



**‘WHO HOLDS THE MICROPHONE?’
CRISIS-AFFECTED WOMEN’S VOICES
ON GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE
CHANGES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS:
EXPERIENCES FROM BANGLADESH,
COLOMBIA, JORDAN AND UGANDA**

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Cover Photo: A South Sudanese refugee woman holding a microphone.

Photo Credit: UN Women/Fernanda Baumhardt-Grojean.

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RESEARCH PAPER

‘WHO HOLDS THE MICROPHONE?’ CRISIS-AFFECTED WOMEN’S VOICES ON GENDER- TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS:

Experiences from Bangladesh, Colombia,
Jordan and Uganda



**PEACE, SECURITY AND
HUMANITARIAN ACTION SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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FOREWORD

“Who holds the microphone?” is an apt metaphor – and title – for this study. Crisis-affected women taking hold of the microphone in refugee and displacement settings represents a necessary disruption in the multiple power inequalities embedded in the humanitarian sector. In the context of exploring localization, participation and gender-transformative change processes, the same question of who holds the microphone can be extended and posed to humanitarian actors beyond these specific contexts to identify who speaks, in what formats, on what topics and with whose priorities.

The question **“Who holds the microphone?”** challenges humanitarian actions that only view women as victims and beneficiaries rather than as decision makers, with voice and agency to identify those with the greatest needs and lead humanitarian planning, action and accountability mechanisms. This research explores women’s leadership from eight diverse groups of crisis-affected women in large-scale refugee and displacement crises in Bangladesh, Colombia, Jordan and Uganda, and used participatory video processes, among other data-collection methods. By collaboratively creating this space and

video content over a period of several days, women took over the microphone to speak about different aspects of their lived experiences. Their responses to this question included reflections on and ideas about peer-to-peer engagement, and what it means to truly listen, engage and respond. They also captured an understanding of the microphone as a symbol of power.

This research aims to capture the voices, lived experiences and testimonies of communities affected by refugee and displacement crises regarding gender-transformative change processes, meaningful participation and effective localization. The central contention of this report is simple and a fundamental in UN Women humanitarian support, that the voices of crisis-affected women, often not heard as a result of gender and social norms, should resonate loudly and clearly in spaces where decisions about their lives are made.

Paivi Kannisto
Chief,
Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action



Rohingya refugee women handling video equipment. Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Photo Credit: UN Women/Dr. Angélica Cabezas Pino

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