Guidance Note 10

Community Mobilization

1. Why community mobilization is important for IDPs

During displacement, traditional support mechanisms within a community, such as extended families, friends, neighbours or other social networks, are often disrupted. For displaced persons, this adds to the conflict-related trauma they experience, and contributes to reducing their self-esteem and sense of control over their lives. As a result, it is difficult for communities to overcome protection risks inherent to displacement.

Community mobilization aims to restore feelings of self-worth and responsibility among the affected population. Ultimately, it should empower communities to develop their own protection responses and enjoy their rights, and find solutions. Wherever necessary, the international community should support this process. Communities will mobilize themselves when they have trust and confidence in a process and when they see benefits emerging from it.

> Community mobilization involves:
> - working with the community and its leaders;
> - understanding the dynamics and structures within the community; and
> - building on the capacities and strengths of its members in order to find solutions to identified concerns.

Other affected populations, such as host families and residents in surrounding areas, may be concerned that the presence of IDPs will lead to increased military activity or conflict-related violence, or be a drain on already limited natural resources. Community-mobilization activities need to encourage a dialogue between IDPs and surrounding populations to develop joint activities, based on common goals and interests, thereby fostering peaceful coexistence and helping to rebuild communities. These kinds of activities should be carried out at all stages of the displacement cycle, from initial movement to return or settlement in a new location.

2. Key activities to mobilize communities

Before embarking on community-mobilization activities, national and international staff should receive training. The training should provide guidance on necessary attitudes, skills and techniques and give an orientation on national or regional cultural practices and sensitivities. The findings of the situational analysis are a good basis on which to build *(see Part III.1).* 📖

> Always remember that community members have first hand knowledge about the issues they face. Our role should be to stimulate and support ideas and activities, not to impose them.

The following activities should be adapted to each specific situation and do not need to be undertaken in a chronological order.

2.1. Community mapping of management structures

> Understanding existing structures and ground rules within communities will guide humanitarian workers on how to establish a well functioning partnership with the community and help identify issues to address.

- Observe the composition of communities and their leaders. Note their age, gender, ethnicity, religion and political affiliation. Assess if these are the regular leaders, whether they are respected or whether there are others.
- Jointly with the community, map the structures, coping mechanisms and support systems. Identify whom the community turns to when it faces a problem and whom they count on to organize the response.
- Work with the community to identify the strengths and skills of its members, agree on gaps and capacity-building needs.
- Find out the level of participation of women, children, particularly adolescents, and groups with specific needs, including minority groups.
- Invest time and effort in understanding how structures and mechanisms, including traditional justice systems, deal with taboos and individual rights. Discuss issues with leaders to understand why certain groups or individuals are excluded, if any.
- Give feedback on the mapping to the community to validate our findings and cross-check their own perceptions.

2.2. Community-based representation

While it is essential to work with communities through their representative committees, or to support the establishment of new ones, we should remain aware that committees will always develop their own internal dynamics. They might tend to serve the interests of only one part of the community. In addition, a committee elected at the start of an operation might not be so popular or representative of the community ten years later. All committees need to be monitored by the community members and have fair and transparent election processes.

