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The context, concepts and guiding principles

This section outlines the context in which we work, defines a community-based approach, explains its relevance to UNHCR operations and highlights the underlying principles that should guide our interventions.

2.1 The context

UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection to persons of concern. Protection, which includes physical security and the restoration of human dignity, involves supporting communities to rebuild their social structures, realize their rights, and find durable solutions. Protection encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring that women, girls, boys and men of all ages and backgrounds have equal access to and can enjoy their rights in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, including international refugee law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.[5]

Forced displacement affects women, girls, boys and men in both similar and different ways. The immediate trauma and disruption can lead to a sense of confusion, insecurity and isolation, usually in a strange and sometimes hostile environment, that can be exacerbated when individuals have been subjected to or witnessed violent incidents. Social, economic and cultural changes that result from violent displacement, combined with sepa-

ration or loss of family members, community ties, personal belongings and material resources might contribute to or create protection risks and severe emotional stress. The protection risks and levels of distress will vary, depending on a wide range of factors, including the age, sex and background of the affected persons. For example, women and girls are traditionally less likely than men and boys to be able to exercise their fundamental rights and have access to food, health care, shelter, documentation and material resources. Often, they do not participate in decision-making processes. In addition, women and girls, including women with disabilities and older women, are more likely than boys and men to be subject to sexual and gender-based violence. Groups or persons with specific needs, such as unaccompanied and separated children and persons with mental disabilities might be marginalized and easily exploited, particularly in the emergency phase.

Yet people have remarkable coping capacities, even under extreme circumstances. In a relatively short period, community structures reappear or new ones are formed as people begin to rebuild their lives and provide for and protect their families and dependents. It is important to identify and understand these capacities and coping mechanisms when applying a community-based approach. It is also important to be aware of the broader political context, to recognize and understand changes in roles and power relations between women and men, young and old, and majority and minority groups, and to work with leaders and all members of the community to ensure respect for rights and equality. This will help ensure that our interventions do not undermine community structures which can provide protection and support. At the same time, new community dynamics will provide opportunities for strengthening representative and fair structures. In working closely with the community, we become better informed about the protection risks faced by different groups, depending on their age, gender and background (diversity).[6] Collaboration with government, national and international non-governmental partners is also essential when using a rights and community-based approach to provide protection and assist persons of concern in claiming their rights.

Ten changes to look out for during displacement

✓ Changes in family structure: With loss of or separation from family members, older persons might assume responsibility for their grandchildren in "grandparent-headed households"; adolescents might become sole carers of younger siblings; women or men might become single heads-of-families.

✓ Changes in access to services: In urban settings, refugees and internally displaced persons can find themselves without a "community" or support network and face isolation, discrimination, and language barriers; stateless persons might be unable to access documentation or education; returnees might have lost property and access to health care or education.

✓ Changes in status of older persons: Older persons might be marginalized if their traditional sources of power, such as community respect, control over land and property, or a leadership role in resolving disputes, are undermined.

✓ Changes in support systems: Frail older persons, persons with disabilities and unaccompanied and separated children who have lost traditional support from family and neighbours might be left out of food distribution and other essential services.

✓ Changes in risk of abuse: Persons with disabilities can be at higher risk of sexual abuse if they have lost family support. Unaccompanied and separated children might be subject to abuse and exploitation and/or military recruitment.

✓ Changes in the role of women: Women who have lost male relatives may be unable to move freely and access humanitarian workers and assistance.

✓ Changes in the role of men: Men who traditionally derived their status from providing for their families might experience low self-esteem and loss of control.

✓ Changes in social roles: Individuals can lose or gain power, become marginalized, or become isolated, and thus be subject to different protection risks.

✓ Changes in participation: By only focusing on those who can speak our language, we might undermine traditional leadership roles and inadvertently exclude those who do not find it easy to communicate with us.

✓ Changes in leadership: New leaders might be created based on control over resources or arms, information, or political affiliation. This can have a negative impact on the community.

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2.2 What is a community-based approach?

2.2.1 Community

"Community" can be described as a group of people that recognizes itself or is recognized by outsiders as sharing common cultural, religious or other social features, backgrounds and interests, and that forms a collective identity with shared goals. However, what is externally perceived as a community might in fact be an entity with many sub-groups or communities. It might be divided into clans or castes or by social class, language or religion. A community might be inclusive and protective of its members; but it might also be socially controlling, making it difficult for sub-groups, particularly minorities and marginalized groups, to express their opinions and claim their rights.

