**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION PROJECT**

# PROJECT REVIEW REPORT

## Women's Participation Project

## 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# SUMMARY

During 2023, as part of the global 'Safe from the Start' initiative funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM) from the US Government, a comprehensive review of the Women's Participation Project (WPP) was conducted to compile main findings from the last seven years of implementation to identify challenges, best practices and recommendations, contributing to better inclusion of women, adolescents, persons with disabilities and other individuals at heightened risk. The objectives of this review are the following:

1. **Compile the main achievements of the WPP since its inception in 2016**
2. **Identify the best practices and recurring challenges throughout the last seven years of implementation**
3. **Develop learning around the evolution of the project**
4. **Identify recommendations for ways forward for the WPP and broader workstreams of CCCM**

This report was developed from a desk review of WPP project documents from 2016 to 2023, learning reports, baseline and endline assessments, and adapted tools from a wide range of country contexts including Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia and South Sudan. Complementary to the desk review, 20 Key Informant Interviews were conducted with IOM staff involved with project design and implementation at country-level, partners, and key headquarters staff, including technical advisors in CCCM and GBV. Key findings were presented to operational and HQ teams in the WPP Global Workshop in March 2023, ensuring a space for the validation of findings, feedback, two-way dialogue, and the development of recommendations.

## BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The WPP was designed by IOM and the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) in 2016 with the objective of supporting meaningful participation and representation of displaced women and girls. The project, managed by the IOM CCCM Global Support Team, is part of the 'Safe from the Start' initiative funded by BPRM and aims at reducing GBV risks through supporting CCCM practitioners to have a broader understanding of what participation is and to develop strategies adapted to their specific context of operations to enhance the participation of women and girls in displacement sites.



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> *Each mission does their own iteration of the WPP. Some contexts must focus on the process of building the capacity of women to raise their voices and participate in their community and sphere of influence. In other contexts, the participation or social norms are not as much of an issue so it's thinking more about how we will empower women through building economic opportunities.*
>
> — Key Informant

> *How can we promote a longer-term perspective in the WPP that contributes to the meaningful participation, recovery and empowerment of women and adolescent girls in particular?*
>
> — Key Informant

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During its seven years of implementation, the WPP has been implemented in 13 countries and has reached over 16,000 women and girls globally.[1] Despite the many challenges faced during implementation in contexts with restrictive socio-cultural norms and working with communities under the stress of a conflict or a disaster, the project has remarkably contributed to strengthening women's participation in camp governance structures, in decision-making at the household and community level, and contributed to addressing safety concerns identified by women and girls. The project has also promoted identifying challenges and best practices around the inclusion of adolescent girls and persons with disabilities in camp management.

