Tool G.3.1

Guide to Creating a Women's Coordination Network

1. Background

The findings of NRC's 2019 research project on women's role in coordination found that displaced vulnerable women often have less 'social capital'[1] than men,[2] meaning that they have fewer social relationships and less access to social structures that could help them to solve problems and improve prosperity for themselves, their families, and their communities.

However, the study also found that with the right support, women could develop strong networks, which enable them to coordinate widely and leverage additional support and services for their communities. Linking women to service providers and other relevant stakeholders – including other more 'connected' women – is therefore an important way in which to enhance women's role in coordination and influence on positive outcomes for their communities.

But what is "the right support"? The study found that women must be supported in two ways: firstly, by including them in structures of coordination, and secondly by building their capacities and confidence – which are often limited by a combination of restrictive culture and lack of education and experience. This briefing note explains how to do (1) and (2) through the creation of a 'Women's Coordination Network'.

2. The Concept and Objectives

The Women's Coordination Network (WCN) is a mechanism which facilitates and supports women to coordinate with other women – including women from the community itself (e.g. community representatives, committee members, formal/informal leaders, or influential individuals), as well as women from NGOs (both local and international), authorities, private business, or voluntary groups. A WCN, if successful, would enable women to build on and use each other's networks, experience, and skills, thereby:

- Expanding the number of influential stakeholders that women have access to/can engage with
- Increasing women's collective and individual confidence
- Enhancing women's participation in and influence on 'public' life
- Improving women's ability to solve problems and generate positive outcomes for their families and communities

3. Role of the Supporting Agency

The role of the Supporting Agency[3] is to support the establishment and initial development of the Women's Coordination Network, but without trying to maintain ownership over it; instead, the emphasis should be on encouraging the development of women's dynamic, extensive networks.
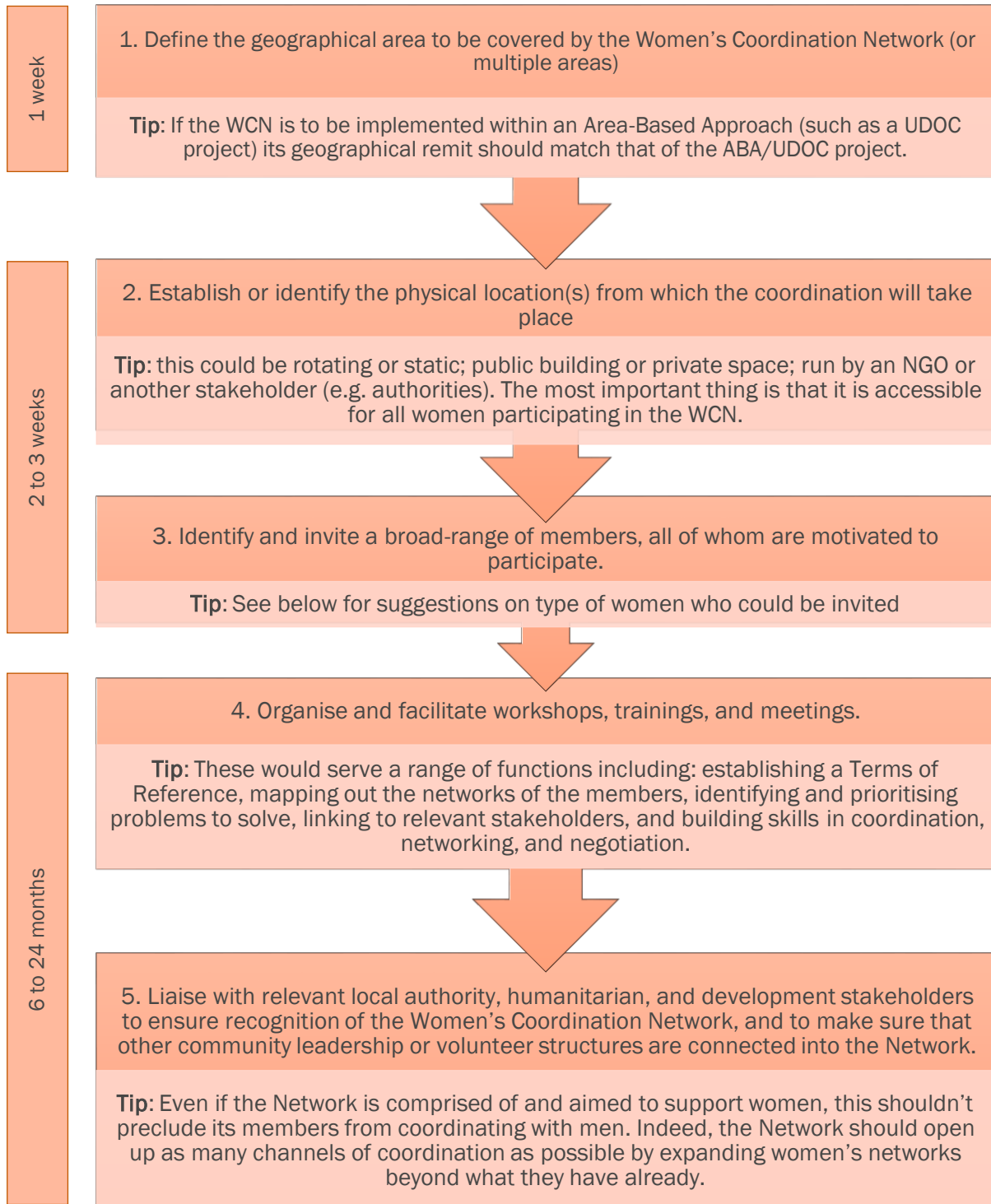
In practice, this means identifying and then physically bringing together a range of female stakeholders; helping them to map their networks and define the issues they want to address together; and ideally helping to formalise their role within the broader public institutions and humanitarian structure of the location in question.

