

Shifting Power Dynamics:

Exploring the Impact of Women-Led Organizations' Leadership in GBV Coordination

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Background

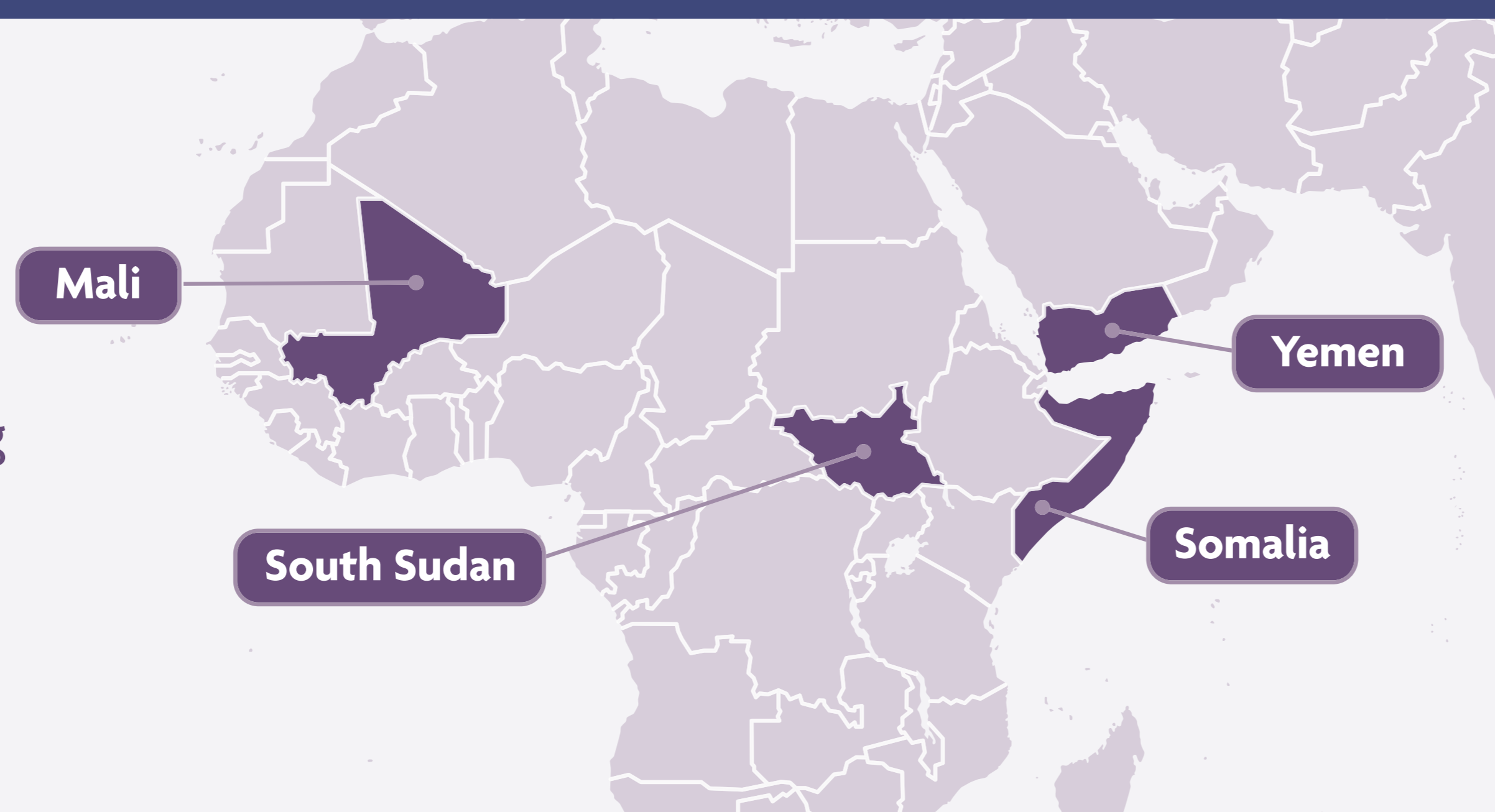
Women-Led Organizations¹ (WLOs) are first responders to Gender-based Violence (GBV) in humanitarian crises, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. Their active engagement and leadership in coordination spaces is critical to prioritizing the needs and perspectives of women and girls, yet WLOs are underrepresented in coordination spaces and leadership due to systemic barriers and exclusionary practices in the humanitarian response architecture. To address this issue, the GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR), led by UNFPA, in partnership with Women for Change (WFC), Active in Development Aid (ADA) and Trócaire, has actively worked to open coordination spaces to WLO leadership and test various models to support WLO Leadership in Coordination.