- Regardless of their attitude, never antagonize existing community leaders as this might jeopardize our access to communities or their participation in planned activities. Instead, find way to work with them, seek their support for non-sensitive activities, such as the creation of sports clubs or older persons' groups, to build confidence and gradually expand the dialogue.
- Work with leaders and community members from all backgrounds to identify ways to disseminate information to *everyone* in the community.
- Analyze the ground rules for interaction with all the leaders and committees: how representative they are, who attends meetings, who speaks and who *dares* to question statements.
- Initiate discussions with groups that are neglected or marginalized and seek their views on how they see their integration within the community.
- Identify and highlight community values that support inclusive approaches to show that these are not "alien" concepts but already existing in traditional values.
- Note who in the community can influence traditional leaders and is open to change. Build their leadership and negotiating skills and support them in persuading leaders of the benefits of sub-committees, sub-area representatives, or the inclusion of new members in the existing leadership.
- If this fails or takes time, community mobilization can still take place by involving current leaders in activities and gradually developing a network of "focal points" in the community to create a broader representative base.
- As and when dialogue has reached sufficient maturity, and when IDPs are likely to remain in place for some time, initiate discussions or workshops with the community on governance, including representative and time-limited leadership, and on human rights and gender equality.
- Depending on the receptivity to the subject, determine the right time to encourage volunteers to organize fair elections and invite observers. Support the community in monitoring the process to ensure transparency and prevent intimidation.
- Avoid creating committees for the sake of committees. Work with people to agree on clear goals and ensure that the traditional leaders support the initiative.
- Take into account the constantly changing composition of the community in situations of continued displacement and encourage communities to revalidate the composition of their leadership regularly to reflect these changes.

2.3. Supporting community-based protection responses and solutions

Normally, communities and individuals develop mechanisms to respond to most of the protection issues they face. It is therefore essential to identify these mechanisms and build on them to ensure that they are inclusive and incorporate human rights. It is also important to identify groups that might not be given full attention by the community and might have specific protection problems.

- Work with community members and representatives to learn how the community responds to protection risks facing various groups, such as older persons, different ethnic groups, youths, and persons with mental and physical disabilities. Participatory assessments are a useful way to do so (*see Part III.1*). 📖 Involve those members of the community in analyzing root causes of the risks, and whether these come from within or outside the community.
- Provide support in tackling both internal and external threats through targeted training:
  - Work with community leaders to inform all members about their responsibilities as duty-bearers and as right holders. For example, train special focal points within the population to disseminate information on rights and obligations.
  - Build the capacity of the community to handle procedures for civil documentation, land titling, and compensation. To do so, develop the expertise of selected focal points who will assist their peers and make related information accessible to the public.
  - Encourage direct meetings among the IDP community and external stakeholders involved in mitigating protection risks of durable solutions, including local authorities, police, registrars, and host communities.
- Provide guidance to community members on documenting existing good practices and participatory methods[1] and on how to collect, verify and analyze information on specific protection issues to determine a course of action.[2]
- Keep an open dialogue and agree with the community on the mechanisms that will be established to address identified protection concerns and ensure follow-up and monitoring.
- Generate debates on durable solutions envisaged by the displaced communities. Ensure that all members have access to objective and accurate information on the various options available *(see Parts IV.6 and VI).* 📖
- Provide regular feedback on agencies' interventions, progress and difficulties.

2.4. Working with the community on sensitive issues

A number of protection issues will be highly sensitive within the community as they relate to security, taboos, cultural beliefs, and financial interests. Such issues require caution and should be tackled by experienced staff.

- On the occasion of routine activities and meetings, regularly present and explain the position of humanitarian agencies on human rights and international legal standards.
- Avoid appearing judgmental about community practices; show respect and be culturally sensitive.
- Identify individuals within the community who are open to new ideas, especially among leaders, and explore ways of beginning a constructive dialogue.
- Ensure privacy in meetings of a sensitive nature to enable concerned individuals to speak freely.
- Focus on the reasons behind the issue/practice and discuss this with the community in addition to the consequences and effects of such practices.
- Work with the community to identify small areas for change, such as alternative practices that uphold values or address concerns without violating rights.
- Engage men in issues relating to empowerment and equality of women. Use focus groups to discuss issues such as masculinity or gender-based violence.
- Working with community leaders, organize mass-information campaigns, awareness-raising activities, training, theatre activities with groups of men, women, boys and girls of different age and backgrounds.

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1 Provide examples from other locations and facilitate go-and-see visits, when appropriate.
2 Leave information at the end of any meeting, workshop, etc., so that it can be reviewed and further discussed.