Refugees and displaced persons living in temporary "communities" often have different nationalities, religions, languages, ethnicity, and backgrounds, and do not perceive themselves as belonging to any community. Whether they live in camps, in transit and reception centres, or in urban dwellings, lack of economic options, restrictions on freedom of movement and/or imposed decisions on accommodation often dictate who their next-door neighbours will be. In some urban situations, internally displaced persons might prefer to keep their identities hidden, thus making it difficult to contact members of informal groups and mobilize people around common problems. In other instances, displaced persons living in urban areas might have assimilated well into existing sub-groups and may not need support. Working with displaced persons requires learning about members of the host community, who are also stakeholders, and addressing their concerns whenever feasible.

2.2.2 A community-based approach

A community-based approach is a way of working in partnership with persons of concern during all stages of UNHCR's programme cycle. It recognizes the resilience,[7] capacities, skills and resources of persons of concern, builds on these to deliver protection and solutions, and supports the community's own goals. The approach is not limited to a particular function or sector of work; it should guide all UNHCR staff and partners in

their work with persons of concern. It demands that we understand and consider the political context, the receiving population, gender roles, community dynamics, and protection risks, concerns and priorities. It also requires that we recognize our role as facilitators, our limitations in capacity and resources, the temporary nature of our presence, and the long-term impact of our interventions.

A community-based approach can help communities work to prevent social problems and to deal directly with those that do arise, instead of having external actors step in and assume these responsibilities. It supports persons of concern in re-establishing familiar cultural patterns and support structures. Indeed, the goals of the community-based approach are to reinforce the dignity and self-esteem of people of concern and to empower all the actors[8] to work together to support the different members of the community in exercising and enjoying their human rights.

An Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) working-group paper, *Community-based Protection in Somalia*,[9] highlights some of the difficulties in adopting a community-based approach. Ideally, the community freely defines its priorities. But our responsibility to respect individual human rights and the goals of our agencies might not coincide with community practices or priorities. UNHCR and partner staff must therefore work with the community to find ways to respond to the priorities of the community and uphold our mandate to protect all of its members and respect individuals' rights. In our daily work, this can mean introducing new practices, such as vaccinating children, educating girls, creating mechanisms for the fair distribution of food and assistance items, encouraging women to participate in decision-making processes, and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. We must be open and transparent about our goals, obligations and responsibilities, listen carefully to community members, and build mutual understanding. As UNHCR's mandate is to ensure the protection of *all* members of the community, these considerations are paramount, and the guiding principles outlined below should be the foundation of all of our work.

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2.3 Guiding principles

2.3.1 A rights-based approach[10]

A rights-based approach is a *conceptual framework*[11] that integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the policies, programmes and processes of development and humanitarian actors. It therefore focuses on both procedures and outcomes.

> *One of the most important roles of … organization [s] is to support rights-holders to claim their rights. This requires major shifts in the way many agencies are working. Rather than delivering services and doing advocacy work on behalf of poor and disadvantaged people, a rights-based approach requires organizations to support people to demand what they are entitled to. … A rights-based approach demands that agencies work together to support broad processes of change in society. Supporting participatory processes that bring together government and civil society is one of the most effective ways to change relationships between rights-holders and duty-bearers.*
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> *Joachim Theis, "Challenges for a Rights-based Approach," in Children's Rights Information Newsletter, No. 18, March 2005, p. 28.*

A rights-based approach is founded on the principles of *participation* and *empowering individuals and communities* to promote change and enable them to exercise their rights and comply with their duties. It identifies rights-holders (women, girls, boys and men of concern) and duty-bearers (principally the State and its agents), and seeks to strengthen the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims and of duty-bearers to satisfy those claims. This requires an attitudinal shift in how we work with and for persons of concern: They are no longer viewed as beneficiaries of aid, but as rights-holders with legal entitlements.

