizations (especially those led by women) that have adequate resources and authority to set the humanitarian agenda is undoubtedly important. At the same time, the concept of "local" is quite blunt and does not help us distinguish among actors or clarify our vision for which characteristics, skills, capacities, and social and economic capital are necessary for the equitable, sustainable and just response to humanitarian need. Systemic inequities exist within "local" organizations and structures. For example, one story from Bangladesh highlighted how "localization" in the Rohingya refugee response instilled power with select individuals who were almost always older men. The Majhi system reinforced or even strengthened certain patterns of exclusion and gender inequality. The strategy of localization is a key mechanism used by the humanitarian sector in addressing the need for inclusion. Thus, the assumption of external as bad and local as good should not inform attempts to shift power. Instead, dismantling systems of oppression and taking the time to understand how power dynamics play out in different contexts is essential.

Recent events, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, have necessitated a rapid shift to more community-driven response. Experiences and co-analyses brought to light the many challenges and opportunities that come with such a change. Crises that limit external access to affected populations have the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities, with more vulnerable groups experiencing heightened needs accompanied by a lack of resources. Often, community-based organizations are best positioned to respond rapidly to community needs but lack the funding or decision-making power to implement responsive programming. These challenges demonstrate how essential it is to adequately fund community-based actors for the work they are best positioned to do while also allowing them to make decisions about how funding is spent.

Some experiences that were shared show this can be done. One story from Uganda described how communities were able to make decisions about funding at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to swiftly identify and deliver assistance to individuals most in need of food aid. An experience from Nepal described how stateless populations were not able to access emergency relief at the start of the pandemic, but, with the support of a community-based organization, advocated for a change in regulations and were therefore able to access essential resources. These experiences demonstrate how shifts in funding priorities and power can lead to positive tangible results. These organizations were there before, during, and after the particular crises that these stories illustrate. Their capacity to be effective had to be in place before the crisis occurred. These findings demonstrate several core dimensions of the localization agenda that need to be understood. Civil society organizations in affected contexts (1) have the expertise, trust, and credibility to act effectively and (2) their capacity is derived from years of expertise and knowledge that far exceed the resources provided by project-based cycles of funding that characterize humanitarian response.

The idea of inclusion was heavily discussed both in the shared experiences and during co-analysis sessions. Stories demonstrated how inclusion and participation can be externally imposed requirements that lack real meaning. Based on their own experiences, co-analysts provided insights into how the use of buzzwords such as "inclusion" can negatively impact the desired systemic shift in humanitarian response. For example, in attempts to include affected populations in decision-making, many international organizations actively seek out displaced persons to serve on advisory committees, technical working groups, and other similar bodies. However, getting a seat at the table does not ensure that input is taken seriously. Moreover, such inclusion can be seen as "ticking a box," often with limited appreciation of the vast capacities and expertise that exist among people affected by crises and displacement. Placing an emphasis on inclusion runs the risk of tokenism and surface-level participation. This is not to say that humanitarian organizations should not strive for meaningful inclusion. Rather, attention must be given to defining what inclusion means to those who are being "included" and following through with commitments to meaningful participation. If we are to truly have a *locally* owned, placed-based, women-led equitable response to crises and forced displacement, then local actors would *not* be included by other entities, but rather would be in the position to decide whom *they would want to include.*

In interpreting the meaning of experiences, co-analysts noted frequent differences in interpretations of what "success" looks like. Some stories were categorized by the respondent as positive or successful, but to co-analysts the story appeared to reinforce power dynamics common in humanitarian response. This finding reflects several potential phenomena. First, we do not know

who exactly the respondents were and whether they have a shared vision of what a more inclusive and responsive humanitarian system would look like. As noted by several co-analysts, respondents who disproportionately hold power may be less likely to deem certain experiences as "failures." Different interpretations of success versus failure also highlight the importance of learning from mistakes and different types of experiences. While an experience might have had negative aspects or could be seen as a failure in its ultimate outcome, it may have taught an important lesson in how the humanitarian system can meaningfully include and respond to affected communities. In this way, the story sharers may interpret the experience as successful in starting a shift toward more inclusive humanitarian response.

