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Rightful Voices

Refugee Participation in Humanitarian Programming:

The Example of CARE International in the Azraq Camp

Nora Diethelm

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ABSTRACT

Refugee camps worldwide host approximately 6.6 million refugees. While they are envisioned as temporary solutions, many have become semi-permanent cities. Camp residents largely lack basic autonomy. Beyond respecting their rights and dignity, meaningful refugee participation enhances the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of humanitarian assistance. This study identifies the drivers and constraints of refugee participation in humanitarian programming and examines CARE's mechanisms in the Azraq camp to facilitate such participation. It combines a literature review with qualitative field research, including observations and interviews.

While there are few compelling incentives for organizations to implement participation, numerous constraints, including legal restrictions and structural issues in the sector, hinder refugees' influence on humanitarian activities. CARE has established several mechanisms to involve residents, including community representation, consultations, project evaluations, a camp-wide accountability mechanism, and the implementation of most activities by residents working as volunteers. While these mechanisms enable refugee participation, they have diverse limitations.

Keywords: Refugee camps, humanitarian assistance, refugee participation, CARE International, Azraq refugee camp, humanitarian programming, community representation, evaluation mechanism, accountability mechanisms, qualitative field research, refugee-led activities, incentive-based volunteering.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
CBP	Community-based protection
COC	Code of conduct
CR	Community representative
CSO	Civil society organization
FGD	Focus group discussions
GRN	Global Refugee-led Network
IBV	Incentive-based volunteer/volunteering
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IO	International organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
JOD	Jordanian Dinar
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, learning
NFI	Non-food item
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SOP	Standard operating procedures
SRAD	Syrian Refugee Affairs Department

UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees / Refugee Agency
UNIGE	University of Geneva
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WFP	World Food Program

I FOUNDATION

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Topic and Relevance

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), approximately 6.6 million refugees worldwide live in refugee camps, which is about 22 percent of the total number of refugees (36.4 million[1]) (UNHCR 2023c). Many of these camps, initially envisioned as temporary solutions, have become semi-permanent cities due to lingering political crises. Martín argues that this is due to a "veiled acceptance by the international community and UNHCR that refugee camps are the only solution in the absence of a political settlement" (Martín 2017, 43). The troubling rise in forced displacement, coupled with increased securitization and criminalization of refugees—particularly in Europe and North America—suggests an ongoing confinement of a vast number of refugees in camps. In a media landscape focused on brief, click-driven content, long-standing crises quickly fade into the background or are entirely forgotten. Therefore, it is crucial that the situation of refugees living in camps receives increased attention and is thoroughly examined by researchers.

These refugee populations are largely denied basic autonomy. Centralized decision-making processes and top-down approaches to camp management and humanitarian programs limit refugees' right to self-determination and fail to consider their diverse skills and needs (Global Refugee-led Network 2021; Konyndyk and Worden 2019). Olivius aptly states that "Enabling meaningful political participation and self-governance in such contexts is essential if refugees are to be treated as people worthy of living with dignity, not merely as people whose lives are to be saved or who are viewed as threats to be controlled and contained" (2017, 290). International calls for refugee participation have grown since 2015, with the 2016 New York Declaration[2] and the 2018 Global Compact[3] advocating for a

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[1] Additionally, according to UNHCR's estimations, there are approximately 110 million forcibly displaced persons, 62.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 6.1 million asylum-seekers.

[2] The 2016 New York Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), represents a commitment to enhance mechanisms for protecting the rights of refugees and migrants, focusing on human rights, humanitarian aid, and responsibility sharing.

[3] The 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the UNGA, is a framework seeking to enhance refugee protection, decrease pressures on host countries, ease access to third countries, and support conditions in countries of origin. It is a non-binding statement on migration policy.

participatory approach. According to the Global Refugee-Led Network (GRN),[4] an umbrella organization of refugees and refugee-led organizations worldwide, meaningful refugee participation describes the genuine inclusion of refugees into decision-making processes concerning their lives. This study focuses on refugee participation in the particular context of humanitarian programs in refugee camps.

Today, most actors within the international refugee regime have accepted this new objective. Beyond the fundamental imperative of respecting the rights, dignity, and autonomy of affected people, participation significantly enhances the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. It brings increased legitimacy, a greater sense of ownership among refugees, and improved sustainability compared to 'top-down' interventions. However, despite increased international representation, the refugee response sector has systematically failed to include refugees in the decision-making processes of humanitarian organizations (Global Refugee-led Network 2021). There are numerous obstacles to meaningful refugee participation, and implemented mechanisms are often flawed and have unintended consequences.

This study examines the situation of Syrian refugees in the Azraq camp in Jordan. Since the Syrian war's escalation in 2011, over 12 million people have been displaced (Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu 2017). Jordan hosts roughly 1.3 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2023c). The Azraq camp was established in 2014 to alleviate the enormous pressure on the Za'atari camp. The nearly 40'000 residents of Azraq face serious hardships, including severely restricted rights and freedoms, limited economic opportunities, and the inability to cover basic needs. The prolonged living situation of the camp residents, who have been confined for over a decade with no future prospects, underscores the urgent need for a re-evaluation of the current humanitarian strategies.

1.2. Research Question and Study

However, little research has been done on the implementation of refugee participation in refugee camps. Most articles focus on political participation and activities of refugees, but only a few look at participation in humanitarian programming. In particular, there is barely any empirical research describing concrete mechanisms and strategies allowing for the implementation of refugee participation. However, precisely this information is necessary in order to actually and meaningfully implement the demands and promises regarding this

[4] The GRN is a coalition of refugees and refugee-led constituencies across six world regions, amplifying refugee voices and promoting meaningful participation.

concept. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the methods by which participation can be successfully implemented to encourage investments and progress, while much of the existing literature predominantly focuses on identifying ineffective approaches.

Through a literature review and case study based on field research, this dissertation aims to contribute to filling this gap. The CARE International[5] program in the Azraq camp serves as a critical case study for diverse reasons. Firstly, Jordan is one of the countries hosting the most refugees worldwide, especially when considering the proportion relative to its local population (UNHCR 2023b). Therefore, it also is a hotspot for humanitarian organizations. Secondly, Syrian refugees are the largest refugee population worldwide and have received diminishing international attention as other crises have emerged. Thirdly, the Azraq camp gets less attention than the Za'atari refugee camp, which is renowned for its enormous size. Residents of the Azraq camp face higher control, more regulations, and have fewer opportunities and autonomy. These factors make refugee participation even more crucial. Among the largest humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), CARE plays a pivotal role in the camp as one of UNHCR's key implementing partners. Their mandate of community-based protection (CBP)[6] is particularly relevant to this study, as it recognizes the affected population's skills and knowledge and emphasizes participation.

I critically discuss the following research questions: What are the drivers of and constraints on implementing refugee participation in humanitarian programming from the perspective of humanitarian organizations? What are the mechanisms CARE applies in the Azraq camp that enable the participation of the camp residents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their humanitarian programs[7]? This review aims to identify effective strategies for fostering meaningful refugee participation and understand the challenges and risks that may arise and how they can be mitigated.

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[5] In the following called "CARE"

[6] CBP recognizes the skills and knowledge of the affected community and emphasizes their capacities of self-protection and coping strategies. CARE's activities focus on community mobilization and engagement, capacity building, and empowerment initiatives based on refugees' participation in decision-making and implementation.

[7] In the humanitarian context, "program," "project," and "activity" refer to different levels of intervention. A "program" is a broad, long-term plan encompassing multiple projects and activities aimed at achieving overarching objectives. A "project" is a specific, time-bound initiative within a program with particular goals, while an "activity" is an individual action or task within a project. For simplicity, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably or according to the context, as all generally refer to elements of humanitarian interventions.

This study employs a comprehensive methodology, combining a literature review with qualitative field research, including observations and semi-structured interviews. During a month of field research in the Azraq camp, I accompanied seven CARE staff members and five residents working as “incentive-based volunteers” (IBVs)[8] for CARE. IBVs are camp residents who “work” for organizations operating in the camp in exchange for small financial compensation. In theory, the IBV program is meant to offer skill-building opportunities on a voluntary basis. However, in practice, it is often the only option for residents to earn some additional income helping to cover their basic needs. In the case of CARE, many IBVs implement and lead humanitarian activities. When accompanying these study participants, I observed their daily activities, visited their centers, and conducted interviews. The study focused on two activities in which IBVs have the most influential roles and two CARE departments relevant to the participation of the community: the Community Mobilization Department and the Program Quality Department.

I used pseudonyms for all interviewees to protect their privacy and ensure consistent treatment for all participants. Furthermore, I do not use the term “beneficiaries,” the most commonly used term for the camp population and participants of activities. I disagree with this description because it implies a hierarchy between humanitarians who “give” and the refugees who “receive.” Additionally, it suggests that humanitarian services are, by default, “beneficial” for the targeted population, which I disagree with. According to GRN, such terminology reflects top-down, disempowering structures and language. Moreover, I avoid consistently referring to the individuals living in the Azraq camp as "refugees" because I do not want them to be identified solely by this characteristic. Instead, I use the terms "camp residents" or simply "residents," as their status as camp inhabitants is their most distinguishing characteristic in contrast to the staff working in the camp.

This dissertation is structured into four main sections. The Foundation section discusses the topics of refugees, the humanitarian refugee response, and the role and dynamics of refugee camps. This section also explores theoretical and empirical perspectives

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[8] IBV is the official term used by the camp authorities, organizations, and residents. I do not agree with the term “volunteer,” as refugees expressed to be coerced into these jobs due to the lack of opportunities to cover their basic needs. Because of lacking alternatives, they need to accept these “offers” despite considering the conditions, especially the extremely low financial compensation, unfair. However, for the purpose of clarity, I will use the terms “IBV” or the description “work as a volunteer,” as used by one of the interviewed IBVs to illustrate the contradictory conditions of their position.

on refugee participation, identifying obstacles, flawed implementations, and critical factors. The next section introduces the case study, describing the methodology and context, picturing the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan and the Azraq camp, and presenting CARE's mandate and the selected activities. The third section discusses the case study findings. It delves into the drivers of and constraints on refugee participation and the mechanisms that enable the community's involvement. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the research findings and implications and offers final reflections on the study.

2. Refugees and the Humanitarian Refugee Response

The following chapters introduce the concepts of refugees, the humanitarian response to refugees, and refugee camps, which are important foundations for understanding refugee participation in the humanitarian context.

2.1. Defining and Locating Refugees

One of the most important open questions in the theory and practice of refugee issues is the definition of 'refugee' and, therefore, also the question of who qualifies for protection. Kleist reasons about the meaning of this lack of agreement on the definition of refugees and brings it in relation to the practice of distinguishing between refugees and non-refugees:

> The disagreement about who a refugee is provides the foundation on which we build what we consider the 'Refugee Regime'. If one fixed definition existed we might have a 'Refugee Agency', an administrative body, not a Refugee Regime made up of multiple institutions and persons negotiating the many tensions and contradicting interests inherent to the regime's field of activity. In fact, I pre-suppose, the 'regime' is defined not so much by governing as by the political negotiation around policies and their implementation. (Kleist 2018, 168)

The Refugee Convention of 1951 includes a definition of who is recognized as a refugee under International Law and receives protection according to the defined rights and minimum standards mentioned in the Convention. All states party to the Refugee Convention and the UNHCR rely on this definition in the process of determining who receives asylum. According to the convention, a refugee is an individual who:

> owing to the well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being

> outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Marshall 2011, 62)

Marshall states that the definition of 'refugee' has evolved. As new categories of refugees emerge, there is an ongoing debate about whether the criteria defining a refugee need to be updated. However, there is no international consensus about such an extension of the convention, as it would pressure states to accept a much higher number of refugees (2011). Moreover, according to Kleist, the refugee regime is marked by a certain level of inconsistency and significant variation across different regions over time. It bases its criteria for protection not simply on the refugees or their reasons for fleeing but on political communities' definitions of belonging. This results in selective admission, protection, and assistance, where some migrants are recognized as refugees while others are not. Consequently, the regime is shaped by contested and competing interpretations of these concepts, leading to diverse institutional responses and a wide range of laws and policies (Kleist 2018).

In contrast, the GRN, an organization seeking to represent refugees worldwide, understands "refugees" as persons who have been forcibly displaced from their home country, regardless of obtaining any legal status, and emphasizes their heterogeneity due to diverse experiences and identities. Martín explains that refugees can be classified into two groups: those who achieve individual status through asylum applications and prima facie refugees who receive collective temporary protection, as, for instance, Syrian refugees in Jordan. Individual cases are more prevalent in higher-income countries, as only a small fraction of displaced populations succeed in reaching these destinations due to various obstacles. In the case of prima facie refugees, the United Nations (UN) usually suggests voluntary repatriation as the most suitable solution. However, this only becomes feasible when the underlying conflicts are resolved. Eventually, most of them often end up living in refugee camps close to international borders for extended periods due to ongoing conflicts (Martín 2017).

In the following, the situation of refugees worldwide is illustrated by the most recent UNHCR statistics of the year 2022. After 2018, there was initially a decline in the growth rate of refugees, but this trend reversed with a remarkable rise in 2022, resulting in a record high (UNHCR 2023a). The UNHCR Global Trends Report 2022 indicates that by the end of the year, 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced. This total includes 35.3 million refugees (according to UNHCR's definition), 62.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 5.4 million asylum-seekers, and 5.2 million other individuals in need of international protection. Importantly, about 40 percent of forcibly displaced persons are children (UNHCR 2023b). In the period of 2018 to 2022, on average, 385,000 babies yearly were born as refugees (UNHCR 2023c).

Seventy-six percent of the world's refugees find refuge in low- and middle-income countries, with Jordan classified as an upper-middle-income country, and seventy percent in neighboring countries (UNHCR 2023b). Ten countries alone host about fifty-five percent of all refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2023a). The nations hosting the largest numbers of refugees include Türkiye, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Colombia, Germany, and Pakistan. Regarding the proportion of refugee populations relative to national populations, Jordan and Lebanon both host one refugee for every four residents[9] and Aruba one for every six (UNHCR 2023b). Over half of all individuals requiring international protection, approximately 52 percent, originate from just three countries. Syria is home to the biggest national group of refugees worldwide, 6.5 million, corresponding to nearly one in five refugees worldwide. Seventy-seven percent of them are hosted by neighboring countries, with 3.5 million registered with UNHCR in Türkiye, 814,700 in Lebanon, and 660,900 in Jordan.[10] Additionally, Ukraine and Afghanistan are each source of another 5.7 million refugees (UNHCR 2023b).

2.2. Humanitarian Refugee Response

The following two subchapters discuss how the international community has been responding to these refugees as well as the limits of humanitarian assistance.