Needs-based Approach[12]	Rights-based Approach
Deserving	Claim and entitlement
No one has definite obligations	Clear obligations
Receiving – beneficiaries	Active participation - partners
Some are left out	Equal rights for all
Charitable and voluntary	Mandatory, legal obligation and accountability
Addresses symptoms	Addresses causes

Thus, a community-based approach is integral to a rights-based approach as they are founded on common principles and goals.[13] The dual approach requires that our policies, programmes and activities be based on international legal standards, and that members and leaders of the community consider their roles as both rights-holders and duty-bearers. It is important to analyze, with all actors, the obstacles to exercising these responsibilities and ways to overcome them. For example, States have a duty to provide education for children, while parents have a responsibility to encourage their children to attend school, providing that they have access to schools and the means to support their attendance. In 2007, UNHCR's Executive Committee affirmed that a rights-based approach was fundamental to child protection.[14] A rights-based approach also requires that national legislation affecting displaced persons be reviewed. If necessary, UNHCR and partners may have to advocate for change so that such legislation conforms to human rights instruments.

2.3.2 Meaningful participation

"Participation" refers to the full and equal involvement of all members of the community in decision-making processes and activities that affect their lives, in both public and private spheres. The level of participation will depend upon how rewarding people find the experience and whether they gain something from the process. Participation also requires that instead of "informing and deciding for people," we listen to them. Our role is to facilitate discussions and analysis with persons of concern so that they can identify their own priorities and preferred outcomes.[15]

Participation :

- is a right, and essential for informed decision-making;

- promotes protection and reduces feelings of powerlessness;

- enables UNHCR to draw on the insights, knowledge, capacities, skills and resources of persons of concern;

- empowers women, men, girls and boys of different backgrounds to rebuild self-esteem and self-confidence; and

- helps people of concern cope with the trauma of forced displacement.

> ### *Overcoming exclusion in Chad*
> *In Chad, one group of refugees, the blacksmiths, were considered by the other refugees to be from a lower class. They were excluded from decision-making processes and were not even allowed to participate in gatherings organized by the community leaders. Humanitarian workers helped the blacksmiths organize themselves and resume work. They quickly became one of the first groups to be productive and generate income. Visitors to the camp were encouraged to meet them, and as the community leaders accompanied the visitors, they began to discover the value of the group's work. Community leaders then encouraged the blacksmiths to come to community meetings, which gradually led to their direct participation in camp-leadership discussions.*

Without broad participation, only a few will decide for all, and those few might control information and resources. This can lead to abuse of power, including among refugees. Meaningful participation by all will often require special efforts to ensure that those traditionally marginalized, such as women, children,[16] older persons, persons with disabilities and minority groups, are given support and specific opportunities to contribute. It might also be necessary to work with traditional leaders to encourage their active support. This is essential for avoiding token participation and failure, which reinforces marginalization and discrimination. In some settings, particularly in IDP contexts, some persons of concern might be unable or unwilling to freely express themselves in the presence of authorities.

A number of international legal standards emphasize the importance of the right to participate, particularly for women and children.[17] This right is closely linked to the right to information: People must have opportunities to ask questions about their rights and, if necessary, to challenge the content and help determine what and how information is disseminated.

Sonke Gender Justice, a South African NGO, has worked to empower persons with HIV/AIDS by teaching them about the consequences of the disease and about which medication is appropriate for each person. The objective is to ensure that people can exercise their right to adequate medical care. As a result, affected individuals felt empowered to ask for the correct medication, and doctors became more accountable for their services.

Participation is sometimes regarded narrowly as a method of improving project performance, rather than a way of fostering critical consciousness as the basis for active citizenship.[18] Through effective participation, the community can support its own self-initiated activities to meet its preferred goals.[19] In addition, active participation by women, girls, boys and men of all ages and diverse backgrounds is essential for effective protection planning. For further guidance on how to undertake participatory assessments, refer to *The UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations* (UNHCR, 2006) and Section 3.1.4 below.

2.3.3 Age, gender and diversity analysis

An integral part of a rights- and community-based approach is analyzing the different realities people face because of their **age**, their **gender**, and their **diversity**, which relates to ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation, among other factors. Too often, a failure to consider the particular circumstances of each group has led to actions that have unintentionally resulted in further exclusion and discrimination. UNHCR thus adopts a two-pronged approach to promoting gender equality and rights for all: age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM), and targeted action. This means that age, gender and diversity issues are analyzed and incorporated into all areas of our work; and when the analysis indicates

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that inequalities exist, targeted actions are implemented to empower those who are being discriminated against to exercise their rights.