## COUNTRIES IMPLEMENTING WPP



Active (as of 2023)　　Ended
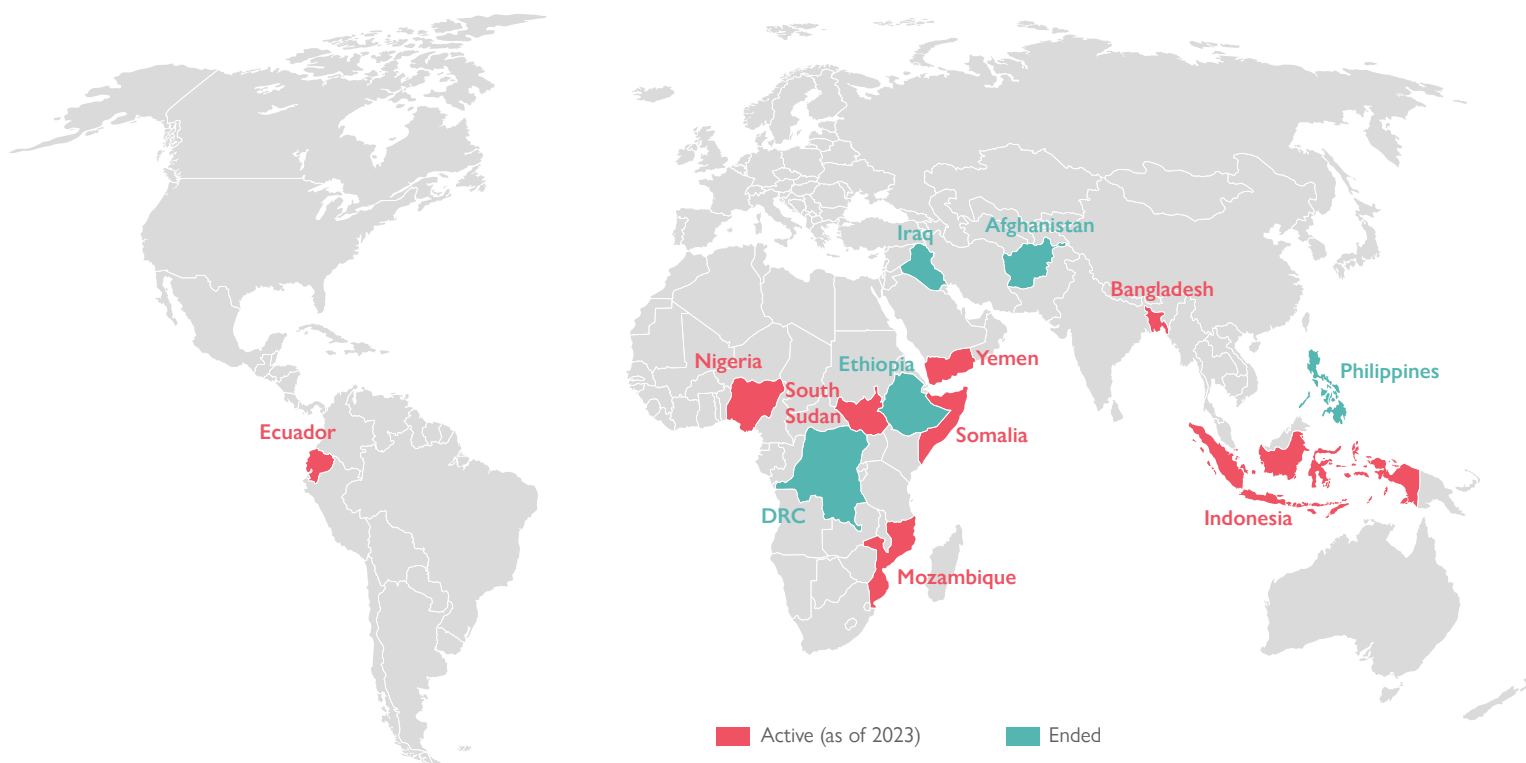
The WPP is implemented in **four phases** with a set of tools supporting specific activities as part of each phase:

1. **Baseline Assessment Phase:**
   looking at identifying forms and levels of participation, barriers, and opportunities specific to the context.
2. **Project Design Phase:**
   where results of the baseline assessment are presented, and community-led activities are designed.
3. **Project Implementation Phase:**
   involving the monitoring of the implementation of activities.
4. **Progress / Endline Assessment:**
   to examine changes in a) levels of empowerment, b) women and girls' participation in camp life and governance structures, and c) perceptions of safety.

> "
> *The more you will train and support women and empower them, then you will start to see more emerging. These individuals become more proactive women who will inspire other women in their community but we need to have a strategy to sustain it and not lose this momentum.*
> "
>
> – Key Informant

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[1] As of 31 March 2023

# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The WPP is an evidence-based and best practice model for enhancing displaced women's participation at the individual, household, and community level and which contributes overall to the reduction of GBV risks. The following summary of key findings were identified from across all WPP implementing countries.

■ **Women's Participation and Leadership:** The wide range of case studies where the WPP has been piloted indicate that enhancing women's participation and agency in public and private spheres was essential for social transformation and for preventing violence against women and girls. In all implementing countries, women were able to be involved in camp management and governance at some level with several best practice cases where women obtained leadership positions in camp committees. These successes were achieved mainly through mobilising community to support women's committees or by introducing formal quotas for women in community decision-making forums. In addition, trainings and workshops for women, which focused on developing their confidence, communications skills, and leadership abilities (often paired with complementary literacy classes), proved effective for enabling their safe and meaningful participation. However, continued meaningful women's participation remains a significant challenge in many of the case studies. This is due to multiple factors, but two that were repeated among operations were: first, restrictive norms that perpetuate male authority in decision-making, and second, a perception among women that they are unable to participate due to lack of confidence, illiteracy, and limited time due to household responsibilities. In some contexts, women and adolescent girls are unable to move in public spaces without a male guardian or accompaniment which further limited their ability to participate.