2.2.1. Refugee Regime Complex and Key Actors

In his article “The Refugee Regime Complex,” Betts discusses the evolution of the refugee regime from a singular institutionalized framework into a complex network of overlapping institutions managing various aspects of human mobility. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the refugee response apparatus comprised the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR. During the second half of the 20th century, globalization and interdependence led to the creation of many more institutional entities responsible for human mobility concerning issues like travel and labor migration, human rights, humanitarianism, development, and security. This expansion brought many overlapping mandates, either complementing or contradicting each other. That is why, according to Betts, “it is no longer possible to speak of a compartmentalized refugee regime; rather; there is now a ‘refugee regime complex’" (2010, 12).

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[9] When considering the 487,300 Palestinians registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Lebanon and the 2.4 million in Jordan

[10] The actual number of Syrian refugees is likely to be much higher in each of these countries, as many are not registered with the UNHCR. Jordan is estimated to host about 1.3 million Syrian refugees. (ACAPS, “Jordan: Country Analysis”; Kattaa and Both, “Impact of Refugees’ Participation in the Labour Market on Decent Work and Social Cohesion”; Marks, “Syrian Refugees in Jordan.”)

In addition to national states striving for exclusive control of international borders, numerous non-state actors play essential roles in regulating migration today. First, supra- and intergovernmental organizations are important in the management of borders and mobility, such as the European Union (EU) and Frontex in the European context, or UNHCR and the International Migration Organization (IMO) globally. Second, the private sector is increasingly providing technology that facilitates controlling migrants, filtering, and gatekeeping, for example, in the process of visa issuance and managing detention and expulsion (Cuttitta, Pécoud, and Phillips 2023). Third, NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) are relevant actors, too, especially in activities such as advocacy, lobbying, information sharing, and humanitarian assistance (Pécoud and Thiollet 2023).

The UNHCR is the most important international institution “managing” refugees. It is mandated to provide international protection to refugees as defined by its statute and to find durable solutions for their plight. This legal framework mandates UNHCR to cooperate with governments that are parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, ensuring state collaboration in protecting refugees. The scope of UNHCR’s mandate has broadened beyond refugees and today includes stateless persons, asylum-seekers, returnees, and IDPs. Thereby, it responds to broad issues of displacement and a significant range of humanitarian crises (Betts 2010; UNHCR 2024).

The 2018 Global Compact advocates for a “whole-of-society approach” to migration governance, emphasizing the importance of partnerships between government bodies and non-state actors such as migrant diasporas, local communities, CSOs, the private sector, and trade unions (Cuttitta, Pécoud, and Phillips 2023; UN General Assembly 2019). In fact, UNHCR and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) rely on NGOs as service providers and often instrumentalize them (Georgi and Schatral 2012; Hyndman 2000). As described by Cuttitta, Pécoud, and Phillips, this dynamic reflects the broader role of NGOs within the refugee regime, where they align their operations with the directives of governments, international donors, and intergovernmental organizations to improve the well-being of the communities they serve. While NGOs occasionally challenge these bodies when they neglect their duties, they usually adhere to national frameworks and governments’ sovereignty (Hyndman 2000).

Cuttitta, Pécoud, and Phillips argue that migration and border governance challenge the traditional state-centric model as it involves individuals with ambiguous national affiliations. This places them in precarious situations where their needs might be unrecognized or ignored by the states they depend on. Importantly, refugees have specific needs. For undocumented migrants, the crucial need is to avoid deportation, while refugees in transit need to continue their journeys. Even if NGOs recognize these needs, they often face legal and ethical dilemmas

because supporting these needs can conflict with government and intergovernmental policies. The authors state that,

> This often results in compromises, according to which NGOs/CSOs limit themselves to addressing other needs (like migrants' access to basic services, such as shelter, food, health, or education)—thereby raising fundamental political issues in terms of which needs are deemed essential, and by whom. But this may also lead to situations in which civil society contributes directly to governments' agenda, for example by taking care of the needs of unwanted migrants in the course of their (forced or voluntary) return. In such situations, the problems faced by civil society are ethical, rather than legal. (Cuttitta, Pécoud, and Phillips 2023, 5)

Finally, Pincock, Betts, and Easton-Calabria argue that humanitarianism, similar to other policy areas, is marked by a clearly defined hierarchy. They illustrate that powerful states establish and shape IOs, such as UNHCR, for instance. These then select their partner NGOs to implement fulfill their mandates. And these NGOs, in turn, determine the manner of engaging with community-based organizations and the affected population. The justification for such hierarchical governance is often based on the claim of "protection." Emergency situations and dangers are used to legitimize external intervention with the goal of re-establishing a specific vision of normalcy. However, this form of protection, based on power, can result in prolonged subjugation and the erosion of the autonomy of the affected people (Pincock, Betts, and Easton-Calabria 2020).

2.2.2. The Search for Durable Solutions

The three commonly recognized solutions are voluntary repatriation, resettlement to a third country, and local integration in the country of first asylum. Firstly, voluntary repatriation is seen as the most desirable and feasible option in the eyes of most governments, international organizations (IOs), and academics, and it is supported by the Refugee Convention (Bakewell 2000). However, most crises have a very long timeframe and prevent refugees from returning. Additionally, it is challenging to determine when a country is truly safe for return (Martín 2017). Secondly, resettlement to a third country offers an alternative that, in theory, is grounded in a shared responsibility approach. Nonetheless, this solution is realistic for only a minor fraction of the refugee population—less than one percent globally—due to limited political to offer resettlement opportunities. Thirdly, local integration in the country of first asylum is often preferred by refugees. However, most host countries are reluctant to fully integrate refugees without discrimination, and the quality and effectiveness of this option are difficult to determine (Martín 2017).

In 2022, six million displaced individuals managed to return to their homes, among them 4,346 Syrians previously living in Jordan. There has been a steady decline in the proportion of refugees who are able to return to their countries of origin since 2016. During the year 2022, 114,300 refugees could resettle, twice as many as in the previous year (UNHCR 2023b). However, the UNHCR reports that the gap between the demand for and the actual number of resettlements expanded. The lack of offer is emphasized by the fact that 91 percent were resettled to just 10 countries. Worldwide, 50,205 refugees were naturalized in 2022, and only 28 of them were Syrians in Jordan. Since 2011, Jordan has granted asylum to 13,590 Syrians (UNHCR 2023c). Remarkably, the total population requiring international protection more than doubled in the six years leading up to 2022, escalating from 17.2 million to over 34.6 million, with a sharp increase of 10 million new refugees between 2021 and 2022 alone. During this period, for every refugee who achieved permanent resettlement, returned, or was naturalized, five new individuals were displaced (UNHCR 2023a). These numbers underscore an alarming and growing gap in refugee protection.

The asylum regime seems to be at the center of the refugee protection system. However, the number of asylum applicants relative to the total displaced people reveals that the system, which relies on sovereign states granting asylum, does not reach its objective. While, in 2023, there were 110 million forcibly displaced people worldwide and 36.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, there were only 6.1 million asylum seekers, corresponding to less than 17 percent of all refugees and 6 percent of all displaced persons (UNHCR 2023c). Betts, among other authors, offers an explanation for this discrepancy (2010). He explains that the reduction in collaborative efforts to grant asylum is an important negative effect of the refugee regime complex on refugee protection. With increased politicization of asylum issues, security concerns over immigration, and claims of misuse of asylum avenues by "irregular migrants," many countries in Europe and North America have sought ways to minimize their asylum obligations while adhering to international law. Given that, under the convention, a state is only obliged to ensure protection to persons entering its territory, controlling territorial access became a strategy to circumvent these obligations. They have implemented mechanisms within the travel regime, such as visa controls, the deployment of border guards at airports, sanctions on airlines, and “developmental assistance” to countries that are a source of refugees, to restrict the regular movement of people aiming to flee. These measures have increased the burden on other countries that lack the means to limit territorial access effectively (Betts 2010). Furthermore, these restrictions have forced people to use irregular migration routes. This makes their flight life-threatening in most cases and enables right-wing parties to accuse them of being “illegal migrants” and associate them with security risks and criminality.

Those refugees who either cannot or choose not to flee often find themselves trapped in their home country or neighboring nations without prospects. Many are confined to refugee camps, as is the case for Syrian refugees in the Za'atari and Al Azraq camps.

In conclusion, all the aforementioned arguments on the humanitarian refugee response make clear what Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu have described very aptly:

> Refugee protection is inherently political. While international law and values inevitably influence governments' decisions about how to respond to refugees, so too do power and interests. Host and donor states' commitment to assist, protect and provide solutions for refugees are all shaped by whether and to what extent they perceive refugees to be a burden or a benefit in relation to security and development outcomes, for example. Evidence for this can be found in almost every aspect of the functioning of the refugee system: from donors' earmarking of humanitarian contributions to resettlement decisions to host states' decisions about whether to provide socio-economic freedoms to refugees. (Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu 2017, 3)

2.3. Refugee Camps

Refugee camps became significant during decolonization and the Cold War and have increasingly evolved into long-term structures in the absence of alternative solutions for refugee populations. Johnson explains that, as the ability to control borders is fundamental to the concept of sovereignty, states seek to suppress irregular migrants who evade state practices and challenge their sovereignty. Additionally, the typical state strategy is to push these disturbances to the peripheral border and contain them in refugee camps, clearly defined and controlled territories, to maintain internal order (Johnson 2014).

According to Ilcan and Rygiel, with the demographic shift of refugees from Eastern Europe during the Cold War to low-income countries in other continents, the portrayal of refugees transformed from potential political entities to depoliticized, vulnerable victims, often through a racial and gendered lens (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015). Hyndman and Giles explain that today, refugees attempting to request asylum in Europe and North Africa are perceived as threats and are excluded by restrictive migration policies. In contrast, the millions of refugees who live in low- and middle-income countries are rather portrayed as passive and immobile. This feminized perspective results in the predominant approach to "managing" them—primarily through a humanitarian lens within the countries where they are located (Hyndman and Giles 2011). A camp management model evolved under what is called "humanitarian emergency governance," where diverse actors orchestrate a response focusing on basic service provision.

This approach reflects a neoliberal strategy that positions humanitarian organizations as key administrators in managing refugee populations perceived as risks (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015).

According to the UNHCR, about 6.6 million refugees globally reside in refugee camps, accounting for roughly 22 percent of the total refugee population (36.4 million) (UNHCR 2021; 2023c). While theoretically the responsibility of host states, refugee camps are, in most cases, managed by IOs and NGOs under UNHCR coordination. Governing systems and the role of refugees vary significantly. Camps will likely continue to be used on a large scale despite loud critiques. According to Martín, and Verdirame and Harrel-Bond, among other authors, they are the preferred option of most governments and non-state actors, not because of humanitarian considerations but because of reasons of control and governance. Camps ensure facilitated governance, efficient provision of humanitarian aid, refugees' isolation from the local society, and visibility stimulating international assistance (Martín 2017; Olivius 2017a; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005).

While intended to be temporary, these settings have frequently become long-term residences for many years and multiple generations (Harrell-Bond 2002). Hyndman and Giles, among other authors, argue that the perception of camps as temporary spaces of emergency and exception is supposed to legitimate the suspension of refugees' human rights, such as the right to free movement, adequate housing, education, and employment (Hyndman and Giles 2011; Olivius 2017b; Omata 2017). Refugee camps have become tools of indefinite containment and semi-permanent cities of people without the prospect of a political solution (Olivius 2017b). Agier has aptly described the condition of refugees in camps as "lives of waiting" (Agier 2018, 274). Martín concludes: "Refugee camps seem to have become a medium that allows the international community to stall when it lacks the ability to resolve conflict; and in some cases they are also a means to contain large and unwelcome migration to other countries, especially those in the North" (2018, 43).

The academic literature presents various critiques of the humanitarian response in refugee camps. There are increasing inquiries regarding the impartiality of humanitarian workers, the accountability of humanitarian entities, and the effectiveness of current organizations and NGOs in their life-saving missions. There is concern over how to properly evaluate the impact of these interventions, as many express concerns over unintended negative consequences of humanitarians' actions (Calhoun 2011). Additionally, the inhumanity of humanitarian work in refugee camps has been highlighted, notably by Harrell-Bond. She argues that interactions between aid workers and refugees, who depend on humanitarian organizations for survival, often border on inhumane treatment. The author underscores the urgent need for a transition to "rights-based humanitarianism," which advocates for the defense

and enjoyment of human rights, viewing refugees not merely as victims requiring pity but as resilient survivors facing severe adversity. Moreover, Ilcan and Rygiel critically describe the concept of "resiliency humanitarianism," which reflects a shift in camp governance towards encouraging refugees to adopt entrepreneurial attitudes within the camp setting and take responsibility for their futures. The authors state that this approach, while often framed as community development, pushes refugees to take responsibility for their own survival in crises. It supports handing over the burden of managing their hardships directly to the refugees themselves (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015).

An additional essential criticism is the lack of refugee participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of humanitarian activities. The subsequent chapter will delve into the theory and empirical research surrounding refugee participation, providing an analysis of obstacles, flawed implementation, and critical factors for the meaningful involvement of camp communities.

3. Refugee Participation in Theory and Empirical Research

Over the last decade, the concept of "localization" has gained prominence in diverse international fields, including governance, development, and humanitarian action. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, emphasized the need for localization at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, stating that humanitarian aid must be "as local as possible and as international as necessary" (United Nations 2016). Participation of the concerned populations is one of the key conditions of localization, especially in the case of refugee camps, where the affected population is often not allowed to lead organizations and work (Gidron and Carver 2022). Both the New York Declaration and the Global Compact advocate for meaningful participation of refugees. The UNHCR's Policy on Age, Gender, and Diversity of 2019 encourages the engagement of specific refugee groups. Today, most actors of the international refugee regime have accepted this new objective. Beyond the fundamental imperative of respecting the rights, dignity, and autonomy of affected people, this strategy brings significant benefits regarding the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, such as increased legitimacy, a greater sense of ownership among refugees, and improved sustainability compared to "top-down" interventions (Global Refugee-led Network 2021).

According to the GRN, meaningful participation is achieved:

> When refugees — regardless of location, legal recognition, gender, identity and demographics — are prepared for and participating in fora and processes where strategies are being developed and/or decisions are being made (including at local, national, regional, and global levels, and especially when they facilitate interactions

> with host states, donors, or other influential bodies), in a manner that is ethical, sustained, safe, and supported financially. [...] Meaningful participation of refugees requires attention to the multitude of experiences and identities of refugees. All refugees, resettled or in their first countries of refuge; with or without legal status; with all levels of formal education; and inclusive of all genders, sexual identities, religions, ethnic groups, those with disabilities, youth and elders, among other identities, should be included in important discussions that impact their lives. (7, 12)

However, despite increased international representation and consideration on the local and national levels, refugees are largely absent in decision-making processes and humanitarian organizations. Their engagement is, in most cases, restricted to ad hoc consultations that do not allow for actual influence on decisions affecting refugees' lives (Global Refugee-led Network 2021). Numerous obstacles hinder the meaningful implementation of refugee participation, and even well-intentioned approaches can be flawed and lead to unintended consequences, as illustrated in the next chapters.

