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Considerations for specific contexts

This section offers guidance on applying a community-based approach in different settings.

The community-based approach can be used in all types of UNHCR operations, since the basic principles and methodology remain the same. However, some specific issues might have to be considered and adaptations might have to be made to the approach, depending on the situation.

5.1 Emergencies

The nature of the emergency will determine the extent of community participation. However, as in other contexts, a significant level of community participation is possible and highly desirable.[70] Quick action is needed to address life-threatening situations, so the time for consultation and negotiation is very short. It is important to balance the time and effort spent on situation analysis, including participatory assessment and community mobilization, with the length of time the results of an assessment will be valid. In an emergency, conditions change all the time, so the situation analysis will require updating.

Take every opportunity to meet persons of concern. Although there may not be time to meet every group, it is vital that a range of representatives

from the whole community is included in the assessments.[71] Do not rely solely on the people who are easier to reach, such as existing leaders or young men who speak the humanitarian workers' language. As often as possible, talk with women, men, boys and girls of different ages and backgrounds to gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation and the persons of concern.

Some tips on working in an emergency

- Through field assessments with people of concern, **map existing agencies, services and community structures**.
- The **security** of those consulted must be carefully considered. Individuals or groups communicating with aid agencies can become the object of resentment or even violence by other individuals or groups. Sources of information should therefore be kept confidential. In IDP contexts, ensure, when working with local authorities, that there are no repercussions on individuals or communities when discussing human rights violations.[72]
- Do not wait to consolidate the **priority needs** of all groups. Start with one group and respond before moving to another. Since the situation is likely to change, assessments should be carried out every three months, if possible, to ensure that activities are planned according to need.
- Work with national and international partners at all times. Coordinate and **avoid over assessment**.
- Early, quick assessments should review **protection risks and human rights violations** prior to and during the emergency. The root causes should be analyzed from an age, gender and diversity perspective with the aim of taking speedy remedial action and avoiding further abuses or displacement.
- Take immediate steps to analyze, with the community, the particular protection risks facing women and girls, and ways to **prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence**.[73]
- **Visit people** in their shelters/homes. Make time to listen to people.
- **Establish fixed points** where staff can make themselves available at regular times to gather information on groups with specific needs, answer questions and/or provide counselling.

- Quickly identify a team within the community that is able and willing to **organize community support** for those with specific needs.
- Set up community-based systems, upholding respect for individual rights, to identify and **provide protection and care for groups with specific needs**, such as older persons, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied and separated children.
- Take immediate action to **prevent family separation**, reunite families if possible and initiate family-reunification procedures.
- Set up a mechanism for identifying, with the community, groups who are at **heightened risk**.
- Establish an **individual case-management system** for all persons identified as being at heightened risk, track follow up and monitor the individuals.
- Working with the community, **develop an information and communication mechanism** to ensure that everyone, including older women, persons with disabilities and other potentially marginalized groups, have access to information on assistance and other issues. Post notices in places where people are likely to meet, such as the water-collection point, the community centre, registration points or wherever assistance is being distributed.
- Avoid establishing patterns of behaviour or relationships during the emergency that might be difficult to change later on. Instead, **make temporary arrangements** that are reviewed regularly. Make sure that people are aware that any arrangements made in an emergency situation might change later.
- Establish specific **emergency-response plans** with partners and the community.
- Where persons of concern are struggling to survive, UNHCR and partner agencies have a great deal of power, since they are seen as a lifeline. This can distort relations between people of concern and the humanitarian agencies, since people may be reluctant to raise complaints about or disagree with activities that are implemented. **Think about the future** and consider the long-term implications of all decisions.

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Participation in emergencies

When the UNHCR emergency team reached Galkayo, Somalia, in January 2007, it was the first time an international agency had been present on the ground for some time. As this was an emergency and an IDP operation, participatory assessment was adapted to the specific context.

Since UNHCR needed to work with other agencies, the emergency team proposed to complement an IDP profiling exercise that was being rolled out by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) with a participatory assessment. By combining the two methodologies, an in-depth understanding of the situation would be obtained.

As UNHCR and DRC had limited staff on the ground, it was difficult to apply the multifunctional-team approach. Instead, a team was recruited locally and trained to do the assessment. Since the political context was highly sensitive, it was decided that "local authorities" would not be included in the focus group discussions, as the IDPs would not have felt safe or free to express all their concerns.