■ **Community Mobilization and Engagement of Gatekeepers:** Community mobilization and the engagement of gatekeepers (including men and boys) from the outset of the project was found to be essential for securing community buy-in for the project, for mitigating GBV risks, and for building a safe environment for women and girls' participation. Some of the major successes were achieved by targeting (male) community gatekeepers such as religious leaders, as well as establishing groups for fathers, husbands, and teachers so that they could support each other in for women's participation. All implementing countries found that a model of male 'champions of change' – or advocates who can help promote women and girls' participation in community decision-making – can be effective. However, influencing gatekeepers to enable women's participation continues to be a challenge across all implementing countries. Even within the operational teams, there were challenges in promoting positive attitudes about women's participation and gender equality, demonstrating the need for more structured and continuous sensitization and capacity-building and training.

■ **Livelihoods and Income-Generating Activities:** In the design of the WPP, economic empowerment of women was theorized as way to enhance social and cultural capital of women in the community, and thereby improve their meaningful participation. Over the seven years of implementation, multiple pilot projects found that it was indeed an effective strategy. Some of the many income-generating activities (IGAs) in the WPP included skill-building and peer-to-peer vocational training in jewellery-making, basket-weaving, food processing, goat-rearing, fish net manufacturing, soap-making, sewing, and tailoring, among many others. The most successful models were projects led by women's committee members or community volunteers. As a result, the women not only learned new skills and benefitted from additional income, but also built a support system of other working women in their communities. While successful overall, the main issue encountered was the sustainability and scale-up of such activities. The

> *"Starting a project in my country, where my team is all male and many of our staff are not convinced to do women's empowerment, is a challenge. Because it's a very normal thing, the women do not have a voice in my own community and even problematic attitudes can be among female staff. There are a lot of processes you have to go through before starting the WPP, to get the buy in from your team and to train them."*
>
> – Key Informant

> *"While there must be a proportional number of women across the table, this needs to go hand in hand with the more informal decision-making structures and strengthening the skills and capacities of women and adolescent girls and persons with disabilities to meaningfully engage and which can strengthen their leadership abilities."*
>
> – Key Informant

women involved in WPP IGAs often faced barriers to access markets, required additional assets to continue the activities, and were concerned they would lose their skills and capacities if the support from the project was interrupted. For example, the distribution of sewing machines in Bangladesh had positive outcomes but when machines broke repair was often not possible due to budgetary constraints. To ensure continuity, operational teams in some countries included IGAs for women in regular CCCM programming under alternative funding, although this does not address the issue of long-term sustainability beyond the humanitarian interventions. In countries with government restrictions on refugees handling money or which restrict displaced populations from selling in the local market, more informal practices have been taken up by WPP participants like selling items from individual shelters or engage in informal peer-to peer teaching and skill-building.

- **Structural Resource Limitations:** Financial and human resource constraints are a significant challenge in WPP implementation, mainly due to limited dedicated staff and the short (one year) project cycle. More specifically, this included "double hatting" of WPP focal points in CCCM teams, limited technical capacity and confidence in the implementation of women's participation activities, and limited sources of funding to integrate WPP across other sector units. Therefore, the most successful WPP models have been in the countries where other donor funding and existing human resources have allowed the missions to better integrate or mainstream WPP activities across CCCM (or other units) core operations. Supporting these linkages between the WPP and other technical units — for example with the Protection team in Bangladesh and the MHPSS team in Ethiopia — helped the project overcome human resource limitations and create a more sustainable model for WPP and should be explored when possible.

- **WPP Adaptation:** The WPP requires regular adaptation of project activities to address evolving needs and changing priorities in different crises and country contexts. In some contexts, shocks and stresses provided opportunities for WPP development and innovation, while in other countries, WPP activities were negatively impacted or interrupted due to disasters, armed conflict, public health crises, security risks and restrictions from government authorities. The primary finding was that operational teams require additional HQ support when adapting WPP to challenging operational contexts to ensure the continuity of activities or innovative solutions.

In summary, the diverse iterations of the WPP demonstrate that the project has scope to further expand and adapt building on the lessons learned over the last years and aligned with IOM's strategic priorities in climate change, gender, disaster risk reduction, disability inclusion, among others. Moreover, the WPP can help catalyze inter-sectoral integration between key technical sectors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, three broad recommendations on how to improve future iterations of the project emerge: First, focus on capacity-building – at all levels from community members to field teams and HQ staff. To support this, there is also a need for additional funding and human resources capacity. Second, at the field level, deepen the integration of the WPP with all relevant technical teams, and at the global level, increase knowledge sharing among country offices. Third, revamp the monitoring and evaluation tools for the project, specifically so that the impact of the project can be better measured at the community-level.