3.1. Obstacles Hindering Refugee Participation

Konyndyk and Worden present a comprehensive overview of obstacles hindering refugee participation based on a literature review, expert interviews, and a workshop with professionals conducted by the Center for Global Development in February 2019 (2019). In this chapter, I draw on their findings and supplement them with further sources. Firstly, the humanitarian sector is characterized by an extremely unequal power distribution between different actors. According to Barnett and Walker, decision-making power in the sector is largely held by a "humanitarian club" consisting of donors, states, IOs, and major NGOs. This elite group dictates the allocation of resources and sets the agenda for humanitarian action without substantial input from aid recipients (Barnett and Walker 2015). This centralized control extends to field-level operations, where governance is predominantly top-down, the engagement with affected communities is inconsistent, and their input is minimally integrated (Konyndyk and Worden 2019). Olivius describes conflicting dynamics in refugee camps, where participatory initiatives meet "top-down practices of coercion and surveillance in sometimes contradictory ways" (2014, 45).

Secondly, and related to the previous argument, donor priorities and the lack of political will significantly hinder increased refugee participation and accountability to affected people, as described by the 2015 and 2018 State of the Humanitarian System reports (Kahraman and Songur 2018; Metcalfe-Hough, Poole, and Bailey 2018). Current donor practices often prioritize other agendas, such as financial accountability and technical

performance, due to higher accountability related to these aspects. Furthermore, donor funding structures typically do not offer sufficient flexibility to adapt projects based on feedback from affected communities. When there is a conflict between donor priorities and feedback from the affected populations, the donor's preferences are usually prioritized, as they must account to their governments and taxpayers (Konyndyk and Worden 2019).

Thirdly, Konyndyk and Worden describe how the humanitarian sector is shaped by numerous individual institutions having their own business models, which leads to fragmentation, duplication, and competition. This fragmentation is evidenced as organizations develop individual feedback mechanisms, focusing exclusively on their mandate. As individuals perceive their needs holistically, regardless of traditional humanitarian mandates and sectors, these mechanisms do not enable participation effectively and diminish the confidence of the affected populations in them (Konyndyk and Worden 2019).

Fourthly, diverse authors write about the desire for "governability" of refugees, which is linked to a reluctance to involve refugees in decision-making processes. The camp setting inherently discourages participation by positioning refugees as passive victims rather than as active political entities. When refugees become politically active, they are often viewed as problems that need to be contained. Olivius describes three strategies to control refugees and contain their political activity: human rights suspensions, depoliticization, and the imposition of cultural hierarchies that elevate humanitarian actors while demeaning refugees (Olivius 2017a; 2017b). Omata states:

> if divorcing refugees from politics is driven by a totalitarian impulse which requires all refugees to obey a particular blueprint, ultimately for the convenience of refugee-governing authorities, the de-politicisation of refugees must be fundamentally scrutinised, questioned, and contested. (2017, 131)

In this perspective, participation in decision-making could be perceived as an impediment to governance, administrative efficiency, and the achievement of previously set goals. Building on McConnachie's criticism (2014), Ramos Almeida describes very aptly how this distorted perception about refugees' autonomy and the desire for governability explain humanitarian and governing actors' hesitant reaction to refugee participation:

> The status of refugees in camps is linked to the idea of victimization, where they are constantly dependent on third-party help and perceived as vulnerable individuals who lack control over their own lives. This focus on victimization may compromise their autonomy and political voice. As such, there is not always a clear distinction between the protection they have access to, and the victimization of the refugee, strongly promoted by the agencies present on the spot but not necessarily by the refugees

themselves. That is, while they are dependent on aid, their autonomy and political voice can be undermined. (2022, 8)

Lastly, diverse practical challenges hinder effective participation, as elaborated by Konyndyk and Worden. Rapid-response situations, like natural disasters or sudden influxes of refugees, demand swift action and leave little room for comprehensive local consultations. Even in prolonged crises, the typical duration of humanitarian funding cycles—usually no more than a year—constrains the opportunity to develop local ownership extensively. Furthermore, the high turnover of international staff and their frequent lack of proficiency in local languages complicate building trust with the community. Most humanitarian personnel are recruited for their capabilities in project management and technical fields rather than for skills in social work or community organizing, which are crucial for engaging effectively with local communities. This situation is exacerbated in high-risk areas where organizations increasingly rely on remote management techniques, which can further distance aid workers from the beneficiaries and limit genuine engagement with those receiving aid (Konyndyk and Worden 2019).

3.2. Flawed Implementation of Participation and Associated Risks

In addition to obstacles, flawed implementation can hinder meaningful participation and lead to diverse adverse consequences. Politics and diversity within the refugee community can complicate the question of legitimate and meaningful representation. The most vocal individuals are not always representative of the broader population's views but can, in turn, become gatekeepers by positioning themselves as intermediaries between aid organizations and refugees. Choices in a contested context can challenge the humanitarian principle of neutrality and inadvertently influence local power structures. A comprehensive understanding of local power dynamics can be achieved through political economy analyses, yet they remain rare and weak in the sector (Konyndyk and Worden 2019). Representation is further complicated, where leadership structures are imposed top-down. For example, in the Buduburam camp in Ghana, Omata reports that the camp commander established a one-party system, limiting fair competition and perpetuating a patronage system (2017). Furthermore, Lecadet reports that the UNHCR also intervenes in the creation of leadership models, imposing criteria that aim to include vulnerable groups and enhance gender representation. These interventions can serve to weaken local leaders and power structures that potentially compete with the UNHCR and other institutions governing the camp (Lecadet 2016).

According to Tazzioli, participatory approaches may inadvertently lead to exploitation. Based on research on UNHCR's operations in Greece, Jordan, and Lebanon, she reports about "extractive" humanitarianism. She argues that participation is based on unpaid labor,

which is often disguised as voluntary activities and supported by subtle coercion. Such practices not only deprive refugees of deserved compensation but also benefit international agencies and state authorities by capitalizing on their labor. Furthermore, refugees are regularly asked to divulge personal information, for example, details on their family members' educational background, life coping strategies, use of money, employment, and activities in the black market. This practice renders refugees more vulnerable due to the risk of misuse (Tazzioli 2022).

Additionally, refugee participation programs can contribute to the exclusion and marginalization of specific groups within the refugee community. By idealizing certain characteristics, behaviors, and forms of participation, these programs establish a hierarchy between "good" and "bad" refugees, fostering unequal treatment based on conformity to a specific image (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010; Olivius 2014; Omata 2017; Tazzioli 2022). This issue becomes particularly evident when we consider the gender dynamics at play, as noted by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. She describes that NGO initiatives predominantly engage well-organized and visible women and, thereby, reinforce stereotypical representations and inequality among women. Consequently, women and girls who face barriers to participate or do not match the idealized image are excluded (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010). Similarly, Tazzioli points out that refugees who opt out of unpaid "voluntary" activities or do not engage as expected are placed lower in the social hierarchy within refugees (2022).

Moreover, Omata's research at the Buduburam camp highlights that authorities claim to encourage refugee autonomy and participation, yet in practice, suppress political activities initiated by refugees. His observations reveal that participation is often restricted to those who conform to the authorities' expectations of being law-abiding, harmonious, and obedient. Women are particularly encouraged to participate because they are perceived as more compliant and less confrontational (2017). Similarly, Olivius points out that humanitarian organizations tend to encourage female participation in roles that conform to traditional views of femininity. Conversely, men are often seen as politicized and self-interested. As a result, behaviors aligning with authority preferences are allowed, while genuine autonomy and active involvement from the refugee community are effectively stifled (Olivius 2014).

Finally, specific risks of refugee participation can be observed in the field of security operations. Community policing has gained popularity as a localization strategy to foster security ownership and build trust between government forces and communities. However, Brankamp observed significant risks of this practice during his research in Kenya and Tanzania. Due to the proximity between refugee guards and national police, the former are likely to be perceived as accomplices in surveillance and corruption. This association leads to

mistrust and resentment within the refugee community, which endangers refugee guards. Simultaneously, refugee participants lack the protection that comes with official law enforcement status. This ambiguity can expose them to violence from the formal police, particularly if they are perceived to be interfering with their responsibilities. Lastly, despite efforts to dissociate policing work from ethnic affiliations, the guards are deeply embedded within their ethnic structures, which can introduce bias and partiality, potentially intensifying community tensions and conflicts (Brankamp 2022).

3.3. Critical Factors for Enhancing Refugee Participation

There is limited literature describing critical elements and strategies fostering meaningful refugee participation. In this chapter, I draw on two frameworks, the GRN's action-oriented guidelines(Global Refugee-led Network 2021) and the report of Konyndyk and Worden mentioned above (2019). Considering these critical factors and strategies is essential when discussing the study's findings, enabling a comparison of the current mechanisms with recommendations presented in the literature. This chapter focuses on factors relevant to humanitarian agencies that are comparable to CARE.

First, for refugee participation to be truly effective, feedback and accountability mechanisms must be integral components of the planning processes and humanitarian program cycle. Establishing methodologies to solicit representative feedback is a fundamental requirement in every response. According to Konyndyk and Worden, the independence of mechanisms is an important prerequisite for their effectiveness. It is crucial to ensure that the voices of aid recipients are neither filtered nor biased by the interests of humanitarian organizations. To mitigate these risks, the authors recommend independent satisfaction and participation audits, similar to financial audits. Furthermore, they advocate for response-level mechanisms separate from individual aid agencies that engage recipients' voices holistically and impartially (2019).

Both the GRN and Konyndyk and Worden further call on humanitarian organizations to increase refugee representation within their staff and leadership ranks. This includes ensuring equitable compensation, fair employment conditions, and adequate influence on all levels of decision-making (Global Refugee-led Network 2021). Additionally, it is essential to include the views from diverse groups and consider credible local representation structures instead of creating redundant mechanisms (Konyndyk and Worden 2019). Moreover, refugees' equitable access can be achieved through partnerships that treat them as equal stakeholders and provide logistical support. The GRN stresses the importance of creating safe spaces for engagement, especially in contexts where legal protections for refugees are insufficient. It

recommends enhancing refugee preparedness through professional development and training opportunities, allowing them to engage more effectively in decision-making processes (2021).

Konyndyk and Worden further illustrate that the implementation of participation must be underpinned by practical adjustments in humanitarian programming and funding. Firstly, there is a need to analyze community coping mechanisms and local power dynamics to ensure a balanced and inclusive engagement of different groups. Secondly, humanitarian agencies and donors must adapt their grant processes to allow for real-time adjustments based on ongoing feedback from refugee communities. Thirdly, adequate funding for all these initiatives must be secured (2019). The GRN emphasizes that refugees need to be adequately compensated for their time, expertise, and work (2021). Lastly, agencies need to recruit individuals skilled in community organization and social work, prioritize local language capabilities, and value outreach and participatory expertise as highly as technical knowledge. These requirements will ensure that staff are capable of fostering meaningful engagement with the refugees they serve (2019).

The GRN emphasizes the necessity to confront and amend institutional practices that perpetuate existing power imbalances and pose barriers to effective engagement. Humanitarian institutions must undertake a comprehensive review of their organizational cultures, potentially with the assistance of specialized consultants. Practices that undermine meaningful participation, such as the use of exclusive jargon, disempowering top-down structures and language, and assumptions about common knowledge, should be identified and suppressed. Moreover, tokenization needs to be prevented by critically assessing whether participation is genuinely inclusive or merely limited to symbolic gestures during specific events (2021).

II INTRODUCING THE CASE STUDY

As outlined in the previous chapters, the implementation of refugee participation in humanitarian programming faces numerous obstacles and challenges. While existing literature provides valuable insights into the theoretical underpinnings and empirical observations of refugee participation, there remains a need for a deeper understanding of the practical implementation of the concept in the field. Therefore, this study aims to offer a comprehensive examination of the participatory mechanisms employed by CARE in the Azraq camp. Specifically, we explore how CARE integrates refugee participation into its program planning and implementation, what challenges arise, and how these challenges are addressed.

4. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological framework adopted in this study to investigate refugee participation in humanitarian activities within refugee camps.

4.1. Research Design

This study encompasses a comprehensive literature review and qualitative field research based on observations and semi-structured interviews aiming to answer the following research questions: What are the drivers of and constraints on the implementation of refugee participation from the perspective of CARE? And what are the mechanisms CARE applies in the Azraq camp in Jordan, enabling the participation of the camp residents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their humanitarian programs?

The literature review included an examination of academic journals, books, reports, and policy documents relating to the topic. It allowed the research to be founded on a broad knowledge of topics, including the humanitarian sector, humanitarian refugee response, participation of affected populations, and contextual factors relevant to the case study, strengthening the understanding and refining the focus of the primary research. Additionally, I conducted a case study of the humanitarian activities conducted by the NGO CARE in the Azraq camp, located in the Zarqa governorate of Jordan. The field research was conducted from February 19th to March 17th. Throughout these four weeks, I resided in Amman and traveled approximately five days a week to the Azraq camp with the CARE team. In the camp, I accompanied seven CARE managers working in different programs through their daily routines and joined case management sessions, control visits of activities, a community representative meeting, and office work. Furthermore, I spent many days accompanying five CARE IBVs during their work days in the CARE activities and visited their centers and courses. I conducted multiple semi-structured interviews with these seven CARE managers and five residents working as IBVs.

This study specifically examined selected programs and activities that were pertinent to understanding refugee participation. The investigation concentrated on CARE activities where IBVs held leadership roles or significantly influenced the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. While I recognize that residents working in less influential roles, such as guards or cleaners, could also provide valuable perspectives, their potential to impact the CARE activities significantly was considered limited. Consequently, with time and capacity constraints, the study focused on three activities: the informal education and library service, the technology laboratory, and the InZone Centre. The latter is a program offered by the University of Geneva (UNIGE) facilitated by CARE. Furthermore, the study focused on two key

CARE departments directly related to participation: the Community Mobilization Department and the Program Quality Department. The former is responsible for information provision, outreach, mobilization, and community representation. The latter focuses on monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) mechanisms, which aim to assess the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions.

The interviewee's selection was aligned with the research focus on the chosen activities. Interviewees included CARE employees with a significant overview of the CARE programs and the selected activities and departments, as well as refugees working in the chosen activities and willing to participate. In the InZone center, I also had the chance to speak to two students who regularly attended InZone courses. Additionally, the CARE IBV working in the technology laboratory is a community representative (CR), which made him an interesting interviewee based on two roles.