CONCLUSION

These research findings provide insight into how to shift to anti-racist and feminist responses to crises and forced displacement. Notably, the findings call into question the utilization of terms such as inclusivity and localization, emphasizing the need to go beyond buzzwords and rhetoric to shift decision-making power. Key elements of success were identified, such as flexible funding, engaging with affected communities before the onset of crises, and respecting the knowledge, skills, and expertise of organizations that may fall outside of the traditional humanitarian sector and engaging with them on their terms. In this process, experiences reported as successful were predicated on prior trust and relationships as well as capacities, qualities, and expertise that could never have been adequately developed in the moment to create an effective, feminist response. Equally important are the lessons learned from the research process; over the course of six months, a range of experts and stakeholders co-led the design of an innovative research tool. They ensured data was collected from participants who may not typically have a voice in the humanitarian system—and equally ensured that the analysis reflected the depth and nuance of their varied expertise and perspectives. This collaborative process brought together civil society, academics, and practitioners from all over the world and provided a space for Core Working Group members to share their experiences, frustrations, and ambitions. The result is a network of individuals who can potentially collaborate on research, programming, and advocacy. Together, we approached the implementation of this project with the same guiding feminist principles we advocate for in the substance of our work.

ANNEX 1. BIOS: CORE WORKING GROUP AND REPORT CO-CREATORS

Mimidoo Achakpa is an expert on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and on women, peace, and security. She holds a Master of Science in Security and Strategic Studies and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Security and Strategic Studies. Mimidoo is the Executive Director of Women's Right to Education Programme (WREP), an NGO with United Nations Consultative Status of ECOSOC, and currently the Secretary of the National Localization Working Group (NLWG). She also coordinates the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women Network—Nigeria, a network that has been working to stop the proliferation and misuse of arms since 2005; and the Women in Humanitarian Response in Nigeria Initiative (WIHRINI), a network that serves as a strong voice on the gender dimensions of humanitarian response. Mimidoo advocates for the betterment of vulnerable groups in society, especially women, youth, children, and people living with disabilities, and recognizes the need to amplify women's voices in humanitarian action.

Cindy Clark is co-executive director of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), a global feminist membership organization committed to supporting women's rights as well as helping gender justice movements thrive and be a driving force in challenging systems of oppression. She joined AWID in 2007 as the manager for the Where is the Money for Women's Rights? program, and subsequently played several different roles related to her passion for exploring how organizations can better embody feminist values and build stronger movements. Prior to AWID, Cindy was one of the founding members of Just Associates, where she worked on advocacy capacity and movement-building initiatives, drawing on methodologies of popular education and deep power analysis as the starting point for change strategies. Cindy has a Master of Arts in Human and Organizational Development, specializing in the study of change and learning processes in organizations.

Megan Daigle is a senior research fellow in ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group whose research focuses broadly on gender, sexuality, race, and disability in humanitarian, conflict, and development contexts. She has conducted research on access and attitudes to sexual and reproductive health and rights; LGBTQ+ experiences of conflict, displacement, and peacebuilding; sexual and gender-based violence in and out of conflict; gender and disability in humanitarian and post-conflict settings; sex work and sex tourism; and feminist, post-colonial, and queer politics. Megan holds a PhD in International Politics from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Julianne Deitch serves as the Women's Refugee Commission's (WRC's) senior advisor for adolescent health and protection. Her work focuses on engaging adolescents in program design and implementation and collecting meaningful evidence to inform programming and service delivery. Julianne has worked in global health for more than 10 years with international, regional, and community-based organizations. Her experience includes five years with the UN Secretariat, where she conducted research and provided guidance to member states on achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals and implementing policies on gender equality. Julianne is currently pursuing a Doctor of Public Health at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public

Health. She holds a Master of Public Health from Columbia University, a Master of Science in Development Studies from the London School of Economics, and a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Economics from the University of California, Davis.