- Involve host communities in these discussions and activities, particularly when they face similar problems or when issues create tensions between the two communities.

2.5. Supporting community action plans and teams

When the community has shown full ownership of the protection-response strategy, it is time to draw up a community action plan, based on the analysis of rights, the prioritization of protection risks and solutions, and the identified needs *(see Part III.1).* 📖

- Ensure that the interests of the different groups, including minority groups and host communities, have been represented, and that children have been consulted in an appropriate manner.[3] If the level of participation remains insufficient, discuss what arrangements will be made to address the outstanding issues or go back to some of the activities under "supporting community-based protection responses and solutions."
- Help the community to articulate its own action plan with clear timeframes, methodologies, division of roles, and needs for assistance to achieve their chosen solution.
- Support flexible and efficient responses through the creation of small **action teams** composed of volunteers and developed around important issues, such as children's rights, the environment, and men's group on HIV/AIDS.
- Use the action teams to emphasize the contributions of each segment of the population, including older persons in charge of day care, literacy and cultural activities, to combat marginalization.
- On sensitive issues, define broader scope for the action team, such as an "education team" to review more general issues but also monitor drop-out rates, recruitment or GBV risks.
- Facilitate joint planning and actions between IDPs or former IDPs and their surrounding communities to facilitate integration and foster good relations. These could include organizing a documentation exercise to issue identity cards for all communities in the area or set up a joint vocational training centre or a reforestation project.
- Use representative committees and action teams established during displacement as key catalysts to rebuild communities in return or new settlement areas.
- Support self-reliance strategies as essential for all affected communities to regain stability and confidence in the future *(see Part V.16).* 📖

2.6. Facilitating discussions (For more advice, *see Annex to this Guidance Note*): 📖

Different methods are appropriate in different contexts.
- Focus groups are useful for exploring group responses to a topic of common concern, but may be inappropriate for sensitive topics, such as GBV.
- Semi-structured discussions or discussions at an individual or household level are appropriate for obtaining more personal, detailed information and analyzing problems that will not easily emerge in a group discussion.
- Using different methods at different times will elicit various perspectives on protection risks and provide an opportunity to cross-check the reliability of the information and confirm an understanding of the situation.

2.7. Community-based monitoring and evaluation

The community should directly monitor the impact of activities implemented by themselves and by humanitarian agencies on their behalf. This will reinforce their sense of ownership and confidence over achieved results. It will also help quickly identify and address problems in implementation that otherwise might create tensions.
- Work with leaders to agree on effective monitoring systems by the community and develop an inter-agency monitoring system in addition.

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[3] See Annex on communicating with children.

- Continuously monitor and identify emerging protection needs and concerns. Prioritize and incorporate the required response in the overall plan of action.
- Undertake regular participatory evaluations using focus groups and other methods. Keep evaluation tools simple and ensure participation of all groups.
- Build on previously agreed plans and findings of participatory assessments to note progress and identify weaknesses.
- Agree with the community on the adjustments or remedial measures needed to address weaknesses and fill gaps and jointly assess the impact of such measures over time.
- Discuss attitudinal changes among teams or sub-groups within communities on the basis of their level of initiative over a period of time, autonomy, and assertiveness in interventions.
- Ensure that all staff wears individual identification so that their attitudes and quality of services can be monitored and evaluated by persons of concern.
- Follow up and share outcomes of evaluations with the community. Document learning and achievements and ensure it is shared among all agencies.

3. Challenges

Community mobilization is a long-term process. It takes time, skills and resources for humanitarian agencies to build a strong working relationship with IDPs. IDPs are often scattered over large areas and can easily become "invisible" in the care of host families or in urban settings. The humanitarian community needs to commit itself, from the beginning of an operation, to engage in a partnership with persons of concern and to ensure that they participate in activities that affect their lives.