The semi-structured interviews were based on rough guidelines and allowed for high flexibility in responding to the interlocutor and the course of the conversation. During the interviews, information was documented using handwritten notes. Not recording the interviews was deemed suitable to foster a comfortable and trustful atmosphere for the interviewees and the interviewer. Given that I do not speak sufficient Arabic, the interviews were conducted in English. This decision was made with the awareness of the findings of Amal Khaleefa's research on the acquisition, representation, and practice of languages in the Zaatari refugee camp. On the one hand, conducting the interviews in English allowed for direct communication with those capable of speaking it, thus bypassing the potential for mistranslation or cultural misjudgment that can occur with the use of translators (2021). On the other hand, conducting interviews in English also introduced several risks. It has excluded non-English speaking refugees—the big majority of the camp residents, leading to a biased sample. However, it can be noted that the selection of IBVs was defined more by the chosen activities relevant to the research project than by their English skills. The selection criteria of a position with a relatively high level of influence on the activity correlated with a higher level of education and proficiency in English. Furthermore, the use of English could reinforce the language's association with power and privilege (Khaleefa 2021), thus adversely affecting the rapport and dynamic between the participants and me. In light of these challenges, I strived to make interviewees feel comfortable by being cognizant of language barriers and power imbalances during the interviews.

After the handwritten notes were digitized, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. Initially, the data was sorted into coherent categories aligning with the research objectives. The coding process was both inductive and deductive, allowing for themes to

emerge from the data while also being informed by the results of the literature review. Then, similar codes were grouped to form preliminary themes, which were later compared to understand how different concepts interacted with and influenced each other. Finally, the different themes were drafted in chapters and discussed in relation to the literature and personal perceptions. While only three out of twelve interviewees wished to be mentioned with their roles but without names, I chose to use pseudonyms for all of them in order to treat everyone equally and mitigate the risks of adverse consequences.

4.2. Strengths and Limitations

On the one hand, the research methodology employed in this thesis benefits from significant strengths that contribute to the reliability and richness of the findings. The qualitative field research approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the research question, combining personal observations and in-depth interviews on the basis of a literature review. A notable strength lies in the diversity of the interview participants, which included camp residents as well as CARE employees across various departments and hierarchical levels. This diverse participation enabled the collection of a wide range of perspectives, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the data. Moreover, considerable effort was invested in creating a comfortable and informal interview setting, which encouraged openness and trust between the interviewees and me.

On the other hand, the research faced several limitations. The limited timeframe, constrained by the scope of a master's thesis, restricted the depth of the analysis considerably and prevented the inquiry into emerging questions. To genuinely comprehend the intricate dynamics of participation, including the multifaceted political interplay among humanitarian organizations, the Jordanian authorities, and the different community factions, a more prolonged field study spanning months or even years would be necessary. Additionally, the selection of interviewees was subject to various biases. Within CARE, all employees who were asked to participate were able and willing to do so. Regarding the residents, however, the sample was limited to those who were English-speaking and working as IBVs with CARE. This subset of the population is far from being representative, as they are more integrated into the camp's humanitarian system and among the relatively more “privileged” residents in comparably good IBV positions. The limitation of conducting the interviews in English became particularly evident when two female camp residents working at the InZone center as IBVs declined to participate. They might have felt intimidated by the prospect of having to communicate in English. This requirement likely presented a greater barrier to women than men among the Azraq camp residents, possibly due to fewer opportunities for women to learn

and practice English in this setting. All five Syrian interviewees are male. While translation software and assistance from colleagues mitigated some communication barriers, the primary use of English might have constrained the depth and authenticity of responses.

A notable limitation of this research is its lack of co-creation, which is essential in studies on refugee participation. Refugees possess the most intimate understanding of their circumstances and are best equipped to identify effective strategies for fostering meaningful involvement and leadership. By not involving refugees directly in the research design and execution, this study may miss critical perspectives that could enhance the depth of its findings. Lastly, the potential lack of objectivity and completeness in the responses must be considered. Given the dependency of camp residents and CARE employees on the organization and its image, there may have been a reluctance to voice criticism or discuss challenges. This can lead to biased or incomplete study results.

4.3. Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Reflecting on positionality is essential to understand the context of the generated data. All information collected through interviews and observations is inherently subjective and does not represent an "objective truth." Therefore, I briefly introduce the interviewees and reflect on my positionality to clarify the origins of specific perspectives and guide the reader in interpreting the subjective realities. As a Swiss researcher conducting interviews with Syrian refugees in a Jordanian camp, the disparities in background, social status, ethnicity, and culture position me as an outsider in many ways. My unfamiliarity with the local culture, history, and the realities of life in a refugee camp, despite prior research and experiences of working with refugees in other contexts, meant that my understanding was inevitably limited. I strongly believe in the impossibility of fully comprehending refugees' realities without having lived through similar experiences. As these experiences have considerable effects on all aspects of a person’s life, experiences, and perspectives, this is another significant barrier. Recognizing my diverse knowledge gaps and different socialization, I approached the field research with intentional openness toward new information, different perspectives and realities, and curiosity to understand and learn. Finally, I am grateful for the many understanding people who were generous to help me and explain.

At the same time, my role as a researcher and a white Swiss person carried inherent power. I directed the conversations, chose the topics of discussion, and interpreted the responses. The potential parallels between my position and that of humanitarian workers, whom refugees often depend on, required me to clearly distinguish my role from that of aid providers and establish trust. Language also significantly influenced the power dynamics of

the research. English is a language associated with donors and camp administration and is perceived as a marker of power and status, according to Amal Khaleefa's research (Khaleefa 2021). I made efforts to express gratitude for their willingness to communicate in English and to alleviate any stress related to language barriers.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, guiding every step from planning the field research to writing down the findings. Participants were extensively informed about the research project, its aims, and the conditions of participation. This included emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and informing them about their rights, such as withdrawing at any time without consequences, reviewing notes, and choosing what personal information about them is presented in the study. By means of written interview agreements, the interviewees were asked for consent in English and Arabic. None of the interlocutors requested the information they shared to be treated with anonymity and only three wanted to be mentioned with their roles only but without names. Nonetheless, it was considered adequate to use pseudonyms to safeguard all participants against any unforeseen negative repercussions despite the low likelihood. This choice was also informed by the fact that the exclusion of names or clear descriptions would not reduce the informative value of the data.

Another important consideration was the purpose of my research. I believe that the topic of participation is highly significant for increasing the dignity of affected populations and the quality of humanitarian programs. And I hope that this case study can contribute to further learning in this field. However, I am aware that I, as the researcher and master's student, benefited the most, particularly in terms of the knowledge and experience gained. While I aim to apply what I have learned about participation as effectively as possible in my professional experiences in the future, this research is unlikely to have a direct positive impact on the lives of the individuals living in the Azraq camp. In light of this fact, I am very grateful for the support of the diverse interviewees who generously spent their time on my study and for CARE, which provided access to both staff and IBVs during working hours for my research purposes. Thereby, on the one hand, compensation was given to the interviewees for their time, enabling low participation costs. Conducting this research within the CARE framework, on the other hand, may have had an influence on the data.

5. Syrian Refugees in Jordan and the Azraq Camp

In the following chapter, the context and history of the Azraq camp are presented, encompassing Jordan's response to the influx of Syrian refugees, the conditions faced by refugees in Jordan and within the Azraq camp, and an overview of CARE's mandate and activities related to refugee participation.

5.1. Jordan's Response to Syrian Refugees

Since the escalation of the Syrian war in 2011, over 12 million people have been displaced, with around 6 million becoming refugees (Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu 2017). While Europe receiving about one million Syrian refugees in 2015 drew enormous attention (called the "European refugee crisis") (Spindler, n.d.), Syria's neighboring countries, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, hosted the vast majority of the Syrian refugees. In 2012, 238,798 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Jordan, in 2013, 346,506, and each following year only a small number (UNHCR 2023c). However, the actual number of Syrians fleeing to Jordan is estimated to be much higher, around 1.3 million in total, as many did not register with the IO (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021). Most of these refugees came from rural areas in the South of Syria and were of rather low socio-economic status. Today, only a small minority of the Syrian refugee population, approximately 126,000, reside in refugee camps. The majority live in urban areas, with the highest concentrations in Amman (38 percent). Overall, Syrians make up roughly 13 percent of the Jordanian population in Jordan (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021).

Jordan has not signed the Refugee Convention, which, according to most reports, is due to the unresolved question of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and lacking the capacity to welcome more refugees. Since 1998, Jordan has given the authority to determine refugee status to the UNHCR, which provides essential services and legal support to Syrian refugees in camps and urban areas, complemented by healthcare and aid from humanitarian agencies (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021). During the first year of the crisis, Syrian refugees were generally welcomed but faced strict hindrances to work due to a high unemployment rate, motivating the government to protect its population's access to most professions in the formal sector (Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu 2017). Increasing security concerns over time due to the increased power of ISIS in Syria prompted Jordan's authorities to increase restrictions around refugee camps and border control from 2013 onwards and create the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) in 2014, consolidating the securitization of its refugee policy (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021). The SRAD is responsible for all Syrian refugee affairs and reporting to the Ministry of Interior (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Public Security Directorate, n.d.). The opening of the Azraq camp in May 2014, as the largest and sixth refugee

camp, marked a continuation of this security-focused approach (Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu 2017).

Dawood, the CARE team lead and camp manager of Azraq, has been working for CARE's response to the Syrian refugee influx since the beginning of the crisis and told me about the history of the camp. He explained that the onset of the conflict pressured Jordanian authorities and humanitarian organizations to create makeshift refugee accommodations. Za'atari camp, one of the first established, quickly surpassed its intended capacity of 80,000 and housed up to 120,000 refugees. In addition to the overcrowding, there was a multitude of problems, including the lack of clear mandates for the numerous organizations operating within the camp, which resulted in duplications and gaps in services. This strain motivated the construction of a second formal camp, Azraq, which opened on April 27, 2014, after nearly a year of planning. The Azraq camp was designed to address previous shortcomings by clearly defining roles and responsibilities among fewer, carefully selected organizations, each with specific mandates to prevent overlap and ensure comprehensive service coverage.

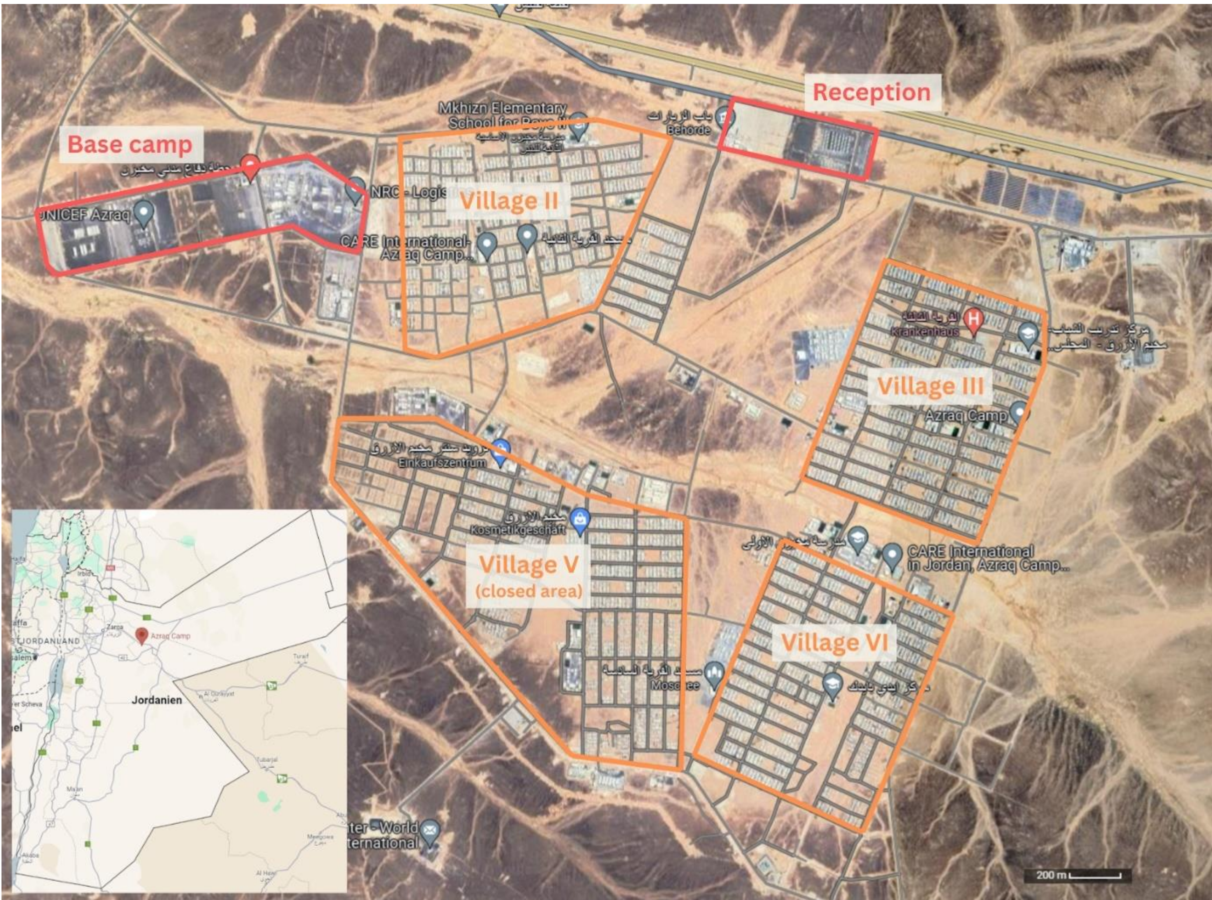

Illustration 1: Satellite pictures of the Azrac camp (Google Maps Screenshots).

According to Dawood, the reasons for the chosen location in the desert east of Zarqa governorate, about 30 minutes by car from the next town, Al Azraq, with not even 6,000 inhabitants, and about 90 minutes away from Amman, are unknown. There is speculation about reasons, ranging from deliberate isolation of the camp community to the creation of jobs for Al Azraq town and security considerations. Betts, Ali, and Memişoğlu state that:

"Securitization and humanitarian service delivery are integrated at this camp in unprecedented ways. Azraq represents both an intensification of the securitization of Syrian refugees, and an attempt to encourage greater international visibility through encampment" (2017, 9).

5.2. The Situation of Syrian Refugees in Jordan and the Azraq Camp

This chapter explores the conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan and subsequently in the Azraq camp, presenting an overview of their socio-economic well-being, access to education, employment, and the prevailing attitudes within the Jordanian community.