Relations among the different IDP sub-groups were particularly complicated, given the power structures, group-protection systems and clan differences, so IDP committees were consulted separately in order to distinguish the members of the committees from the rest of the community. Because of time and security constraints, only three age groups of each sex were covered in the initial consultation.

5.2 Urban situations

It can be difficult to apply a community-based approach in urban areas, since persons of concern are often dispersed over a wide area, and groups or individuals with specific needs are more difficult to reach and can be easily neglected. In most urban areas, persons of concern are often a mix of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants, and are sometimes illegally in the country. Often, people do not come forward to seek assistance, since they may still have some resources, they may be unaware of existing services, they might be uncertain of their rights and/or they might fear being sent back to their country of origin.

Refugees, asylum-seekers or IDPs who live in urban areas are susceptible to a variety of protection problems and threats particular to urban settings. Women and girls are often exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, trafficking, labour exploitation and drugs, and might resort to survival sex. Persons of concern, including single women and female-headed households, often have problems acquiring housing and can be at risk of various forms of exploitation and abuse from landlords.[74] Urban programmes may attract a higher number of young men and should be developed appropriately. Dynamics among urban refugees or IDPs can influence relations with the host community and vice versa. Facilitating the development of a refugee or IDP community network might help reduce social isolation and establish mutual support between the hosts and the refugees.

Some tips on working in urban situations

- **Map people's locations** and which agencies, both government and non-governmental, are providing particular services in each region.
- **Provide information** so that refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and returnees become aware of their rights, obligations, restrictions and opportunities, and of how UNHCR can support access to basic services and support them in claiming their rights.
- **Reduce the sense of isolation** among persons of concern by supporting local-language teaching, and creating informal meeting places.
- **Encourage the formation of interest groups**, such as traders' groups, parents' groups childcare groups, and solidarity groups to assist newcomers. Involve the local community and civil society in joint projects with refugees and displaced communities.
- Make sure that **meeting places**, such as community centres or other activities, are located in neutral geographical areas so that groups of all backgrounds feel comfortable attending.
- **Encourage better relationships with host communities** in order to change the perception of refugees, IDPs or returnees as a threat to the local economy and the stability of the host community. Identify and work with local community based associations.
- **Identify partners and institutions** that are working in the area, and promote cooperation between the different actors and service

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providers. The situation of persons of concern should be addressed in the context of the wider population whenever possible.

■ **Decentralize services** for areas hosting greater numbers of refugees and IDPs to minimize transportation costs and use hot lines to disseminate information.

The UNHCR office in Nairobi revitalized its urban programme by introducing a community-based approach. The approach includes:

- *Inviting refugee communities to participate in the planning and implementation of programmes.* *Instead of focusing on leaders who tend to hold political agendas, UNHCR cultivates relationships with community organizers and self-help groups who help the multifunctional team conduct participatory assessments.*

- *Enhancing our knowledge of the refugee community by gathering information from multiple sources.* *The office acquires information through regular inter-agency meetings with NGO staff and participatory assessments. Various legal, social and economic indicators from the country of asylum and countries of origin are compared against UNHCR data to identify disparities.*

- *Using ProGres to strengthen individual case management.* *Without effective individual case management, UNHCR cannot build the trust of other agencies and refugee communities. Staff in the Nairobi office use ProGres to record and prioritize individual cases, which allows for quick identification of persons at high risk and swift action on their behalf. Since all units in the office record information in ProGres, it is easy to share information.*

Protection Responses:
- *Developing community-based protection responses.* *One activity involves providing paralegal training to refugees who are active in their communities. With a greater knowledge of Kenyan law and institutions, they will be able to provide basic legal assistance and advocate for their community.*

- *Providing community outreach.* *Different implementing partners deploy specialized workers among the refugee community. Some provide health care to women and children, some offer training and literary*

programmes for refugees who earn their livelihoods as domestic workers, and one female lawyer conducts a weekly legal aid clinic in the refugee neighbourhood, which is particularly useful for refugee women who may not have the time or money to travel across town to seek legal assistance.

- *Disseminating protection information among refugees.* Analyzing information provided by refugees about where they live and where they have faced protection problems, such as the location of a crime or detention, and using a GIS map, the office can not only better target services to refugees, but can also advise refugees about places to avoid for their own security.

- *Promoting refugees' access to public services.* UNHCR, an NGO partner and the City Council's Health Department established a programme through which refugees in one neighbourhood receive low-cost medical services on an equal basis with the host community. UNHCR also worked with the City Education Department, NGOs, and refugee communities to enroll refugee children in the city's free public primary schools.