The presence of Women for Change has encouraged other dormant WLOs to become active, showing that women can lead and make a difference.

— GBV AoR member in Warrap State, South Sudan

Methodology

Case Studies: The GBV AoR is piloting various models of WLO co-ordination in four countries (Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Mali), incorporating technical support, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and financial assistance.



Participatory Action Research:

ADA and WFC in Somalia and South Sudan, with Trócaire and the GBV AoR, explored the process of shifting to WLO leadership through Participatory Action Research, involving iterative cycles of research, action, and reflection. The research process included a literature review, an online questionnaire, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and reflection meetings, engaging a range of stakeholders (including co-coordinators and members of the GBV coordination mechanism), which resulted in rich experiential data.

Addressing Barriers, Shifting Power Dynamics

Participatory Action Research in Somalia and South Sudan identified key changes needed to promote WLO leadership, with recommendations advancing leadership across pilot countries.

Raise Funds for WLO Co-ordination

Connect WLOs with funding sources and advocate for donors to prioritize WLO co-ordination positions. Fundraise or partner with other organizations to support these roles if direct donor funding is inaccessible.

Open GBV Coordination Spaces to WLO Leadership

Establish and support WLO co-ordination roles by addressing identified barriers and power dynamics, and actively ceding space. Ensure WLOs have equal opportunities to lead, reflecting their voices in GBV coordination at all levels.

Recognize Local Expertise

Mobilize and encourage greater participation of WLOs in GBV coordination enhancing their visibility and showcasing their capabilities and knowledge.

Facilitate Fair, Inclusive, and Transparent Selection Processes

Implement fair, inclusive and transparent selection processes for WLO co-coordinators, ensuring eligibility criteria are appropriate for local contexts and that selection processes for WLOs are not more complicated or onerous than those for other agencies.

Build a Partnership of Equality Between Co-coordinators

Develop agreements to clarify roles and foster mutual respect, ensure shared leadership, and support joint decision-making between co-coordinators.

Provide Induction and On-the-job Support

Facilitate relationship building, offer mentoring and coaching, assess capacity-strengthening needs, and ensure inclusive training and continuous support for WLO co-coordinators.

Support WLOs in Institutional Strengthening

Work with WLOs to strengthen their institutional systems based on their priorities (i.e. resource mobilization, finance, human resources, policies etc).

What Changes When WLOs Lead

Individual-level Impacts

GBV Coordinators (UN/ INGO)

- More receptive attitudes towards women's leadership
- Underlying assumptions and behaviors related to unequal partnerships surfaced
- Increased recognition of the expertise and value of WLO leadership

Women Leaders

- Increased visibility
- Enhanced leadership skills
- Boosted confidence

Organizational Impacts

UN/INGOs/Donors

- Enhanced organizational commitment towards ceding space to WLOs: Endorsement and target-setting at organizational level towards WLO Leadership
- Strengthened partnerships and buy-in by other organizations: Additional AOR members engaging and committing resources for WLO leadership
- Increased donor buy-in and financial support for WLO Leadership

WLOs

- Greater visibility and access to decision-making spaces, donors and forums
- Some WLOs facing backlash for claiming leadership space

System-wide Impacts

Transforming Coordination and Response:

- Improved overall GBV response
- More tailored service delivery informed by women and girls' needs and priorities
- Integration of GBV concerns into broader responses reflecting local priorities
- Expanded communication across GBV AoR membership
- Increased representation and engagement of WLOs
- Enhanced capacity sharing and WLO leadership initiatives