Syrian refugees, with about 70 percent under 30 years of age and almost 50 percent under 18, represent a young demographic (UNICEF 2023). Gender distribution within this population is relatively balanced. Notably, 19 percent of Syrian refugee households are headed by women (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021). Syrian refugees' vulnerability remains markedly higher than that of other refugee communities in Jordan due to pervasive social discrimination, especially in employment, education, and justice sectors, coupled with a lack of long-term prospects (Al Husseini 2023). In 2015, 80'000 school-aged Syrian children, nearly one in three, lacked access to formal education (Esveld 2016). Furthermore, the dropout rate among Syrians is 31 percent, compared to 5.2 percent for Jordanians. Eighty percent of Syrian refugees live in poverty, sixty percent in extreme poverty, and about two-thirds are in debt, primarily due to high living costs and limited income opportunities (UNICEF 2023). Jodan's laws restrict Syrians' access to many professions, confining the majority to informal sectors with precarious working conditions. The unemployment rates are alarming, particularly for women. These conditions explain a heavy dependency on aid (90 percent). Moreover, the relationship between Jordanians and Syrians has been shaped by negative public statements of officials and media. Jordanian authorities are suspected of having inflated refugee numbers to secure more international assistance and scapegoating Syrian refugees for poor economic outcomes (Fallah, Istaiteyeh, and Mansur 2021).

Syrian refugees residing in the Azraq camp face a harsh reality marked by deficiencies in nearly every facet of daily life. Multiple CARE employees explained that the humanitarian funding allocated to the support of Syrian refugees has dramatically declined in

recent years due to the global shift in focus on other crises. According to Dawood, CARE's funding for the Azraq camp dropped from nearly 3 million Jordanian dinars (JOD)[11] in 2022 to 1.8 million in 2023, representing a reduction of about 40 percent. Between 2014 and 2017, CARE's budget increased by an average of 5 percent yearly. Then, it decreased by 3 and 11 percent in 2018 and 2019, respectively, and since 2020, by 23 percent on average every year. The cut in humanitarian funding for Syrian refugees has tremendous effects on their humanitarian situation. Dawood informed me that, in August 2023, the monthly financial assistance by the World Food Programme (WFP) was dramatically reduced from 23 to merely JOD 15 per resident per month. This cutback has severely impacted the ability of Syrians to meet their basic needs and exacerbated food insecurity in the camp. Additionally, while UNHCR stopped the general distribution of non-food items (NFIs) many years ago, the agency stopped its winterization program in 2023. Until then, vulnerable Syrians had relied heavily on the provision of seasonal assistance to meet their special needs during the winter season, including essential items like cooking gas, clothing, and blankets. Many other services were affected by the reduction of funding, including the budget for IBV positions. According to Dawood, CARE offers about 30 to 40 fewer IBV positions in 2024 compared to the year before.

Illustration 2: The Azraq camp, captured from inside the CARE bus.

[11] JOD 1 corresponds to US$ 1.41.

Yassin, a CARE case manager who has been working in the camp for many years, is the contact person for camp residents with challenges and questions, and therefore, has a unique insight into the situations of the people. She explained that the lack of economic opportunities has fostered a sense of frustration among the residents. Parents often question the value of sending their children to school in an environment where ten years of schooling and training might still not lead to employment. Yassin informed me that numerous refugees seek work outside the camp. Many do so without having permission to leave the camp and work due to the high costs of obtaining permits. Momani, a CARE program manager overseeing diverse projects and activities, explained that, within the camp, refugees do not have formal employment opportunities. IBV positions are, for many, the only opportunity to make a little income.

Al Zubi, CARE's MEAL manager, is responsible for the camp-wide complaint and accountability mechanism and has a detailed overview of the challenges the residents face. He reported that the healthcare infrastructure in the camp is very limited, and specialized treatments outside the camp are often delayed or refused due to lacking funding or logistical challenges. Furthermore, there are serious sanitation concerns, primarily related to water supply. Frequent power cuts and the lack of affordable internet connectivity are additional persistent problems in the camp. In the words of Al Qadah, a camp resident and CARE IBV working in the informal education and library activities, "The situation in the camp is going from bad to worse."[12]

5.3. CARE's Mandate and Selected Activities

CARE has been operating in the Al Azraq camp since its opening. Dawood told me about CARE's mandate of CBP: The organization recognizes the skills and knowledge of the community they aim to support and emphasizes their capacities of self-protection and coping strategies. Hence, the aim of CARE's activities is community mobilization and engagement, capacity building, and empowerment initiatives based on refugees' participation in decision-making and implementation processes.

Momani said that the organization has consistently aligned the provision of goods, services, and activities with the evolving needs of the refugees and the camp's operational phases. According to her description, its services have expanded during three main stages,

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[12] The direct quotes of the research participants are based on notes taken during the interviews and might, therefore, deviate slightly from the original statement.

which correspond closely to the three levels of action in CBP, outlined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Cotroneo and Pawlak 2016) and used by the UNHCR (UNHCR 2013). Initially, CARE's efforts concentrated on ensuring the basic needs of the refugees were met. This included welcoming refugees, conducting needs assessments through case management and other mechanisms, running community centers, doing house visits, providing information and orientation in the camp, referring residents to organizations and services, and advocating for services based on the perceived needs. This phase aligns with CBP's first level of action focused on ensuring the provision of urgently needed services, preventing threats and abuse, and addressing immediate effects. As the initial urgent needs were addressed, CARE expanded its services to include psychosocial support, recreational activities, and skill-building programs. This stage mirrors the ICRC's second level of action aiming to enable individuals to improve their conditions and restore their dignity. In the last phase, CARE introduced income-generating activities designed to foster economic independence among refugees and offer opportunities to learn diverse skills. This final stage corresponds to the third level of action, which seeks to alter the underlying conditions that hinder the capacity of individuals to enjoy their human rights.

CARE offers a broad range of services and activities in the camp, including livelihood and income-generating activities, case management, community mobilization, psychosocial support, recreational and sports activities, daycare services, hydroponic gardening,[13] informal education, the technology lab, and the InZone center. In the following, I present selected CARE activities central to the study, setting the stage for the next chapters, which explore how the camp residents are involved.

Momani explained that the informal education and technology lab activities at CARE are designed to enhance the educational and technological proficiency of the camp residents. This program is segmented into two primary components: The library and informal education project offers diverse books and other learning materials as well as Arabic and English courses for children of different age groups. The technology lab offers various trainings in digital literacy, including Word and Excel, internet navigation, online safety, and the use of social media platforms.

[13] Hydroponics involves cultivating plants in a controlled setting, using only little water, nutrients, and a growth medium. As hydroponic cultivation consumes significantly fewer water and nutrients it allows agriculture in severe environments where water is scarce.

The InZone center is the only program within the Azraq camp offering higher education and being led by refugees. According to Jaber and Al-Farouk, two members of a team of five refugees managing the InZone center, the UNIGE founded the InZone program in 2005 and opened two centers in Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab camps. In 2016, UNIGE opened the InZone center in Azraq under the CARE umbrella. InZone provides certificates in diverse academic fields, vocational training, English courses, and various academic and professional webinars. Furthermore, they offer a FabLab, which allows residents to work with diverse advanced tools like laser cutters and 3D printers.

III REFUGEE PARTICIPATION IN CARE’S PROGRAMMING

This chapter discusses how the Syrian refugees residing in the Azraq camp can participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of CARE’s activities. These findings are discussed in relation to the literature review, with a particular focus on the identified obstacles, flawed implementation, and critical elements crucial for meaningful refugee participation. All the elements of Chapters 6 to 9 are strongly interrelated. Especially, all the information collected through consultation, evaluation, and feedback (see Chapter 7.3) overlaps and strongly influences the planning process.

6. Factors Hindering and Fostering Refugee Participation

6.1. Drivers of Refugee Participation

Dawood explained why, in his perspective, CARE has tried to foster refugee participation whenever possible: For him, it is clear that the Syrian refugees who arrived at the camp have professional backgrounds and competencies comparable to the local Jordanian population. He denies the widespread perception that the status of “refugee” says anything about people’s capacity to know what they need and how to organize support and finds it unacceptable that external people and organizations make decisions about their lives. Dawood’s perspective lies in stark contrast to a widespread perception of refugees as passive and vulnerable victims without control over their lives, which is often criticized in literature (see Chapter 3.1) (Ramos Almeida 2022). Recognizing refugees’ competencies and knowledge, CARE has progressively shifted from standards and guidelines to adaptive program designs that reflect the refugees' wishes and utilize their skills. According to Dawood’s description, this shift was, above all, driven by a moral imperative to restore the autonomy of the refugees and respect their rights and dignity after they had been diminished by the crisis. Moreover, Momani elaborates on how involving the camp residents in the implementation of programs has transformed CARE’s activities. While, initially, the activities were primarily designed based on the training of

Jordanian humanitarian workers, they are now shaped by the actual needs of the community. The residents are familiar with the community's needs and the environment and can base their work on this understanding. According to Momani, this transition has made CARE's spaces and activities more community-friendly and enhanced the refugees' sense of ownership. The latter motivates the residents to execute their tasks diligently and empower themselves and others within the community.

In conclusion, it is evident that there are few compelling incentives for organizations to implement meaningful refugee participation. Despite years of lobbying efforts of refugee-led organizations and international commitments to refugee participation, there seems to be no significant pressure felt by organizations in the field. According to Momani, there are, however, increasing calls for localization and the incorporation of sustainability and exit strategies into project design and exit strategies. However, Dawood explained that in the context of the Azraq camp, these objectives represent significant challenges. Local organizations struggle with legitimacy and funding constraints similar to those faced by international NGOs like CARE and have even less capacity to attract sufficient funding. Additionally, strict legal restrictions on Syrian refugees prevent them from achieving independence from humanitarian aid, hindering any prospects for long-term sustainability. Consequently, while the emphasis on localization and sustainability offers minimal benefit to refugees, there is little pressure to increase their participation, which would significantly improve their situation. Due to this lack of incentives, according to Dawood, many organizations operating in the camp are reluctant to foster refugee participation. The following chapter delves into diverse constraining factors.

6.2. Constraints on Refugee Participation

Dawood reported diverse constraints hindering refugees' increased influence on humanitarian activities—both in terms of a handover to refugee-led organizations and within the framework of Jordanian and international organizations. These constraints concern, on the one hand, legal restrictions and obstacles for Syrian refugees in Jordan and, on the other hand, various structural problems in the humanitarian sector.

Dawood explained that the biggest hurdle to meaningful refugee participation is the stringent legal barriers limiting their ability to lead projects and organizations. These include restricted mobility, prohibitions on founding organizations, opening bank accounts, receiving direct funding, and employment in most sectors. Limited infrastructure and resources, such as minimal electricity and high internet costs, further impede their efforts. These restrictions come from the fact that the Jordanian government views refugees as temporary. Given that local integration is politically sensitive and undesirable in the eyes of the government, it anticipates

Syrians' eventual return or resettlement, which results in their temporary status. These policies prevent refugees' integration as well as participation, authority, and self-reliance above a certain—very limited—extent and make the handover of humanitarian services to refugees impossible. Additionally, they force program designs to focus on short-term relief over sustainable aid and development.

In addition to legal obstacles, Dawood critically examined the operational rigidity within humanitarian organizations. These organizations adhere strictly to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which lack the flexibility necessary to address specific situational demands. He stated, "Guidelines will never meet the needs of refugees." For instance, in the case of the Azraq camp, SOPs dictated the distribution of one blanket per person, independently of actual weather conditions. When camp residents requested second blankets because they were cold, it was deemed infeasible to diverge from the SOP and predefined budget. It was only after the community asked for one thermal blanket per person instead and significant advocacy from diverse actors that this adjustment was eventually approved. Moreover, Dawood described the challenges posed by logistical and bureaucratic constraints and illustrated this with the example of bread distribution in Jordanian refugee camps. The WFP procures bread from a single supplier for all camps, compromising quality and freshness upon delivery. The camp residents' proposal to establish an onsite bakery was initially dismissed due to the agency's rigid operational frameworks. Eventually, a bakery was established through persistent advocacy; however, after a while, it was again shut down when funding was reduced.

These examples show that the preferences of the affected population often do not have priority in the program design. Humanitarians often feel reluctant and unauthorized to depart from guidelines, even if proven inadequate, and they struggle to consider propositions coming from the affected people. This rigidity often results in compromises in both the quality and appropriateness of services. When looking at these cases, it seems astonishing to me that solutions that would be taken for granted in other contexts are regarded as unthinkable, too costly, and non-essential in a humanitarian context. The expected quality standards of the assistance provided to these communities appear significantly lower than what decision-makers would consider acceptable in their own personal context. In addition, the threshold above which a certain effort to improve the situation of the affected population appears to be worthwhile seems to be much higher.

Moreover, these dynamics must be contextualized within the broader framework of the humanitarian system, where organizations face significant pressure to execute activities and projects as outlined in donor-approved proposals. As Konyndyk and Worden argue, there

is significant competition and a certain “business model”-thinking among humanitarian organizations (2019). Therefore, they experience considerable pressure to report high beneficiary numbers, which disincentivizes deviations from the initial plan during the implementation phase. Such changes could lead to diverse negative consequences for the agencies, such as lower reported numbers, increased logistical complexity, and the necessity to acquire approvals from multiple hierarchical levels within the organization and institutions such as political ministries and donors. Additionally, altering the project plan implies admitting errors in the initial planning and makes it challenging to portray the project as a success, which potentially leads to reduced funding.

Dawood explained that many organizations operate their programs from a distance and do not directly engage with the affected population. In the Azraq camp, only 25 out of 45 organizations work in the camp villages, while 20 only operate from the base camp or the Amman office. In the eyes of Dawood, this physical and psychological operational distance might severely limit these organizations' understanding of the refugees’ realities and the need for meaningful interaction and feedback mechanisms. These issues are emphasized by a challenge in the field of human resources. I asked Dawood whether the reluctance to engage with the camp residents and listen to their voices is related to a certain lack of empathy and, if yes, why there is such a lack. He then shared his personal reflections on this question. He explained that, during a crisis, the rapid scale-up of operations typically leads to hiring under pressure. At the same time, a job in Jordan’s humanitarian sector is attractive as it offers good working conditions and certain job security as the country’s humanitarian sector is one of the biggest worldwide. This may result in a workforce lacking the necessary experience or passion and unwilling to engage directly with the community, diminishing the quality of humanitarian assistance. To my question about what would be needed to improve the situation for the camp residents, Al-Farouk, InZone manager and camp resident, responded, “Empathy. You need to understand the problem; but not from your own perspective; from my perspective.”

These observations align with Konyndyk and Worden’s statement about recruitment practices focusing on project management and technical skills rather than competencies fostering effective and genuine engagement with local communities (2019). At the same time, other critiques presented by the authors are not confirmed in the Azraq camp. There is almost no international staff involved. The employment of the Jordanian workforce allows for a certain stability in the teams, Arabic language proficiency, and a certain cultural proximity to the Syrian camp residents, which excludes certain obstacles to refugee participation described by the authors.

However, there are numerous obstacles to the effective implementation of refugee participation. These barriers necessitate re-evaluating humanitarian strategies to emphasize flexibility, proximity, and sustainability in program designs.

7. Refugee Participation in the Planning of Activities

In the following chapters, I will outline how CARE activities are planned and the information and mechanisms that influence this process. First, I will explain the general planning process. Then, I will discuss community representation, consultation, and evaluation mechanisms, which all gather information relevant to planning.