Affected communities do not necessarily know the difference between one agency and another. While respecting each other's mandate, coordination among the different agencies in order to "speak with one voice" and to decide on key principles for how to engage with the community, is essential. Agencies referring to different leadership structures or setting up parallel channels risk undermining the work of partners and creating confusion within the community. Agencies should use and build on community groups and action teams established through community-mobilization programmes to benefit from their understanding of key protection issues and reinforce their legitimacy.

In highly politicized and volatile situations, IDPs may be reluctant to be identified as "community leaders," as this might expose them to security risks. Action teams represent a more informal and less sensitive approach for members of the community to act on their community's behalf.

Resources

- *A community-based Approach in UNHCR Operations*, Provisional Release, UNHCR 2007
- *Participation by Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action: Practitioners' Handbook*, Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, 2003.
- *Tools for Community Participation: A Manual for Training Trainers in Participatory Techniques*, L. Srinivasan PROWWESS, UNDP, New York, 1990.
- "Reinforcing a Community Development Approach," UNHCR, EC/51/SC/CRP.6, 15 February 2001.

Useful Websites

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: **www.fao.org/Participation**
- United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF): **www.unicef.org**
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM): **www.unifem.org**
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): **www.unhcr.org**
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): **www.unfpa.org**
- Women's Commission: **www.womenscomission.org**

Part IV – 10

Annex: Discussing the issue

Communicating with adults:

- Meet with women, men, boys and girls from different ages and backgrounds in order to allow them to freely express themselves and to ensure that protection risks specific to a certain age and/or gender group become visible.

- Inform the group in advance that you would like to talk to them and ask for a suitable time to ensure that they do not have to take time away from household tasks or income-generating activities. Be on time!

- Ensure that the leaders in the community are aware that the meeting is taking place.

- Make sure that you have enough time for the meeting and that you are assembling in a private area so that individuals feel relaxed and can express their concerns without worrying that others are listening.

- If, in a focus group, a person raises a sensitive issue, it is often best to follow-up separately in a one-to-one setting with that person.

- During the discussion:

  - Introduce yourself and explain why their participation is important, that participating is voluntary, what will happen with the information, the importance of confidentiality, and how the participants will receive feedback afterwards;
  - At the beginning of the meeting, introduce themes that are neutral and of common concern as a way to start the discussion;
  - Ask open questions such as how, what, where, why as much as possible, especially to clarify or confirm understanding. Do not judge people who speak: accept what they say;
  - Avoid using leading statements and questions;
  - Avoid dominating the discussion; ask simple questions and only one question at a time;
  - Ensure that everybody in the group get a chance to talk. Be sensitive to cultural norms so that nobody feels rushed or excluded. Be aware of persons dominating within the group; and
  - Steer the group towards analyzing the causes of the risks, the skills they have at their disposal to resolve their problems, and the role of the community in developing solutions.

Communicating with children:[4]

Children and young people should always be included in participatory assessments. Girls and boys have needs and abilities that are significantly different from those of adults. It is essential to ensure that each child is participating in the assessment voluntarily and that parents have given permission for younger children to participate. Communicating with children has some particular requirements, including:

- Try to be at ease with children, engaging with them in whatever style of communication suits the individual, such as by sitting on the ground, through play, going for a walk, and tolerating expressions of distress and/or aggression;
- Use simple language and concepts appropriate to the children's age, stage of development, and culture;
- Accept that children who have had distressing experiences might find it extremely difficult to trust an unfamiliar adult. It might take time and patience before a child has enough trust to communicate openly;
- Understand that children might view their situation in distinctly different ways from adults: children might fantasize, invent explanations for unfamiliar or frightening events, express themselves in symbolic ways, or emphasize issues that might seem unimportant to adults;
- Be sensitive to gender, culture, ethics, and the power relations between adults and children; and
- Encourage the involvement of colleagues/partner staff who are familiar with working with children in a participatory way.

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[4]   The following list is taken from UNHCR's *Tool for Participatory Assessment*, 2006, page 34.