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- *Training government officials.* The office trains police trainers, judges, children's officers, and members of the provincial administration in refugee law and refugees' lives. As a first step toward developing a community-based approach in the Refugee Affairs Department, one government official is based part-time at the UNHCR office and has started participating in outreach activities.

Supporting the development of refugee communities. UNHCR launched a competition for small, capacity-building grants for self-help groups and community-based organizations. In 2006, 12 groups received support. In collaboration with other agencies, UNHCR is providing a series of training sessions for small self-help groups to develop skills in community mobilization and organization.

5.3 Return and reintegration

The planning and realization of repatriation are usually governed by tri-partite agreements among UNHCR, host States and the country of origin. As repatriation often involves delicate negotiations, it might be difficult to include refugees fully in the process. However, their views, collected through the community-based approach, should form an integral part of the discussions with governments, especially during peace negotiations. UNHCR should promote and support the meaningful participation of women[75] and youth in negotiations.

Members of the returning population might find it difficult to integrate into their old society in their country of origin. Social structures may have changed and differences in values might emerge between those who moved and those who remained. Repatriation will require a careful and detailed situation analysis comparing the situation in the country of origin with that of exile, including analysis of demographic data disaggregated by age and sex, educational and skills profiles acquired before and during exile, job opportunities and skills required in the country of origin, and membership of social groups. The community-based approach will help identify the protection risks, needs and interests of both local and returnee populations so that trust can be rebuilt and a strong community can develop.[76]

> In 2006, at a conference in Oslo, returnee Sudanese women expressed their concern that young women who were returning from the refugee camps would be perceived by the receiving communities as "promiscuous" and carriers of new problems, such as HIV/ADIS, because of their different experiences and new ways of dressing.

Reintegration is a process that requires the active involvement of communities and a comprehensive understanding by UNHCR staff and partners of the new realities a community finds on its return. Returning refugees or internally displaced persons are considered to be of concern to UNHCR until minimum national protection mechanisms are in place to ensure the sustainability of return. UNHCR's role is to facilitate the reintegration process by working with the community, the national authorities and other actors to support the re-establishment of national protection mech-

anisms. In particular, UNHCR should promote the active participation of returnees and women, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, in recovery and transition processes. It is important to apply the community-based approach at this stage so that the repatriation or return can be successful and sustainable.

Some tips on assisting a repatriation/return

- Ensure, through participatory assessments, that people of concern are repatriating **voluntarily** and that each adult signs a form declaring that this is so.
- Identify any groups, movements or individuals within the refugee or IDP community that might have the **power to influence**, for their own benefit, decisions over whether or not to return or repatriate.
- Work with the authorities in areas of return to **prepare the community for receiving the returning groups**. Facilitate dialogue among returnees, the receiving community and authorities. Whenever possible, set up "go-and-see" visits, ensuring that women and men of all ages and backgrounds are included.
- Working with the different members of the potential returnee community, especially youth, develop ways to **share information** about the situation in returnee areas and to present their main concerns to national authorities.
- Bring the receiving community and returnees together to identify what capacities and skills each group has and which can be of benefit in developing **coordinated projects**.
- Since UNHCR has an important advocacy role to play, **foster cooperation** between humanitarian actors involved in the repatriation operation and the development agencies, including government departments, responsible for sustainable development and reintegration.

Some tips on assisting reintegration

- **Include developmental actors** from the beginning in planning return and reintegration activities, and promote a community-based approach. Coordinate with them to ensure that areas of return are targeted and that the programmes of the different partners are consistent and do not duplicate each other.

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- Conduct common **inter-agency situation analyses** and assessments in the context of government recovery efforts.
- Promote efforts to **foster confidence-building**, **coexistence and reconciliation**, such as inter-community bus lines,[77] women's initiatives and other community-based coexistence projects.
- Ensure that any Quick Impact Projects are subject to a participatory assessment process. **Avoid pre-determined menus of projects** that limit people's options. Think about livelihood strategies early on.
- When considering **property restitution and land allocation**, be aware of the impact on the rights of women and unaccompanied and separated children.
- Identify and strengthen the capacities of the national society, especially through community-based organizations, to assume **ownership of the community-based approach** in return areas.
- Introduce projects to **reduce conflict and tension**, especially among youth, and to encourage positive communication and foster a community spirit.
- Support the development of **a broader recovery strategy** that integrates returnee communities.