7.1. The Planning Process

According to Momani, the aim of the planning process of CARE's activities is to ensure that programs are aligned with the organization's mandate and reflective of the actual needs and desires of the refugees. It is based on diverse community engagement mechanisms, including CR meetings (see Chapter 7.2), community consultations, project evaluations, and the feedback and accountability mechanism (see Chapter 7.3), which are all explained in detail in the following chapters. Furthermore, Chapter 8.2 will discuss how residents working as IBVs in the implementation of activities do have the chance to influence them.

In addition to these mechanisms involving the community, the activity planning is based on numerous exchanges on the effectiveness of and feedback on ongoing services and activities with diverse stakeholders. Dawood explained important elements of the process of evaluating and potentially adapting ongoing programs: Firstly, CARE employees participate in the monthly camp coordination meetings to discuss the current situation of services and activities offered in the camp with all other organizations. Secondly, there are sectoral working group meetings, taking place once a month for each sector, in which the organizations operating in the same sector come together and coordinate their programs. In both of these meetings, the CARE MEAL manager shares all common community complaints[14] and feedback collected through the camp complaint mechanism with the other organizations and requests responses to the reported issues (see Chapter 7.3). Thirdly, CARE holds regular internal consultations with its employees and IBVs implementing the activities to discuss whether they need to be adapted or not.

[14] "Common community complaints" refer to feedback that affects the entire camp community or parts of it, rather than just an individual, as would be the case with an instance of unfair treatment, for example.

Moreover, there is a separate but interrelated process focusing on the preparation of new project proposals for the upcoming year. Dawood informed me that these include discussions between CARE and UNHCR representatives, as well as meetings between senior CARE management in Amman and the program quality department, which is responsible for the MEAL mechanisms. According to him, these meetings are crucial for gathering comprehensive feedback on current activities, understanding the community's needs, the expectations of major donors, and the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. Following these discussions, CARE's program managers endeavor to reconcile the refugees' needs with the expectations of UNHCR, their main donor, and design projects on a middle ground between these perspectives. The outcomes of these deliberations form the foundation for the new project proposals.

When I asked Dawood how CARE identifies and defines “the needs of the camp residents,” he explained that they apply a proactive and responsive process. When refugees express the need to adapt ongoing or create new services, CARE tries to link their needs with what they can offer, depending on their mandate and capacity and suggests how it could respond to the needs. In two-way communication, the camp residents and the CARE staff can thereby try to find an adequate answer to the need. He further argues that, through case management, CARE ensures that refugees can express their needs and problems, are referred to corresponding offers and services, and their queries are systematically followed up upon. Furthermore, he explained that CARE has to consider the number of camp residents potentially interested in a service to evaluate its effectiveness. They aim to find a balance between fostering new ideas and offers that target specific groups and aiming to benefit as many people as possible.

When asked about future aspirations for refugee participation, Dawood stated that CARE's strategic direction at Azraq camp focuses on localization, enhanced community consultation, and partnerships with refugee-led organizations or businesses. He envisions training Jordanian organizations to take over the activities in the camp while continuing to support in the background. At the same time, he aspires to integrate refugees into the governance of their activities and establish official partnerships with refugee-led organizations. Dawood recognizes that this vision is challenged by the legal and governmental barriers that currently prevent refugees from forming organizations. However, he is willing to advocate for the legalization of Syrian organizations to achieve this goal. This would allow these organizations to take ownership of diverse CARE projects such as the hydroponic systems, for instance, leveraging their extensive expertise. Dawood envisions a scenario in which refugees "run the show," local organizations are active in the camp to support them where necessary,

and CARE facilitates their operations, leveraging its international reach and established credibility, in particular through financial support. Moreover, as other organizations in the camp often do not seem receptive to this approach, CARE aims to positively influence other organizations' activities by demonstrating the benefits of empowering refugees and showcasing activities that bring the desired results and truly benefit the residents.

On the one hand, CARE has established numerous important mechanisms to involve the camp community in the program planning and evaluation processes. Through their diversity, they complement each other and offer residents various ways to participate. On the other hand, these mechanisms have significant limitations, especially considering the high number of residents and the limited availability of participation opportunities. In its program planning, CARE must balance the interests of refugees with those of its primary donor, the UNHCR. However, UNHCR should not automatically be considered the voice of refugees but an external political actor. UNHCR represents not simply the interests of refugees but also those of its member states and its own organizational priorities. Consequently, the interests of the affected population are considerably compromised. This power imbalance, especially in relation to program design, is reflected in literature. It reflects Konyndyk and Worden's statement on the unequal power distribution in the humanitarian sector and Barnett and Walker's description of the humanitarian club consisting of donors, states, IOs, and major NGOs that decide about the allocation of resources and the agenda (Barnett and Walker 2015; Konyndyk and Worden 2019). Moreover, ultimately, it is still CARE that writes the final project proposals without direct participation of residents, and, subsequently, donors decide what is implemented, again, without involving the affected population.

7.2. Community Representation

According to Khatib and Hamdan,[15] two CARE managers responsible for the community mobilization program, the latter aims to ensure refugees' information, engagement, and also active participation in the program design. The two managers explained that the program consists of three main activities with different objectives. Firstly, CARE assumes the central role of disseminating information for all organizations, including the UNHCR. This is achieved through various methods, including monthly information sessions, an SMS system, a virtual information board, and physical information boards at the community centers. Secondly,

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[15] This information is based on an interview that was conducted with Khatib and Hamdan simultaneously. This seemed adequate as they have experience in the same program and they could complement each other in the conversation. Additionally, it was helpful to combine the interviews as it facilitated translation where needed.

outreach and mobilization involve daily house visits to inform residents about services and activities and ensure the inclusion of vulnerable persons by referring them to appropriate activities and case management services. Thirdly, the community representation mechanism focuses on involving the community in decision-making processes and the submission of feedback and complaints. Dawood reported that it was established by CARE in 2015, and today is led by the UNHCR with the support of CARE and the supervision of SRAD.

Khatib and Hamdan explained how the selection process of the CRs is structured: It starts with CARE identifying potential CRs. Thereby, natural and accepted leaders and active members of the community are identified, while CARE sometimes also relies on recommendations of previous CRs. The managers then send a list of proposed candidates to UNHCR and SRAD, which scrutinize the individuals, including their online activities, and approve or disapprove each person based on the clearance process. The reasons for rejecting certain nominees are not disclosed to CARE or the candidates. According to Khatib and Hamdan, this year, CARE shared a list including 60 individuals, while only 47 were approved. CRs generally serve a temporary term of about two years. However, they explained that some CRs are retained longer because of their important position in the community and good relationships within organizations and the residents, while others are exchanged earlier if they are not active.

The two CARE managers, Khatib and Hamdan, listed the diverse mandates of the CRs. The monthly CR meetings coordinated by CARE are important occasions where CRs voice issues in the representation of their village and the two humanitarian sectors they were assigned to. Thereby, they present feedback, challenges, concerns, and other inputs from residents to representatives of the operating organizations, the UNHCR, and SRAD. The organizations then respond to the issues raised, providing clarifications and, where possible, proposing solutions or explaining why a resolution may not be feasible. According to Khatib and Hamdan, CARE ensures that the CRs receive responses to all queries at the same or subsequent meeting. Moreover, special CR meetings are organized to address specific issues that necessitate more detailed discussion. These meetings are requested either by the organizations to solicit feedback on new projects or by the CRs to discuss particular services, while the latter requires approval from the organizations. Additionally, the CARE managers stated that CRs are occasionally consulted on special protection issues or sensitive community matters, such as divorce cases or family tensions, leveraging their trusted status within the community.

They acknowledged that the system faces diverse challenges, particularly regarding the selection process. The representation mechanism currently only includes 47 CRs selected

by governing organizations for a population close to 40,000, underlining its limited scope. According to Khatib and Hamdan, they have received numerous complaints from camp residents asking why certain people were selected or rejected and reporting that not all the issues they face seem to be communicated by the CRs. Additionally, issues arise as some appointees seek special benefits despite the role being defined as strictly voluntary. CARE has attempted to respond to these diverse challenges, for instance, by implementing sector-specific specializations for CRs, aiming to ensure comprehensive reporting. Furthermore, the responsible managers stated that they have been working on alternative selection processes to make it more democratic, but they seem to have little hope for approval from the SRAD.

In the eyes of Salama, a current CR and CARE IBV, CRs are generally respected within the community despite not being elected. He explained that he earns respect, trust, and legitimacy through strong relationships with the community, particularly with older men. Nevertheless, he notices that some residents are dissatisfied, feeling that CRs do not effectively resolve issues. In his eyes, this sentiment stems from the reality that not all problems reported to the organizations can be promptly or fully resolved due to the slow pace of organizational processes or other hindrances, such as lack of funding. According to Salama, this delay and the occasional inability to resolve issues are often not understood by the residents, leading to a lack of faith in the effectiveness of the CR system.

These findings on community representation resonate with Konyndyk and Worden's observation that an insufficient grasp of the power dynamics within refugee communities and the questionable legitimacy of CRs can hinder meaningful refugee participation (2019). This research is insufficient to fully evaluate the managers' understanding of camp society and local power dynamics. However, some camp residents question the legitimacy of the management of the representation mechanism and the selected CRs. The selection process is controlled by CARE, UNHCR, and SRAD and lacks transparency. Thereby, the process reflects various critiques in the literature highlighting the contradiction between the supposed promotion of participation and the extensive control that governing actors seek to maintain. As discussed in Chapter 3.1, Olivius noted that participation initiatives frequently encounter "top-down practices of coercion and surveillance" (Olivius 2014, 45). Similarly, Omata contended that while authorities purport to encourage participation, they, in reality, only permit involvement from those who are compliant and operate within the narrow confines of their interests (2017).

When we discussed the fact that the selection process does not allow the camp residents to voice their preferences regarding who should represent them, one of the CARE managers made an interesting statement. He said that Syrians have no experience in and lack the skills for voting. This comment, while seemingly aiming to justify the undemocratic

character of the CR selection, is in line with the desire for facilitated governance of refugees, described by multiple authors. Olivius describes three strategies through which political activity is contained and governability is ensured, which are—consciously or unconsciously—inherent to humanitarian assistance (Olivius 2017a): Human rights suspension, which is almost a given in refugee camps; depoliticization; and the creation of cultural hierarchies. Both the latter two strategies are salient in the manager's statement, presenting Syrians as unskilled to participate in political processes or voice their political opinions and differentiating between Syrians who do not have experience with voting and Jordanians who do.

Finally, according to Tazzioli, the reliance on the unpaid labor of CRs, who use their knowledge, understanding, and network to get feedback on current services, input on how to design new offers, spread information in the community, and advice on how to solve diverse social issues, could be described as exploitation or "extractive humanitarianism" (see Chapter 3.2) (2022). This perspective aligns with GRN's call to fairly compensate refugees for their time, expertise, and labor (2021).

7.3. Consultation and Evaluation Mechanisms

CARE's consultation and evaluation mechanisms collect information relevant to program design and are crucial in aligning humanitarian programs with residents' needs. The CARE program quality department is responsible for the MEAL mechanism and independent of the program department, which manages CARE's programs and activities. Al Zubi, the MEAL officer, explained that the latter is pivotal in ensuring the effectiveness and responsiveness of CARE's operations. He described the four components of the department: Firstly, monitoring involves regular assessments of the activities' execution and ensures their alignment with the planning and established standards. Secondly, CARE conducts internal evaluations to determine whether the objectives of the activities and programs have been met. Thereby, qualitative and quantitative data are generated after projects are implemented through focus group discussions (FGD), surveys, and key informant interviews. This process helps to measure the effectiveness of interventions and identify areas for improvement. Thirdly, under the component "accountability," CARE manages a confidential camp-wide complaint mechanism that allows refugees to give feedback and report issues such as inadequate support, mistreatment, or grievances against staff members relating to all organizations and services in the camp. Al Zubi informed me that the residents could use diverse channels, such as calling or visiting the responsible manager, filling out an online survey, or posting a complaint in a box at the community centers. Furthermore, according to Dawood, all facilities and organizations should be regularly visited for control checks by the responsible CARE

officer. Complaints are then directed to the concerned organizations for resolution, while the MEAL officer is responsible for ensuring all complaints are responded to. Fourthly, the learning component is responsible that insights derived from monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms are utilized by CARE and other organizations to improve activities either immediately or in future programming cycles. Therefore, Al Zubi stated that CARE writes reports on all the findings and shares them with CARE managers, other organizations, and donors.

In addition to these MEAL mechanisms, community consultation meetings are a very important element in consulting with the affected population and allowing for refugee participation in the design of humanitarian programs. Khatib and Hamdan stated that, since 2014, they have been conducted by CARE every October. They reported that CARE holds multiple community consultation meetings with different population segments, such as youth, women, people with disabilities, and CRs, to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. According to Dawood, these consultations aim to gather insights on how the refugee population would prefer the organizations to operate in the upcoming year. These sessions' outcomes form the foundation for designing project proposals for the following year. Furthermore, Dawood reported that CARE organizes working groups with residents to consult them on diverse services. For instance, it conducted a working group consisting of representative community members to collect inputs on how to revise the IBV SOP. Al Zubi explained that, for working groups, surveys, and FGDs, the participants are randomly selected from a representative pool of residents, which might be adapted based on criteria or quotas relevant to the particular case.

These findings illustrate that CARE has established a comprehensive set of program and project evaluation and community consultation mechanisms, allowing for significant refugee participation. However, the program quality department faces significant challenges due to insufficient funding. As Al Zubi pointed out, the limited human resources due to funding cuts constrain the department’s ability to carry out the extensive list of MEAL duties. At the same time, the camp-wide accountability mechanism is a positive counter-example to the frequent issue of agency-specific feedback models highlighted by Konyndyk and Worden (2019). This comprehensive feedback channel mitigates the risk of inputs being considered only regarding a specific mandate or being distorted to align with an organization's interests. Furthermore, the authors emphasize the importance of evaluation and accountability mechanisms being independent. This independence is, to a certain extent, ensured as the program quality department operates separately from the program department. However, it

remains unclear whether this degree of independence is sufficient or if an external entity might be better suited for this role.

8. Refugee Participation in the IBV Program

The following chapter explores the IBV program and its potential for refugee participation. It outlines the program and the working conditions and discusses the role of IBVs in planning activities and the associated power dynamics.

8.1. The IBV Program

An IBV position offers temporary assignments with various organizations operating in the camp for which the residents get a small financial compensation. Dawood stated that the IBV system is a collaborative program by the UNHCR and humanitarian organizations that has been running since the opening of the camp. Its primary objective is to offer skill-building activities to the residents and create opportunities to increasingly engage refugees in the activities and programs offered in the camp. According to Yassin, there is a profound discrepancy between the high demand for such roles (20,000 residents are estimated to seek employment) and the very limited offer of 1,000 to 1,500 yearly positions.