> *Awareness-raising in the community is essential because as much as we empower women and girls, we have seen there is still backlash and harmful community attitudes. Community gatekeepers and dominant community structures must be adequately sensitized to also create that space where meaningful participation of women and girls can better thrive. How do we engage men and boys? How do we measure behavioural change in communities with more restrictive socio-cultural norms.*

– Key Informant

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|

### RESOURCES AND STAFF CAPACITY

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Operational teams require continued technical support, training and capacity-building in the WPP project design and implementation phases.<br><br>■ Funding and human resource constraints. | ■ Conduct capacity-building, training, and mentoring including enhanced knowledge management and platforms for peer-to-peer sharing between missions in real-time (common challenges, practical approaches, resources, materials, etc.).[2]<br><br>■ Advocate, mobilize resources, and diversify or increase donor funding for GBV risk mitigation within CCCM.[3] Additional human resource capacity may be required at the HQ level to strengthen support in training, capacity-building, and project implementation support. | ■ HQ Teams[4]<br><br>■ Donors<br><br>■ Operational Teams |

### LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES: DIVERSIFICATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Livelihood activities are ad-hoc or not sustained over time. | ■ Promote women's leadership roles through innovative and sustainable models for income generation in coordination with relevant technical teams. | ■ Operational Teams<br><br>■ Technical Teams working in early recovery[5] |

### WPP INTEGRATION WITH OTHER SECTOR UNITS – MULTISECTORAL LINKAGES

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Limited awareness raising resources, capacity building, training, or technical expertise.<br><br>■ Barriers to linking WPP activities to other sectors when the project is not directly implemented.<br><br>■ GBV risks and gendered social norms are constantly evolving. | ■ Continue efforts for mainstreaming successful activities implemented under WPP across operations at the country-level to ensure sustainability and continuity of activities beyond HQ seed funding.<br><br>■ Enhance integration between units for multisectoral coordination on community engagement activities (i.e.: best practice models focused on close integration and coordination with GBV - Protection, CCCM, WASH).<br><br>■ Strengthen the integration and linkages between GBV and CCCM at the global and country-level, including the review of concept notes and safety mappings.<br><br>■ Establish environment-building and/or community-level initiatives to mitigate GBV risks, community backlash, or stigma using evidence-based interagency approaches.<br><br>■ Identify countries or specific areas where GBV prevention activities are conducted in order to develop possible linkages for future WPP pilot initiatives. | ■ HQ Teams<br><br>■ Operational Teams<br><br>■ Technical Teams<br><br>■ Community members (women, girls, men, boys, persons with disabilities, community and religious leaders, etc.) |

### WPP ADAPTATION

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Need for further guidance on practical operational challenges, problem solving, mentoring, and guidance for specific-country context.<br><br>■ WPP interruption due to unforeseeable situations.[6]<br><br>■ Communication of activities in a culturally appropriate manner. | ■ Increase guidance and technical support in the WPP toolkit (project implementation phase) and support in the M&E process.<br><br>■ Develop guidance for IOM staff and partners with further HQ technical support in adaptation and application of tools, including M&E.<br><br>■ Consolidate learning across countries by HQ teams into structured guidance to inform future WPP adaptation strategies.<br><br>■ Strengthen mentoring, capacity-building and knowledge exchange between different WPP implementing countries.<br><br>■ Provide support on how to effectively contextualize different tools within CCCM and other sectors and units. | ■ HQ Teams<br><br>■ Operational Teams<br><br>■ Technical Teams[7] |

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[2] Additional human resource capacity may be required at HQ level to strengthen support in training, capacity-building, and project implementation support.

[3] This type of funding should not substitute resources/funding for GBV specialised programming.

[4] Refers to the CCCM Global Support Team at IOM HQ.

[5] Note key technical staff in IOM's structures and systems working in early recovery may vary for other organizations and partners.

[6] Includes population movements, relocations, site closures, conflict, public health crises, disasters, among other shocks and stresses.

[7] Key technical staff in IOM's structures and systems include CCCM, Transition and Recovery Department (TRD), Cash Based Interventions (CBIs), GBV, Protection, MHPSS, WASH, among other relevant units depending on the project activities. Such technical units may vary for other organizations and partners.