2.3.4 Empowerment

Power can be defined as the capacity to make informed choices and have the freedom to take action. Empowerment is not something that is "done" to people; it is the process by which individuals in the community analyze their situation, enhance their knowledge and resources, strengthen their capacity to claim their rights, and take action to achieve their goals.[20] At the same time, their capacities and skills are recognized by others. Empowerment requires change at the individual and structural levels.

In all societies, there are some people who are more powerful than others because of age, gender roles, ethnicity, political affiliation, economic situation, or other reasons. During displacement, power relations shift. Sometimes those who had previously been excluded suddenly have an opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes. These various changes must be analyzed and understood.

Power relations between men and women are often based on gender roles, some of which might limit individuals' capacities to enjoy their rights. For example, some men are taught that, to behave "as a man," one has to be authoritarian and even use violence as a means of control. This can be a restrictive and negative experience, particularly if the men feel that they have to suppress their emotions, use force to command respect, and maintain a distant relationship with their children. Exploring the origins of that image of masculinity can provide an opportunity for discussing gender roles and power relations.[21] These same dynamics may well influence how traditional leaders interact in the community, the expectations and frustrations of youth, and how traditional justice systems rule on such matters as domestic violence, divorce and women's behaviour. Women will help sustain such systems if they believe that this is what "makes a man." Therefore, any changes in gender roles will require that women and men discuss how they would like to relate to each other and how this can benefit the family and the community.

Another important power relationship is that between humanitarian actors, including government partners, and the community members who rely on them to ensure appropriate use of resources. We are responsible for creating a climate of trust through our behaviour and our attitudes. UNHCR's Code of Conduct provides clear guidance in this respect, and Section 4 contains some guidance on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that should be encouraged to facilitate partnership.

Community empowerment can also result in the empowerment of humanitarian workers. Instead of working in an atmosphere of seeming mutual dependence, with the sometimes overwhelming feeling of impotence in the face of enormous challenges,[22] humanitarian workers can be more realistic about their limited roles. Recognizing the capacities of members of the community will foster a more constructive relationship, based on mutual respect, with persons of concern. In turn, UNHCR staff and partners will become more effective in delivering protection and supporting solutions.

2.3.5 Ownership, solutions and sustainability

Ownership is achieved when persons of concern assume full responsibility for the continuation of the work and manage the activities and services that they consider priorities. It is the natural outcome of a process that has respected the principles of meaningful participation and empowerment. Support and assistance from external actors might still be required, however, because of an absence of resources or opportunities.

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Older persons take action

In Costa Rica, the "Amigos de Oro" (the golden friends) group was created to provide an inclusive and friendly forum for older refugees to share their feelings, ideas and experiences regarding their displacement in December 2005. This group has now grown to include more than 35 older refugees. The group, which meets once a month, has identified a worrying lack of social-support networks and other obstacles to achieving self-sufficiency. Although many older refugees are willing to work, employment opportunities are scarce. Older refugees noted their marginalization and emphasized the need to raise awareness about their situation.

The "Amigos de Oro" group is acquiring legal status as an autonomous group so that it is better placed to lobby for support and participate with other organizations. The group plans to create micro-enterprises with a pay-back function so that the association will be self-supporting. The income will then be deposited into a "common fund" to support members who might have urgent needs, including medicines. The micro-enterprises will include handicrafts, sewing and dress-making, and a basic computer-skills course. Activities to support the group's integration into their host society include an event to introduce "Amigos de Oro" to local associations for older persons in Costa Rica.

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Sustainability is the possibility of maintaining the achievements of any support provided to the community to ensure effective protection and solutions. The work will only be sustainable if all partners systematically apply the principles of the community-based approach in the emergency phase and throughout the operation. UNHCR plays a key role in ensuring a consistent approach on which to build sustainability. If, for example, one partner applies a community-based approach in the health sector, but the partner responsible for camp management does not follow the same principles, there will soon be conflicting messages to the community and competition between the agencies. Likewise, if the health authorities are not engaged from the beginning in ensuring a link to the national health system, solutions will be difficult to sustain. In an urban setting, if one agency sets up a centre that provides assistance and cash grants while another fosters the mobilization of the community, it is likely that people will only

visit the agency that provides quick results, and, in the longer term, the capacity of people to protect themselves will not have been strengthened.

Sustainability is about community development: building on the capacities and skills of community members to manage representative and fair structures that can respond to both immediate and long-term protection risks and needs, and to develop solutions while upholding individual rights. Maximum ownership and sustainability are achieved when interventions are responses to community-driven demands.