Dawood reported that, initially, all of CARE's activities were led and executed by its staff members. However, since 2014, there has been a gradual handover of the activity implementation to IBVs. He said that the implementation of the activities by camp residents empowers refugees by giving them ownership over the projects and allows them to propose modifications and improvements actively. This process resulted in a steady decrease in the number of CARE employees and an increase in IBVs. Al Zubi stated that today, CARE offers an average of 100 to 120 positions a year with contracts of three to twelve months. According to Dawood, today, nearly all CARE activities in the camp are implemented by IBVs under the supervision of CARE staff, except for case management and specialized psychosocial services. He explained that these two services need to be offered by a person external to the camp community to ensure the privacy of the clients and prevent unequal treatment due to personal relationships between them and the counselors. Momani explained that, in her eyes, supervising IBVs is necessary to ensure that objectives are attained, the code of conduct (COC) is respected, and personal information is handled confidentially, in addition to mitigating biases and unequal treatment.

The objectives of protecting privacy and seeking equal treatment are certainly important and sensible. However, based on my observations of interactions between staff and residents, I would question the assumption that external humanitarian workers are less

influenced by relationships and human biases. When looking at the example of case management, my observations suggest that the responsible CARE manager has built valuable personal relationships with some residents over many years of working in the camp and assisting them. On the one hand, these relationships are incredibly valuable for the affected individuals, adding a human and personal touch to humanitarian work. On the other hand, this can lead to the risk of bias, which various CARE staff have argued is a reason why residents cannot lead certain activities. Moreover, it is not clear to me that the protection of private information inherently excludes the involvement of residents in the management. These doubts are particularly relevant, in my opinion, given the prolonged nature of the situation. Syrian refugees have been enduring for over ten years with no prospects of an alternative living situation.

Yassin, a CARE case manager, explained that the UNHCR manages the IBV program, while all organizations can autonomously oversee the recruitment process for their positions. This independence of hiring organizations has the consequence that camp residents need to apply individually to 25 different organizations, making job-seeking extremely complex and time-consuming. Additionally, the fairness of the distribution of positions cannot be ensured, as each organization makes hiring decisions independently with minimal cohesive oversight. The primary guideline that remains is the limited contract duration of IBV positions and subsequent mandatory waiting periods between two contracts (see Chapter 8.2) to ensure the rotation of candidates and the distribution of opportunities. However, according to Yassin, this rule is not uniformly respected as some organizations wish to retain their IBVs due to the investments they made in their training.

The autonomous hiring process conducted by humanitarian organizations without significant oversight to ensure fairness and adherence to the SOP poses considerable risks. As Yassin pointed out, this autonomy likely leads to unequal distribution of opportunities among the large number of residents seeking IBV positions. The extreme power imbalance between "employers" and "employees/volunteers," driven by extremely high demand and low availability, allows organizations to pursue their organizational interests in the recruiting process and the overall employment relationship. They might disregard regulations designed to ensure fair distribution and prioritize applicants based on personal relationships or skills rather than needs. Consequently, highly skilled residents often secure more opportunities and build additional skills yet remain classified as volunteers without receiving appropriate compensation. Conversely, many residents wait for years for volunteering opportunities despite their urgent need for even a small additional income. This dynamic aligns with what various researchers describe as the exclusion and hierarchization of different groups of

refugees through participation programs (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010; Olivius 2014; Omata 2017; Tazzioli 2022). By prioritizing particular traits, behaviors, and modes of participation, these programs create a hierarchy that categorizes refugees into "good" or "bad," leading to unequal treatment based on how well individuals correspond to the organizations' expectations.

8.2. Working Conditions

Dawood explained that the term "volunteering" was deliberately chosen to describe short-term opportunities for skill development and vocational training rather than formal employment. On the one hand, in his eyes, this designation is crucial as it allows refugees to engage in work without needing a work permit, which is unaffordable for many camp residents. The lack of a work permit requirement for these positions means that individuals and organizations are not obligated to pay taxes; however, the IBVs also do not receive social security benefits. Notably, many would, in any case, not qualify for social security benefits, often not meeting the minimum salary threshold of about JOD 300. Furthermore, he highlighted that the volunteering framework allows for the rotation of positions, which is designed to ensure a fairer distribution of limited skill-building and income-generating opportunities amongst the large refugee population. However, it also leads to job insecurity and impedes residents' long-term career progression. On the other hand, Dawood explained, volunteering roles can also be seen as a means for organizations to circumvent local labor laws and minimum wage requirements. While the IBV scheme initially aimed to offer short-term skill-building opportunities, today, many residents are well-trained to do diverse jobs in the camp autonomously. Additionally, many positions require advanced skills, years of experience, or even university degrees. In light of these developments, questions arise about the appropriateness of labeling these roles as "volunteering." Dawood explained that, in his personal opinion, it may no longer be fitting to use the term "volunteer" for longer-term positions demanding high qualifications. Additionally, in his eyes, the salaries for some positions should be increased to reflect the qualifications and contributions of the residents. However, many organizations have resisted increasing the salaries of IBV positions.

Regarding working conditions, Momani reported that CARE adheres to the IBV SOP created by the UNHCR in cooperation with all operating organizations and the residents. She informed me about the conditions of the IBV positions: The skill levels required for the position determine both pay rates and contract durations. Roles are categorized as semi-skilled, high-skilled, and technical, with corresponding wages varying between JOD 1.5 to 2.5 per hour and contract lengths of one, three, six, or twelve months to unlimited duration in the case of technical positions. These levels are associated with the degree of “replaceability” of a worker

or the rarity of the required skills: Semi-skilled positions are easy, high-skilled positions are more difficult to fill, and technical positions are considered irreplaceable. Recently, a reduction in funding has led to fewer available positions and a downgrading of the skill levels required for certain positions. This downgrading resulted in deteriorated working conditions for many IBVs in terms of salary and contract length. Momani explained that this change is also due to residents now possessing more skills, making them easier to replace and, consequently, making it less justifiable to maintain higher skill levels for the positions.

This downgrading presents a paradox in the IBV program's original intent to foster skill development among residents. The increased competencies paradoxically lead to the lowering of job classifications and corresponding salaries. Instead of allowing residents to advance socio-economically, the positions are downgraded, adjusting for the fact that now more people possess the necessary abilities. This dynamic ultimately hinders residents from securing better job opportunities and improving their living conditions, likely leading to widespread frustration as their efforts do not yield adequate returns. Simultaneously, organizations continue to benefit from the higher competency levels of their workforce without corresponding compensation.

Issues of low salaries and challenging regulations are evident through multiple accounts. Al-Farouk, an IBV working at the InZone center, noted that payments are hourly and capped at a maximum number of hours per day, with no compensation for overtime. Jaber, an InZone manager and IBV, added that the payment of IBVs is not guaranteed when they cannot work because of the absence of the CARE team due to national holidays, team events, or external factors like bad weather conditions. Furthermore, multiple persons working as IBVs reported that the remuneration is low, especially compared with their high responsibilities, diverse duties, and important contributions to CARE and other organizations. According to Salama, the lack of adequate compensation, social security benefits, and the short-term nature of his contract, despite his great commitment and responsibility for the well-being of his students, prevents him from fulfilling his most important responsibility: to provide for the needs and well-being of all aspects of his family's life. Salama explained: "Life in this camp is not just a temporary experience for us, a trip, but it is our lives."

While originally intended to provide skill-building opportunities, the IBV positions often impose high responsibilities on volunteers but do not accord corresponding rights or adequate financial rewards. Volunteers often assume duties indistinguishable from CARE staff but without similar rights. Jaber reported that, in his eyes, they are considered CARE staff in terms of duties, but in terms of autonomy and rights, they are not. He and Al-Farouk illustrated this with the example that, on the one hand, IBVs are not permitted to offer activities without the

presence of CARE staff, while, on the other hand, the InZone team must solely represent CARE during their working hours and are, e.g., not allowed to conduct outreach on behalf of InZone. Finally, according to Jaber, the IBV working conditions vary significantly across organizations operating in the camp despite the common SOP. While some organizations do not respect the SOP in their own interests, others offer more formal employment contracts with better salaries compared to the standard.

The IBV system, while intending to support and empower refugees, can be seen as another example of a participatory approach that leads to exploitation. Tazzioli argues that humanitarianism becomes "extractive" when it relies on the unpaid labor and knowledge extraction of refugees, ultimately benefiting the humanitarian organization itself (see Chapter 3.2). In accordance with her arguments, I contend that when a camp resident is skilled to perform a certain job, it borders on exploitation to still label and treat them as "volunteers." These individuals do not receive adequate salaries or rights, and their skills and contributions lack proper recognition. I agree with Dawood's argument that the term "volunteering" is, in many cases, inappropriate due to the above-stated reasons. Furthermore, their engagement cannot be considered truly voluntary, as the vast majority, if not the entire community, is compelled to take on IBV positions to earn a small additional income. This income is absolutely essential in the Azraq camp, where humanitarian funds are insufficient, and most people cannot cover even the most basic needs.

8.3. The Role of IBVs in the Design of Activities

This chapter discussed the role of the residents working as IBVs for CARE in the design process of their activities. First, it will discuss the informal education and technology lab program and, subsequently, the InZone center.

In the context of CARE's informal education and technology lab, the role of the residents working as IBVs is integral to the planning and adapting of the activities. Both Al Qadah and Salama, who work as IBVs in these activities, reported that they feel comfortable expressing their opinions and proposing changes if needed, and they describe the communication with CARE as open and straightforward. Salama, in particular, is proactive in suggesting enhancements and new approaches, such as incorporating virtual reality technologies to expand the educational experiences available to camp residents. He discussed this idea with Momani, the CARE manager overseeing his activity, who subsequently communicated it to Dawood, the CARE team lead. Momani informed me that after discussing this proposition, they agreed to include Salama's suggestion in the upcoming donor proposals.

Additionally, Al Qadah and Salama reported having the flexibility to modify schedules and logistical details to accommodate the changing needs of participants. For instance, one day, when I visited the technology lab, students attending a computer course arrived very late to class. Salama, the leader of the technology lab, directly engaged with the students to find out the reason for their delay. After they explained to him that there was a change in the school hours that conflicted with their course schedule, he adjusted the class times in consultation with them. Salama explained that he could make such adjustments independently and inform CARE subsequently. Such autonomy is crucial for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of programs. The camp residents working as IBVs seem perfectly positioned to understand the residents' needs best and adjust accordingly.

Al-Farouk assured me that the planning process of InZone's programs and services is strongly based on the feedback and active participation of the team of IBVs and the center's students. This process begins with a thorough needs assessment conducted by the InZone team through surveys and FGDs, which capture the preferences and expectations of the camp community. The insights gained from these assessments inform the decision-making process regarding the offerings, which is based on an exchange between the InZone team and UNIGE. UNIGE proposes webinars and educational content, which the team then tailors to align with the camp's context and interests. Al-Farouk illustrated this with the example of courses scheduled during Ramadan that are adjusted to accommodate fasting periods.

While CARE does not directly interfere with InZone's educational offers, all interviewed team members, Jaber, Al-Farouk, and Hassan, reported encountering various bureaucratic and organizational obstacles, leading to decreased efficiency and a perceived loss of independence. According to Jaber, new courses or significant program modifications require approval from CARE's management, which tends to delay the planning process. Furthermore, he expressed concerns about CARE's emphasis on increasing participation numbers, potentially at the expense of the educational quality, which remains a priority for the InZone staff. Additionally, Jaber reported that the team often feels excluded from organizational decision-making processes and sometimes finds out about changes post-factum.

These insights illustrate the significant potential influence and autonomy that IBVs have in designing and leading certain activities. CARE has commendably transferred the leadership of most activities to the residents, enabling them to take ownership and responsibility. Despite some challenges, as discussed in the next chapter, residents run the activities without the presence of CARE staff and exhibit a degree of independence in making modifications. During my visits, it was evident that residents working as IBVs care deeply about

their activities and the success of their students, feeling a strong sense of responsibility, if not pressure, to perform their roles effectively. However, a significant power imbalance persists between the residents and CARE. CARE retains control over organizational decisions, strategic directions, and the drafting of project proposals. The influence of IBVs is ultimately determined by CARE and depends on their roles, personal characteristics, and the interpersonal relationships between them and the responsible manager. Notably, the activities examined in this study are those where residents have the greatest autonomy and influence. Finally, there is potential to grant more autonomy to the residents, and these positive experiences and outcomes should encourage CARE and other organizations to seek increased meaningful refugee participation and leadership.

8.4. Power Dynamics

Hassan, an InZone manager, explained that the nature of cooperation and power dynamics between an IBV and the responsible CARE employee often hinges on the personal relationship and the individual characteristics of the involved people. The two residents working as volunteers within the informal education and technology lab, Al Qadah and Salama, have not expressed any concerns regarding the power dynamics between them and the CARE staff. Instead, they described their relationship with their manager as positive and uncomplicated. Salama especially showed a certain degree of autonomy in his role. In contrast, the InZone team reported profound challenges related to power dynamics and perceived their authority as limited under CARE's management. All three interviewed team members emphasized that these challenges fundamentally influenced the operational atmosphere and said they had felt increased frustration and lacking motivation to work at InZone. Most importantly, the team members feel that the responsible CARE coordinator lacks respect and trust towards them.

Dawood explained that the situation of the InZone Center is complex due to its legal status. InZone is not an organization registered in Jordan but a program offered by a Swiss university. The team of refugees leading the center cannot acquire the status of an official entity due to legal restrictions refugees face in Jordan. At the same time, the law requires every actor offering services for Syrian refugees in the country to go through a complex process of approval with multiple institutions and ministries. Due to these restrictions, the InZone Center is officially an activity of CARE—who has permission to operate in the camp and is an established partner of the Jordanian authorities—based on a partnership between UNIGE and CARE. In practice, the center is led by a team of refugees who have IBV contracts with CARE. In this collaboration, the InZone team leads the center and plans, implements, and evaluates

its services. CARE provides administrative, financial, and logistical support, and UNIGE offers technical advice and access to the network and knowledge.

While the division of roles internally is clearly defined, the biggest challenge they face is the communication of these roles and the interaction with external parties due to government restrictions they need to respect. Dawood told me that, aiming to foster refugee leadership, the stakeholders agreed to give the InZone team the full freedom to design the activities offered in the center in cooperation with UNIGE. However, as this is a pilot project, CARE felt pressure to make it successful. The CARE team sees risks in handing over the autonomy concerning their activities and struggles to understand the final impact this investment will have. That is why, Dawood explained, they may act more protectively and get more involved with the InZone center than they should based on the agreement between CARE and InZone. At the same time, the InZone team interprets this resistance from the CARE staff to their leadership as taking ownership of the center and feeling disrespected in their role.

