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Speakers: Christine Friis Laustsen (UNHCR), Robert Mominee (IOM South Sudan) & Anna Hirsch-Holland (NRC)

Action points

- Document best practices on participation with actionable recommendations.
- Identify ways to actively reach out to and support local women's organisations. Support through institution building.
- Examine & map existing HR policies & collect best practice on inclusive staffing.
- Create specific guidance on how to establish, structure & support inclusive governance mechanisms.

The aim of this session was to present recently delivered projects, to share the findings and best practices, and help frame discussions to identify key action points for the Participation Working Group.

Christine Friis Lausten (UNHCR) presented on Tearing Down The Walls: Confronting the Barriers to Internally Displaced Women' & Girls' participation in Humanitarian Settings report. This report, based on a desk review and focus group discussions conducted in Niger and South Sudan, outlines what it means to have meaningful participation and how to address barriers to raising women's participation and the challenge of normalization of harmful practices. The report highlights key barriers in the burden of survival; loss of livelihood that comes with displacement; participation varies in different spaces; SGBV, particularly domestic violence and intimate partner violence; militarization of the humanitarian space can create risk for women and girls, especially when there is a blurred line between civil and military space.

Structural Gender Inequality is the main barrier to participation and this needs to be confronted. Women and girls are breaking down the walls to engage in participation and durable solutions. There also needs to be strategic consultation on how to engage men and boys to encourage women's participation. On top of this, it is unrealistic to aim for substantive women's participation if humanitarian agencies do not display gender equality in terms of resources, staffing and others. Finally, participation happens in many different spaces and it is important to meet women where they are and to see how these spaces can be linked.

Robert Mominee (IOM) presented the I'm Here

project; a systematic needs and gap analysis in adolescent engagement with humanitarian services. A benchmark questionnaire and adolescent mapping was conducted to determine the perception of services. QR cards were then disseminated to youth to monitor access to services. The main finding identified was that adolescent girls were not participating or accessing services. Follow-up consultations were then conducted with groups of girls to discover the barriers to access. The main barriers discovered were that many girls were dropping out of accessing services due to early marriage and pregnancy.

Anna Hirsch-Holland (NRC) delivered the third presentation on research conducted by NRC and IOM on the role of elderly women in community coordination and leadership. Qualitative research was conducted in Afghanistan, Iraq, Tanzania and Kenya with the aim of understanding the role older women play and how humanitarians can support and harness this role. Clear trends were seen where older women held authority and respect from the community and are very much involved in passing down traditions and emotional support to the community. Older women were found to have wide social networks, social intelligence and historical knowledge of different families. Service providers saw older women as a potential barrier to protection through harmful traditional practices. Older women also have influence on decisions made with regards to marriage and education of girls. The final report will work as a guidance on taking specific steps to work with older women.

The group then moved into discussing priorities for the Working Group that would be practically beneficial to the field.