The support of governments, local authorities and the host community is essential when carrying out an analysis and devising solutions with the displaced community. Their roles, concerns and views should not be overlooked, regardless of any preconceptions regarding the position they will adopt. UNHCR and partners, including other UN agencies, can help bring together local authorities, government partners and the receiving population to overcome differences in attitudes and support the displaced.

2.3.6 Transparency and accountability

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Transparency refers to "the provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organizational procedures, structures and processes to their assessment."[23] It requires informing people of concern and duty-bearers about UNHCR's protection mandate, policies and capacities and being open about what the organization is able to provide and its limitations in human and material resources. Persons of concern can then make informed decisions about what they would like to prioritize and what results they can reasonably expect.

We often collect information from the community and its leaders without clearly stating what the outcomes might be. We may implement activities without checking to see whether the different community members agree to the priorities established. People have a right to understand why we are seeking their participation and what the longer-term results will be. Their participation must be guaranteed throughout the process and not limited to certain aspects defined by us. We should seek regular feedback on the implementation of activities and progress achieved.

Accountability is the process through which an organization makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of different stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment. In providing protection, for example, UNHCR staff and partners must ensure that individuals of concern are able to participate meaningfully, be informed of the protection risks, and monitor the progress made in addressing those risks.[24] Accountability involves raising awareness of rights and responsibilities and developing the capacities of duty-bearers, such as community leaders, local and national authorities, and UNHCR staff and partners, to fulfil their obligations. Duty-bearers should be involved in participatory assessments, including protection-risk analyses, and planning, implementing and monitoring responses.[25] Regarding persons of concern as rights-holders will help make their interactions with UNHCR and other partners more equitable.[26] Accountability also entails being clear about who is responsible for what, particularly as regards the role of the State in providing protection, and what limitations might exist.

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Mechanisms through which people of concern can evaluate our services and attitudes are essential for accountability and empowerment (see section 3.2.7 on Community-based monitoring and evaluation). But an evaluation is not an end in itself. Accountability also implies that an organization is willing to listen to the outcomes of such evaluations, learn from the process, and take action in order to improve.

In May 2007, UNHCR introduced an Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Accountability Framework.[27] Since it defines accountability for senior managers for mainstreaming and targeted action, particularly in facilitating participatory assessments and supporting a rights- and community-based approach, it can help staff in carrying out their responsibilities.

2.4 Why use a rights- and community-based approach?

It builds or strengthens the capacities and autonomy of individuals and communities

- Community members take responsibility for analyzing protection risks and jointly developing protection strategies, assistance responses and solutions.

- It recognizes and supports the ways in which persons of concern protect themselves through their own social networks and community resources while ensuring individual rights.

It promotes respect for rights and the accountability of leadership structures, agencies and States

- Community members see that their systems are recognized, reinforced and respected.

- Persons of concern learn about their rights and can support gradual change through which practices that violate human rights are identified and openly discussed, particularly in relation to women and children.

- It clarifies roles and responsibilities in relation to rights-holders and duty-bearers, including humanitarian agencies and governments.

It underpins age, gender and diversity mainstreaming

- It improves understanding of the relations between women and men, different generations and the diverse groups within the community.

- It requires participation of all groups in decision-making processes and representative structures that respect the rights of individuals.

- It provides for age, gender and diversity analyses of the situation, of protection and programme responses, and for targeted action to address discrimination.

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It improves the quality and effectiveness of UNHCR operations

- UNHCR staff and partners are more likely to be alerted to protection problems in a timely fashion if a relationship of trust is nurtured.

- It ensures that activities are of direct relevance to the communities and will meet their various protection needs. Failing to understand a community and its ways of working can lead to inappropriate interventions that will fail.

- It reduces opportunities for exploitation and abuse.

- It generates an attitudinal change whereby refugees and other displaced persons, rather than external actors, are at the centre of decisions, responses and solutions, and their skills and contributions are recognized.

- It improves UNHCR's accountability to people of concern through participatory monitoring and evaluation.

It provides a basis for sustainable responses and durable solutions

- It improves understanding of the local context and allows the UNHCR operation to be more closely linked with other development initiatives[28] and with government structures.

- It focuses on solutions from the beginning, in partnership with the community, and thus can reduce the potential for protracted displacement situations.

- By involving all members of the community, it leads to greater effectiveness and long-term sustainability of programming.[29]