Jacqueline Hart serves as WRC's senior director, gender and strategy, and leads the organization's strategic focus on gender equality and social inclusion. Jacqueline is a feminist sociologist who has been working on issues of gender equality and gender-transformative change for more than 20 years. Before joining WRC in 2019, she was a member of the executive leadership of American Jewish World Service (AJWS), a $40 million international human rights grant-making and advocacy organization. Among her contributions while at AJWS: she was the executive team lead on the creation of the strategic plan; co-created a field-leading feminist strategy on child, early, and forced marriage; and co-authored with the International Development Research Centre of the Canadian government a foundational paper on feminist research for gender-transformative change. Prior to this role, she was on the graduate faculty of the health advocacy program at Sarah Lawrence College, the director of research at Planned Parenthood of NYC, and a consultant for The Solidarity Center and the World Bank. Jacqueline completed a post-doctoral fellowship in health services research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and earned her Doctorate in Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania and her Bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Safia Ibrahimkhel is a 25-year-old refugee youth representative whose family is originally from Afghanistan. She was born in and grew up in an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar, Pakistan. Safia serves as a co-chair of the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) and Global Students Leader in Tertiary Refugee Students Network. She is also a youth activist and consultant working for women's socio-economic empowerment, advocating for education and peace building. In 2019, Safia was awarded as Youth Ambassador for Pakistan and Afghanistan Youth Dialogues. Safia completed high school in Peshawar, graduated from college with a major in Political Science and Sociology, and later completed her master's degree in Political Science from the University of Peshawar. She is now pursuing an MPhil in International Relations at Quaid Azam University in Islamabad.

Geci Karuri-Sebina is a multidisciplinary scholar-practitioner working at the intersection between people, place, and technological change, focusing on the global south. She has more than 20 years experience in development policy and planning, innovation systems, and futures study. Her education spanned from computer science to sociology, architecture, urban planning, and evolutionary economics (in that order). She is primarily occupied as an adjunct professor at the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities, a research fellow at the Wits School of Governance, a global faculty member of Singularity University, an associate with South African Cities Network, and a curator in The Emergence Network. She is also currently involved in writing and editorial roles for several international futures, innovation, and planning publications.

Lizzie Kiama is founder and managing trustee at This-Ability Trust, a nonprofit that works to advance disability rights and inclusion for women and girls with disabilities in Kenya. She has been responsible for conceptualizing and coordinating national and regional movement-building

initiatives focused on increasing access to sexual and reproductive health and economic rights. Her work focuses on amplifying voice, building capacity and creating visibility for women with disabilities across Kenya and beyond—including leading conversations with the private sector on disability inclusion in the workplace, and exploring the role of advertising and marketing in realizing the enjoyment of rights for women and girls with disabilities. Most recently, Lizzie's work has prioritized leveraging technology to build employability skills and increase safe spaces for young women with disabilities, collect quantitative data, and increase public awareness on the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

Julie Lafrenière is the senior gender lead for Oxfam's Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) and the current co-chair of the Inter-Agency Steering Committee's Reference Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action. Julie is a lawyer by training and has worked on human rights and women's rights in Canada and internationally. She has more than 15 years experience working on gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian settings for a variety of actors, including the UN and local civil society organizations. Julie has published reports and policy guidance on women's rights, GBV, and women, peace, and security.

Beth Waruiru Ndonye, Protection Associate, UNHCR Kenya, is a spirited queer black feminist working with LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya. She is passionate about ensuring the safety and inclusion of persons from marginal groups, at-risk groups, women, girls, youth, internally displaced persons and migrants, as well as those with disabilities. Often having to work against the grain, there is no shortage of evidence of the inequalities that play out against those that she advocates for and protects. Keen on developing initiatives that emphasize the inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons, Beth supports interventions that alleviate suffering and restore dignity to marginalized groups. At the forefront of advocating targeted programming for these populations within government institutions and various conventional local and international organizations, she has extensive experience in sexual and gender-based violence prevention, developing initiatives aimed at empowering, facilitating self-sustenance, and easing the integration of LGBTQI+ refugees. Beth has a unique combination of expertise to lead and collaborate in the bringing of much needed-change through policy, refugee networks, disability rights, feminist movements, women's funds, and governance.