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|

## SENSITIZING GATEKEEPERS ON WPP TO ENSURE COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Difficulties for IOM female national staff to get buy-in from other IOM staff, communities, and local authorities in WPP implementation.<br><br>■ Difficulties in getting (male) community buy-in for the success of the overarching project aims. | ■ Sensitize gatekeepers (including men and boys) on project objectives and activities from the very outset of the project, to ensure support and buy-in.<br>■ Identify evidence-based, community-led models for sensitizing gatekeepers (including men and boys) in coordination with Protection and GBV teams at HQ or in country.<br>■ HQ teams can support by pushing institutional buy-in for WPP activities.<br>■ HQ teams can support technical guidance for roll out of curriculum-based packages and peer-to-peer methods for community engagement.<br>■ Develop structured materials ensuring orientation and guidelines on facilitation for effective messaging.<br>■ Reduce traditional top-down humanitarian awareness-raising and community outreach modalities and diversify with strategies that target illiterate persons.<br>■ Identify global-level linkages with work streams and sector linkages on GBV prevention and community level and peer-based behavioral change. | ■ Community members (women and girls, men and boys, community leaders)<br>■ HQ Teams<br>■ Technical Teams[7]<br>■ Operational Teams |

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Gaps in WPP impact measurement at community-level (i.e. women's participation).<br><br>■ Limited awareness on use of WPP M&E tool across implementing operations. | ■ Mainstream the use of the M&E tools and adjust to be more specific to livelihoods and income-generating activities.<br>■ Develop monitoring tools to measure awareness-raising impact or curriculum-based peer to peer programs in coordination with GBV teams focused on the community-level and behavioral change.<br>■ Update the theory of change, reflecting on displacement context and long-term impacts considering early recovery and protracted situations.<br>■ Increase the use of the existing WPP tools such as the Stories of Change to capture qualitative information on project impact. | ■ HQ Teams<br>■ Technical Teams<br>■ Operational Teams |

## PARTNERSHIPS

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ■ Partners required more guidance and support in WPP implementation.<br><br>■ Partnership agreements between IOM and NGOs are difficult in practice when the WPP is not integrated in core operations and/ or supported by other funding. | ■ Increase technical guidance and support from HQ to identify feasible partnership models with local actors, whether formal or informal. | ■ HQ teams<br>■ Technical Teams<br>■ NGOs<br>■ Operational Teams |

> " *Gender norms are shifting with greater empowerment through the WPP. If you are not engaging on social norms then the danger or what remains is more violence or violence may start which was not there. These shifts in norms are even more fluid and changing in displacement contexts. The communities we work with often ask why are you challenging our culture? I know this is difficult because the men in my own community would ask the same thing.* "

– Key Informant

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|

## OPERATIONAL

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ▪ Limited financial resources.<br>▪ Human Resource impediments: 'double' hatting roles and/or lack of sufficient staffing.<br>▪ Training and capacity-building limitations including attitudes among staff, lack of gender awareness, socio-cultural barriers, etc.<br>▪ High staff turnover, project changes, and revisions to the toolkit. | ▪ Increased support from HQ to ensure senior management buy-in at the country-level.<br>▪ Considering formalizing the WPP Focal Point role via a Terms of Reference (ToR) specifying the percentage of time dedicated to WPP activities to promote buy-in from senior management and ensure quality project implementation.<br>▪ Further develop a mixed model of capacity building and training which combines face-to-face and online training methods – consider self-guided options.<br>▪ Offer short refresher sessions of the new WPP training modules on Disability Inclusion and Engaging with Adolescents and Youth on a rolling basis to implementing teams. | ▪ HQ Teams<br>▪ Operational Teams |

## GLOBAL

| CHALLENGES | RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|---|---|
| ▪ Resource constraints.<br>▪ Capacity building, mentoring, and training.<br>▪ Knowledge management and resource exchange. | ▪ Identify linkages within country missions and what iteration of the WPP can be adapted given the context and available programs and donors.<br>▪ Tailor WPP project activities to specific work streams with different donors or identify opportunities for WPP integration working with other sector units.<br>▪ Update objectives and theory of change for upcoming phases of the WPP.<br>▪ Strengthen coordination to highlight WPP activities at interagency or global cluster level and share knowledge, resources and learning. Additional human resource support for HQ may be required to address such challenges and training needs. | ▪ HQ Teams (CCCM) |

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*Our ability to implement the WPP is really linked to the cultural and legal barriers we experience for women's participation generally. The perceptions of the local authorities and our own staff are problematic and we need to shift this mindset. We just don't have enough of an in-depth understanding of this community's gendered social norms and the possible areas of opportunity or entry points to explore. I think if we had expert knowledge from a female national staff working on this, she could identify more possible entry points for women's participation then we can, but we need to support her at an institutional level.*
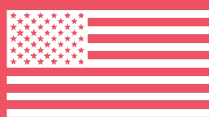
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– Key Informant

For more information, please contact us on: womenindisplacement@iom.int

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