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[1] Social capital "involves people knowing each other and having positive relationships based on trust, respect, kindness, and reciprocity. It involves supportive social structures that encourage prosocial actions and discourage exploitive behaviours." – https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/guide-to-social-capital-the-concept-theory-and-its-research/#1569810590764-335a989b-71b4
[2] And also less compared to wealthier, more educated women
[3] This could be a Camp Management, UDOC, or other agency with expertise in community engagement and coordination

4. Key Steps to establish a Women's Coordination Network

1 week

1. Define the geographical area to be covered by the Women's Coordination Network (or multiple areas)

Tip: If the WCN is to be implemented within an Area-Based Approach (such as a UDOC project) its geographical remit should match that of the ABA/UDOC project.

2 to 3 weeks

2. Establish or identify the physical location(s) from which the coordination will take place

Tip: this could be rotating or static; public building or private space; run by an NGO or another stakeholder (e.g. authorities). The most important thing is that it is accessible for all women participating in the WCN.

3. Identify and invite a broad-range of members, all of whom are motivated to participate.

Tip: See below for suggestions on type of women who could be invited

6 to 24 months

4. Organise and facilitate workshops, trainings, and meetings.

Tip: These would serve a range of functions including: establishing a Terms of Reference, mapping out the networks of the members, identifying and prioritising problems to solve, linking to relevant stakeholders, and building skills in coordination, networking, and negotiation.

5. Liaise with relevant local authority, humanitarian, and development stakeholders to ensure recognition of the Women's Coordination Network, and to make sure that other community leadership or volunteer structures are connected into the Network.

Tip: Even if the Network is comprised of and aimed to support women, this shouldn't preclude its members from coordinating with men. Indeed, the Network should open up as many channels of coordination as possible by expanding women's networks beyond what they have already.

5. Participants in the Women's Coordination Network

The success of the WCN will likely depend on the diversity of its participants. As such, extensive stakeholder mapping (see Chapter 1 for guidance and tools) should take place and use of the 'snowball' technique[4] to find appropriate participants. Initially the participants should number around 20 – with potential for expansion as the Network becomes more firmly established. Participants could include women who are:

- Members of Neighbourhood/Camp Committees or other community representation/governance structures
- Influential in their extended family/neighbourhood/wider community (e.g. formal or informal leaders)
- Lead or participate in volunteer groups, or volunteer with a local or international NGO
- Work in local authorities
- Work in local or international NGOs
- Work in or own local businesses

6. Workshops, Meetings, and Capacity Building

Besides regular coordination meetings, the Supporting Agency should arrange and facilitate specific workshops and capacity building/training sessions. The first month will be particularly important in building the interest of participants, and might involve weekly sessions; or this could be condensed into one week with an intensive two day workshop. However, following the initial sessions, support should continue – perhaps in the pattern of two session per month: one as a regular coordination meeting (concentrating on addressing particular issues/problems) and one or two training/capacity building sessions to build specific skills. A possible schedule over a six-month period is detailed below, but this could continue for longer – according to interest and needs (see 'Exit Plan' section below).

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Launching workshop and network/stakeholder mapping *	▇					
WCN ToR and Coordination skills*	▇					
Problem identification and solutions mapping*	▇					
Service mapping tools*	▇					
Regular coordination meetings (bi-weekly/monthly)*	▇	▇	▇	▇	▇	▇
Learning Needs Assessment Workshop*		▇				
Communication, negotiation, and leadership skills		▇	▇			
Other capacity building as determined by participants				▇	▇	▇
*Denotes training/session plan available in NRC Community Coordination Toolkit (Chapter 3)						

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[4] Asking people to recommend others

7. Working with Local Authorities

Every effort should be made to connect the WCN to local authorities and even to have authorities lead or take ownership of it as part of the authorities' broader coordination role – depending on the context. If this is impossible simply due to a lack of female staff capacity within the authorities, the Supporting Agency could consider including in their project the secondment of a female staff into the local authority[5], who could then take on responsibility for the Women's Coordination Network and thereby ensure it is embedded in local authorities coordination mechanisms. This would need strong follow-up by the Supporting Agency in the early days of the secondment and the WCN, as well as full assessment of local authority structures and consensus-building to obtain approval and recognition of the role.

8. Exit Strategy

A successful Women's Coordination Network should be able to take on a dynamic of its own, and to continue – whether formally or informally – without the input of the Supporting Agency. Depending on the context and capacity of both the Supporting Agency and participating women, support (in terms of organising and facilitating workshops and meetings; and promoting/advocating for the WCN) may be required for 6 to 24 months. The Supporting Agency should make clear from the beginning that its support will be time-bound, and it will be up to the members to decide if and how to continue the Network after the Supporting Agency's exit. Some options to discuss include:

- Will meetings continue? How often, where, and organised by whom?
- Is there another local organisation that could continue to provide support to the WCN (if needed)?
- Is there a way to institutionalise the WCN within the local authority coordination mechanisms? E.g. is there a (female) staff member in the authorities who can take over responsibility for the WCN?

It is perfectly possible that the WCN itself could be time-bound, and its members may not feel the need to continue in a 'formal' way – the objective of 'increased networks, social capital, and influence' having been met.

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[5] See tool AT 3.9 for an example of a ToR for a Supporting Agency staff seconded to a municipality in Lebanon, to support the municipality in handling the refugee response