Anila Noor is a refugee-activist, TEDx speaker, and researcher based in the Netherlands. As an advisor and expert consultant, she works with different institutions on designing engagement projects related to inclusion and diversity. Noor initiated New Women Connectors, a movement striving for mainstreaming the unheard voices of migrant and refugee women living across Europe. She is a co-founder of Global Independent Refugee women Leaders (GIRWL) and a member of Global Refugee Led Network (GRN). She has also worked as a policy advisor on integration for the City of Amsterdam. She is a steering committee member of Global Refugee Led Network and a member of Kaldor Centre of Emerging Scholars Network Australia. Noor has presented working papers in academic dialogues at Oxford University, Bristol University, and Erasmus University. She is an emancipation ambassador of EP—Nuffic (Netherlands) and a member of Kaldor Centre of Emerging Scholars Network Australia. Noor graduated from Erasmus University Netherlands.

Marta Royo found a great opportunity to serve as a rights activist when she became the executive director of Profamilia in 2012, Colombia's longest-standing, non-governmental organization that provides, protects, and advocates for sexual and reproductive rights and services. This responsibility has given her the opportunity to help achieve significant political and social transformation aimed toward improving the status of girls and women in Colombia, including, but not limited to leading legislature on the National Policy on Sexuality and Sexual and Reproductive Rights, making sure these rights are recognized for people with disabilities, and eliminating the barriers that prevent women from accessing safe abortions. Of Spanish and Panamanian nationality, Marta Royo graduated from Dartmouth College. She holds a post-graduate degree in Social Economy from the University of Barcelona, and a Master's in Literature from New York University.

Sumeera Shrestha is an energetic feminist working on the issues of single women, gender-based violence, peace and conflict, social inclusion, economic empowerment, and leadership in rights-based approach for the past 16 years. As a women's rights advocate with an academic background in development studies and economics, she is keen on gearing the momentum of women's movement through a multi-dimensional approach of intersection and collaboration throughout. Sumeera is an Erasmus Mundus Scholar in her master's program. She has conducted research in collaboration with different universities and organizations related to gender, violence, and disaster, and has been the focal point of NGOs of Nepal for the Accelerating Partnership through Localisation project. She had led several relief and response initiatives during different humanitarian emergencies and has contributed to peacebuilding initiatives through the organizations she is associated with. She is executive director of Women for Human Rights Single Women Group (NGO), co-founder of Nispakshya (alliance of Conflict Affected Women in Nepal) and founder of GyanBodh Research and Development Services.

Hafsar Tameesuddin is a former Rohingya refugee based in Aukland, New Zealand. She is a human rights defender and advocate for gender equality, ending child marriage, LGBTQI rights, asylum seekers, refugees, and statelessness. Hafsar currently serves as the deputy chair of Australia New Zealand Pacific Working Group of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and as the New Zealand country coordinator of Free Rohingya Coalition, an advisory group member of Forcibly Displaced People Network. She is a core working group member of global movement for Statelessness, organised by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, and a member of Rainbow Path New Zealand. During her free time, Hafsar works as a volunteer for asylum seekers and refugee communities in New Zealand while also pursuing higher education. Hafsar participated at the Global Refugee Forum as a refugee representative and human rights defender alongside the gender audit team. She strongly believes in equality, feminism, liberty, and human rights.

Manisha Thomas has been working on humanitarian issues for more than 20 years and has been consulting since October 2016. She is the part-time Geneva representative of the Women's Refugee Commission. She was the part-time coordinator of the Emergency Appeals Alliance (EAA) until December 2019. Prior to consulting, she was interim director of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) in Palestine, the Head of Secretariat for the Solutions Alliance. She also worked in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Secretariat and held various positions at the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, including supporting NGO coordination in Sudan and Haiti.