This “protective and resistant” behavior of CARE staff, as described by Dawood, can be recognized in diverse examples the InZone team members used to illustrate the experienced power imbalance. Some of these examples are described in the following. However, I must emphasize the fact that these have only been reported by one of the parties, and I do not know CARE’s side of the story besides the explanation of Dawood presented above. Nevertheless, it is relevant to understand the reality and perception of refugees working as IBV, even if it is presented subjectively. Ali Jaber, an InZone manager, recalled one occasion in which the responsible CARE manager insisted on emphasizing the hierarchical relationship and Jaber’s need to follow their instructions. They stated, "Ali, I am your manager," to which he responded, "No, you are a liaison." Although, in Jaber’s eyes, this description is a fact that had been defined in a common meeting, this exchange resulted in the manager reintroducing attendance monitoring that day, reflecting a regression in trust and autonomy previously afforded to the team. Another example showing a lack of trust is CARE's routine inspection of assets, such as laptops, to prevent theft. To Jaber, this practice shows that the organization does not recognize that the InZone team has built up the center and invests daily in its success. In his eyes, these oversight and control practices suggest unwarranted suspicion towards the team and represent a humiliation for its members who lead and feel ownership of the center.

Furthermore, the communication between CARE and InZone presents a challenge, as illustrated with multiple examples. Hassan remarked that while the responsible CARE employee calls the InZone team lead when they need something, they forbid the team members to call and ask them to send emails instead. At the same time, the team reported

that they often do not get answers to their emails and have to send multiple follow-ups. As Jaber explained, this was also the case when the InZone center temporarily had to move to another camp village and facility. In the new village, the team and students did not have access to restrooms and were not allowed to use the ones of the CARE staff. After three weeks in which the InZone team repeatedly asked for access to restrooms, often without getting a clear response, they were eventually granted one bathroom for men and women, which in the Syrian and Jordanian cultures is considered unacceptable.

These examples illustrate the "protective" behavior and the involvement of the responsible CARE manager that goes beyond what has been agreed upon. On the one hand, it is understandable that the CARE team sees risks in handing over autonomy to InZone and feels the pressure to present the center as a successful pilot project. Additionally, the employees might be guided by the organization's business model (see Chapter 3.1), which pressures humanitarian workers to protect the organization and its success and does not allow them to focus only on the well-being of the refugees. Moreover, the above-presented examples further align with Olivius' statement about participatory initiatives encountering top-down practices in sometimes contradictory ways (Olivius 2014, 45). Furthermore, as explained by Dawood, Jordanian law prohibits refugees from leading organizations and corporations. This regulation supports the fact that, according to Al-Farouk, humanitarian organizations do not fully recognize refugees as leaders but merely view them as volunteers. Jaber emphasized that, due to this widespread perception, "We try to prove to ourselves and others [organizations in the camp] that we can lead a center and be organized and professional."

Regarding UNIGE, the InZone team described their relationship as positive. Nonetheless, UNIGE has not effectively addressed the aforementioned issues. In Jaber's perspective, UNIGE adopts a diplomatic and strategic approach, aligning with CARE rather than advocating for the InZone team's rights and interests. He guessed that this alignment stems from UNIGE's dependence on CARE for donations and support, skewing the power dynamics in favor of CARE. Consequently, it seemed that CARE could operate without significant repercussions for its interactions with the team, leaving it without a viable means to contest grievances. This dynamic can be better understood in light of the literature on the unequal power distribution within the humanitarian sector. Konyndyk and Worden note that donors and implementing agencies typically decide on funding allocations and program directions without consideration of affected people, creating an imbalance of power (2019). This dynamic could potentially support Jaber's assumption that UNIGE prioritizes a good relationship with CARE due to InZone's dependency on the organization instead of standing up for the InZone team that feels unfairly treated. However, my investigation did not go in-

depth enough to fully understand these dynamics or to hear UNIGE's perspective. It is, however, a fact that there is an unequal power distribution between these three parties, and it is likely that this influences their interactions.

IV CONCLUSION

9. Summary of the Findings

The GRN and many other actors have long advocated for the rights of refugees to self-representation and meaningful participation in shaping policies that affect their lives. While there is increasing recognition that participation is crucial for providing humanitarian assistance that preserves refugees' dignity and upholds their human rights, this understanding must be translated into concrete actions. All actors in the humanitarian sector need to identify steps to enable meaningful participation, commit time and resources to enact these plans, and transition to a sector that genuinely partners with refugees (2021). This thesis underscores the critical need to foster meaningful refugee participation in humanitarian programs in refugee camps, specifically in the Azraq camp. The following summarizes the most important findings and presents recommendations for improvements based on the literature and the case study.

The analysis reveals that, despite years of lobbying efforts by refugee-led organizations and international commitments to refugee participation, there are few compelling incentives for organizations to implement meaningful refugee participation in camps. At the same time, numerous constraints hinder refugees' increased influence on humanitarian activities. These constraints include legal restrictions on refugees, structural issues within the humanitarian sector, and lacking infrastructure and resources in the affected community. Firstly, humanitarian organizations often exhibit operational rigidity and adhere strictly to SOPs, lacking the necessary flexibility to address the dynamic needs of refugee communities. The pressure to meet donor expectations and report high beneficiary numbers discourages deviations from initial project plans. Hence, practical adjustments in humanitarian programming and funding are necessary for the implementation of meaningful participation. Humanitarian agencies and donors must adapt their grant processes to allow for real-time adjustments based on ongoing feedback from refugee communities.

Secondly, the rapid scale-up of humanitarian operations leads to hiring under pressure, resulting in a workforce that may lack the necessary experience or passion. Therefore, it is essential that recruiters value skills related to social and community work as well as outreach and participatory expertise. Humanitarians should genuinely be motivated to engage directly with the communities they work with, bring high social skills and empathy, and have the ability to listen. These requirements will improve the staff's capability and willingness

to foster meaningful refugee participation and leadership. Thirdly, refugee protection is inherently political. Host states' commitments to assist and protect refugees are shaped by whether they perceive refugees as a burden or benefit. The former is the case in Jordan. That is why Syrian refugees face stringent legal and policy barriers, which strongly limit their ability to participate in and take over humanitarian activities.

Despite these challenges, CARE has established numerous mechanisms to involve the camp community in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. These include community representation, community consultations, project evaluations, the camp-wide accountability mechanism, as well as the implementation of most CARE activities by residents working under IBV contracts. While these mechanisms enable meaningful engagement with the camp residents, they have diverse limitations. CRs are selected by CARE, UNHCR, and SRAD, raising concerns about their legitimacy. To ensure genuine representation, the selection process must be more transparent and based on the community's preferences. This will foster acceptance and trust within the society and enhance the effectiveness of the CR framework. Furthermore, CARE should prioritize the total independence of evaluation and accountability mechanisms to guarantee that the voices of aid recipients are heard and the organization is accountable. Sufficient financial resources must be secured to ensure all MEAL responsibilities can be adequately fulfilled.

Moreover, CARE IBVs have a significant potential influence in designing and implementing activities. CARE has commendably transferred leadership of most activities to residents, enabling them to take ownership and responsibility. Increasing refugee representation within staff and leadership ranks is essential. As Syrian refugees in Jordan are not allowed to work in the humanitarian sector, the IBV system as an alternative to formal employment is sensible. However, an important power imbalance remains. While CARE retains authority over most decisions, the IBVs' influence is defined by the organization and strongly depends on their roles and personal relationships with the relevant CARE managers. IBVs do not receive adequate recognition, compensation, and rights relative to their contributions and responsibilities. Depending on the specific circumstances of the activities, the power imbalance is felt more or less strongly. Some feel respected and find communication with CARE easy, while others perceive a lack of trust, respect, and autonomy. The cooperation and communication with residents working for CARE must, in any case, be respectful and based on mutual trust. Additionally, the apparent mindset prevailing among many humanitarian workers in the camp, viewing refugees merely as "beneficiaries" and "volunteers," may limit the scope of meaningful refugee participation. The unequal power distribution regarding the InZone center underscores the challenges faced by refugee-led initiatives in achieving true

autonomy within the humanitarian framework. It highlights the need for structural changes that address these power imbalances, ensuring that refugee voices are not only heard but also given weight in decision-making processes.

While CARE’s current framework allows for meaningful refugee participation to a certain extent, there is potential to grant more autonomy to the residents. CARE's efforts to balance the interests of refugees and UNHCR, their main donor, mean that the residents’ needs must often be compromised. Ultimately, CARE drafts the final project proposals without direct refugee participation, and donors decide what is implemented, again without involving the affected population. However, Dawood’s plans for CARE to establish official partnerships with refugee-led organizations and businesses have enormous potential to improve meaningful refugee participation and the sustainability of humanitarian assistance. It is imperative that diverse groups of the camp community have influence at all decision-making levels—including operational and strategic.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the considerable limitations of this study. The topic of refugee participation is intrinsically linked to power dynamics, social structures, and cultural practices, all of which are highly complex and impossible for an outsider to fully comprehend after only one month of field research. Many questions and uncertainties emerged during the research that could not be further investigated due to the limited time frame. Furthermore, some arguments are inherently political and cannot always be transparently discussed and presented. Therefore, while this study provides valuable insights, it also highlights the need for ongoing research to fully identify the obstacles and strategies to foster meaningful refugee participation. I recommend that future research is grounded in the concept of co-creation and actively incorporates members of the affected community into the research team. The camp residents deeply understand the situation and are best positioned to identify ways to enhance meaningful participation.

10. Final Thoughts

The prolonged living conditions of Syrian refugees in the Azraq camp, who have endured over a decade without any prospect of alternative ways of living, demand a fundamental reassessment and change of mindset. This is not an emergency anymore but a long-term living situation for nearly 40,000 people, and it must be recognized as such when designing humanitarian response programs. The camp's decade-long existence invalidates arguments justifying the temporary nature of current practices and claiming that improvements are in progress. Realistically, anything not implemented after ten years is likely to be unwanted, such as a more democratic process for selecting CRs, for instance. Additionally, at this point in time,

it is questionable that residents still need skill-building initiatives, that certain jobs can only be done by external workers, and that numerous restrictions depriving the residents of human rights are necessary and sensible.

Even after ten years, camp residents are forced to share a container with up to nine people while others remain empty. They are not allowed to expand their living space or to use cement in the camp to improve their containers. They must apply for permits to leave the camp and renew them monthly, even if approved. Meanwhile, countless buses transport Jordanians to the camp daily for jobs that Syrians, apparently, cannot perform. Moreover, there is a stark double standard between humanitarian organizations and the camp residents. While the refugees are meant to be the "beneficiaries" of humanitarian assistance, their living conditions are significantly worse than the working conditions of the humanitarian workers who only spend a few hours a day in the camp. NGO offices have direct access to the water system, private toilets, kitchens, and wooden floors. These facilities are cleaned by residents, who are paid extremely low wages and are labeled "volunteers" under the guise of a "skill-building" initiative. On the contrary, residents' shelters lack access to water and private bathrooms and have no flooring, forcing them to live on the desert ground and face constant threats from spiders, scorpions, and other dangerous insects. Clearly, this list of glaring double standards—only looking at examples within the camp borders—could be extended further.

Based on my observations in the Azraq camp, I consider it crucial to pursue the following objective outlined by Crisp and Jacobsen and summarized by Martín: "converting the camps into more manageable, autonomous, and self-sufficient structures (similar to small towns)" (Crisp and Jacobsen 1998; Martín 2017, 38). However, Jordanian laws hinder any progress toward self-sufficiency and independence for Syrian refugees. The authorities reject the integration of Syrian refugees as a feasible solution, and as a result, they perceive and treat them as a temporary issue.

CARE is not responsible for many of the above-described grievances. However, structures, processes, and mindsets within the humanitarian sector significantly contribute to the underlying power imbalance, top-down approaches, and double standards. The sector must change drastically, as advocated by Konyndyk and Worden:

> Revolutions are about changing power structures. A participation "revolution" will not be achieved by the same players continuing to wield the same power in the same ways that they always have. Building a culture of real accountability and participation into humanitarian action will take concerted change to humanitarian incentives and power dynamics. (2019, 25)

In addition to changing the power structure within the sector, humanitarian workers need to scrutinize distinctions between themselves and camp residents, recognize double standards, and plan sustainably. Amidst diminishing funds, humanitarian programs without sustainable exit plans seem to be merely awaiting the inevitable end of funding and support, failing to make any lasting progress. Furthermore, genuine partnerships between humanitarian organizations and refugees are needed. As Dawood explained, Syrian refugees are just as knowledgeable and capable of understanding their needs and organizing support for their community as external humanitarian workers. Therefore, they should not be treated differently. The victimization of the camp residents must end, along with the legitimization of human rights violations. In Salama's words, "Life in this camp is not just a temporary experience for us, a trip, but it is our lives."

Academic research has a crucial role in criticizing the grievances and injustices in the camp. However, it is important to note that, in reality, humanitarian organizations must balance coping with lacking funds and respecting regulations and authorities while supporting refugees according to their preferences. In this environment, they are often forced to choose the lesser of the evils. The creation of the IBV program to engage residents in activities and allow them to earn a small income is a good example. On one hand, it is unjust to call them "volunteers" and not compensate them adequately. On the other hand, organizations need to respect the law forbidding Syrian refugees from working in most sectors and aim to prevent them from having to pay extremely high social security and work permit fees. Additionally, it seems unfair that contracts are limited to a few months, and residents can only start a new opportunity after a waiting period. From the perspective of IBVs, these restrictions prevent them from covering the basic needs of their families. From the perspective of a humanitarian organization, however, these restrictions come from the objective of a more equitable distribution of very limited opportunities. Both perspectives are legitimate and "true."

Nevertheless, findings from this case study show that through cooperation between humanitarians and refugees, significant enhancements in refugee participation and leadership can be achieved. And this, in turn, is a prerequisite for sustainable and effective humanitarian assistance. I want to end this chapter with the words of the GRN that represents refugees and refugee-led organizations from all over the world:

> Will the refugee response sector at large continue trying to assist refugees as beneficiaries and victims? Or, will global actors be bold and humble enough to partner and work with them instead? We invite you to take the challenge and begin transformation. This is our chance to uncover and enable dignifying, respectful solutions for refugees everywhere. (2021, 26)

V APPENDIX

11. List of Study Participants

Name	Position
Jaber[16]	CARE IBV, InZone manager
Al-Farouk	CARE IBV, InZone manager
Hassan	CARE IBV, InZone manager
Al Qadah	CARE IBV, English and Arabic teacher and library manager
Salama	CARE IBV, Technology laboratory manager and teacher
Dawood	CARE camp manager and team lead
Momani	CARE manager supervising diverse activities
Al Zubi	CARE MEAL manager
Yassin	CARE case manager
Hamdan	CARE manager responsible for community mobilization
Khatib	CARE manager responsible for community mobilization
Jaber	CARE project assistant

[16] All names of the research participants are pseudonyms.

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