5.4 Internally displaced persons

UNHCR is fully committed to working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) as outlined in its IDP protection policy paper.[78] In certain contexts, UNHCR's role with IDPs is governed by the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) "cluster approach," which aims to improve coordination among the different UN agencies and other partners to ensure predictability, accountability and effectiveness. In conflict-induced IDP situations, UNHCR is committed to taking the lead in three areas – protection, shelter and camp management – and applying a community-based approach.[79]

A community-based approach is also the guiding principle of the cluster approach, as outlined in the 2006 IASC paper, "Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response." The approach also forms a part of the terms of reference for IASC sector-leads at the country level. Even in an IDP setting, where there is no formal cluster arrange-

ment, UNHCR is committed to working in coordination with other agencies and using a community-based approach.

An IDP operation often takes place in a sensitive political context or in unstable areas with security concerns for everyone involved. There can be widespread distrust among national and local actors. Sometimes, the government's actions caused the displacement, yet the authorities must be consulted and engaged in the humanitarian response, and some form of coordination mechanism must be established. IDPs are often dispersed over vast areas and often stay with host families rather than in camps. Thus there are specific protection concerns for both IDPs and host families. People might also be persecuted and pursued in their area of displacement, and public interaction with external agencies might not be in their best interests. Staff working in operations in Chad and North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, have noted limitations to using a community-based approach because of the insecure environments. Each context will require an evaluation with the different stakeholders, including the community, to see what is feasible and how much can be done.

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On the other hand, IDPs may not be restricted in their movements, as many refugees are, and, as nationals, they are entitled to work. As a result, there may be many opportunities for them to re-establish themselves, provided that their physical safety is not threatened and the economic situation is reasonable. Supporting community-based organizations might be more feasible in IDP situations, but the security situation will often determine what is possible.

UNHCR interventions for older persons of concern in Colombia focus on promoting and strengthening their capacity within displaced organizations to ensure that they participate in formulating age- and gender-sensitive public policies and income-generating projects for older persons.
As a result:

■ *A technical working group on older citizens, organized by the Ministry of Social Welfare, included the rights and concerns of older IDPs on the agenda.*

■ *Some 4,800 older displaced persons benefited from the national registration programme.*

■ *The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, with UNHCR support, prioritized older displaced persons in its socialization programme for the older Colombian population.*

■ *In Apartadó, in northern Colombia, some 280 older displaced persons (100 men and 180 women) benefited from an income-generating project.*

An NGO, A.R.T. (Art for Refugees in Transition), started a project called "Recapturing cultural identity through the arts" to rebuild inter-generational relationships. The project was designed to enable older people to teach younger generations about their traditions and culture in order to keep both alive.

Some tips on working with internally displaced persons

■ A **rights- and community-based approach** should guide the cluster work and our activities on the ground.

■ **Participatory assessment** is a crucial first step to bringing the views of the IDPs and their representatives to the attention of the cluster. Cluster leads should ensure that all groups participate, that age, gender and diversity analyses are conducted in all areas, and that multi-agency teamwork is promoted.

■ Before any assessment is undertaken, **check to see what** *participatory* **assessments have already been conducted** and determine whether another one is needed, or if it is only necessary to focus on certain groups of the population that might not have had an opportunity to speak. Be clear about the purpose and explain it well.

■ The **security** of persons of concern must be carefully considered. People should be informed in advance if the local authorities are participating. It must be made clear that this is a voluntary exercise.

- National partners (government, non-governmental and civil society) are of particular importance in IDP settings. UNHCR and its partners must develop common capacity-building strategies and **promote ownership by national actors**.

- If there are security problems, it might be best to **focus on ministries that are less related to security**, such as health, education and family welfare, and local non-governmental organizations and local associations, including human rights bodies. Consult separately with IDPs and then meet with authorities.

- Where people are in urban settings or scattered, focus on **community-based and church organizations** to find out where people meet.

- Ensure participatory assessment is undertaken with **host communities** and include their needs in responses as far as possible.

- **Authorities need to be involved** and consulted, and a rights-based framework should be used for planning. This might be difficult if a government is implicated in the causes of displacement. Flexibility will be important.

- Information on **service delivery** by authorities should be verified to ensure that services, such as access to education and school curricula, are non-discriminatory.

- Monitor the situation of IDPs with **host families** to ensure that the relationship between them does not become exploitative. Host families should be supported and included in any activities targeting IDPs, including participatory assessments.

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