Simon Marot Touloung was born in 1992 in Wange, Mayom County in present-day South Sudan. Following the conflict in Southern Sudan, at the age of 8, Simon Marot joined his brothers and walked for 21 days and nights from Unity State in Upper Nile and arrived in Keri Transit camp in northern Uganda on 9th September 2000. He received his B.Sc. in Petroleum Geoscience and Production at Makerere University through an exclusive DAFI Scholarship. Marot is currently pursuing an M.Sc. in Energy Economics and Governance at Makerere University Business School—Kampala. As a youth leader, Marot co-founded the South Sudan Science Club (SSSC), whose main focus is environmental protection and climate change. He is a co-founder and team lead for African Youth Action Network (AYAN) based in Kiryandongo refugee settlement, Uganda, and in Juba, South Sudan. Marot was appointed as a member of the African Union (AU) Youth Advisory Council assisting the AU youth envoy by the chairperson of the African Union Commission. He was nominated among the 100 Most Influential Young Africans in Leadership and Civil Society by Africa Youth Awards in 2019.

Zahra Vieneuve has worked on issues of gender equality and human rights across the world for the past 15 years. She is the program director, Freedom from Violence at the Global Fund for Women, and a steering committee member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network. At the Global Fund for Women, she leads a global program focused on supporting feminist leadership during and post conflict, the safety and integrated security of Women's Human Rights Defenders, and feminist movements resisting violence in the name of culture and religion. Prior to joining the Global Fund for Women, Zahra worked with civil society organizations across the Middle East and North Africa as a human rights advocate and educator. In her capacity as senior program officer at Karama, she managed the Women, Peace and Security program and supported the efforts of women human rights activists in Libya, Palestine, Iraq, and Yemen. At the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies in Egypt, she led the human rights education program, where she designed and held human rights and peace education training targeting Middle Eastern youth. She holds two Masters degrees: the first in Political Science from the University of Geneva and the second in International and Comparative Education from American University in Cairo.

The Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN) is an international network of women leaders working together to transform the humanitarian system into one that is guided by feminist principles. The FHN is member-based, comprised of local and national women's rights organizations (WROs), national and regional women's networks, international NGOs, and individuals. The FHN's vision is of a global humanitarian system that is responsive, accountable, and accessible to women and their organizations, in all their diversity; that challenges rather than perpetuates structural inequalities. The FHN works collectively to achieve its vision. It is committed to consistently upholding feminist principles in the way that it works: to acknowledging and addressing power dynamics within, to ensure it is led by its WRO members, to facilitating safe space, and continually reflecting on and refining its feminist practice.

CORE WORKING GROUP MEMBERS AND REPORT CO-CREATORS

Mimidoo Achakpa, Executive Director of Women's Right to Education Programme, Nigeria

Cindy Clark, Co-Executive Director, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Megan Daigle, Senior Research Fellow, ODI Humanitarian Policy Group

Julianne Deitch, Senior Advisor, Adolescent Health and Protection, Women's Refugee Commission

Jacqueline Hart, Senior Director, Strategy, Gender Equality and Inclusion, Women's Refugee Commission

Safia Ibrahimkhel, Co-chair, UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council, Pakistan

Geci Karuri-Sebina, Adjunct Professor, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Lizzie Kiama, Founder and Managing Trustee, This Ability Trust, Kenya

Julie Lafrenière, Senior Gender Lead, Oxfam and co-chair of IASC Reference Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action

Beth Waruiru Ndonye, Protection Associate, UNHCR Kenya

Anila Noor, Founder, New Women Connectors, and co-founder GIRWL

Marta Royo, Executive Director, Profamilia, Colombia

Sumeera Shrestha, Executive Director, Women for Human Rights, Nepal
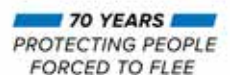
Hafsar Tameesuddin, Representative, Nationality For All

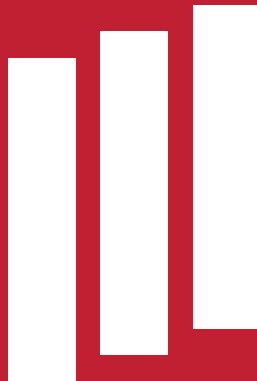**Manisha Thomas,** Geneva Representative, Women's Refugee Commission

Simon Marot Toulong, Team Leader, African Youth Action Network, South Sudan

Zahra Vieneuve, Program Director, Freedom from Violence, Global Fund for Women

Feminist Humanitarian Network

CORE WORKING GROUP MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

**WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**

Research. Rethink. Resolve.