

KEY CONSIDERATION 1:

Principles of Community-level Child Protection



Child protection in humanitarian action is guided by a set of principles that apply to all actions undertaken for the prevention of and response to CP violations. They are outlined in the CPMS.

1. Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions.
1. Ensure people's access to impartial assistance.
2. Protect people for physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion.
3. Assist people in claiming their rights, accessing available remedies, and recovering from the effects of abuse
4. Strengthen CP systems
5. Strengthen children's resilience in humanitarian action

Key principles of CCP emphasize:

- Context sensitivity and deep context analysis
- Broad representation and inclusivity, especially engaging particularly vulnerable children
- Meaningful child participation
- Recognizing and building on community capacities and resources, so as not to establish parallel structures
- Recognizing the role that community members play in CP, including the primary role of the family
- Taking a long-term perspective from the outset with an aim for sustainability and community leadership

KEY CONSIDERATION 2:

Conduct a Deep Context Analysis



The importance of a deep context analysis

Effective CCP requires approaches that facilitate the active engagement of community members in building on their own belief systems and capacities that promote resilience and protection and respond to risk without discrimination. External actors must understand the existing resources and challenges, how CP concerns are understood and prioritized, and how communities mobilize around these issues in order to work in ways that are supportive and collaborative, and not undermining local systems. It is a critical element of CCP and must involve a broad representation of a community, including children.

A deep context analysis requires a process of demonstrating respect, building trust and developing relationships in communities. How we do this is as important as what we do.

A deep context analysis is ideally undertaken during the preparedness phase in a humanitarian context. This would be updated during the response phase. If there was no context analysis undertaken prior to the response phase, the process would begin there and be enhanced on an ongoing basis through the recovery phase.

What are you looking for when you conduct a deep context analysis?

- Learn about local understandings of key concepts (e.g., child, child development, protection, risk, harm) and how those influence local approaches to CP; child development may be different in different communities.
- What are community members already doing to protect children?
- Understand the leadership structures; who are the opinion leaders and influencers?
- Learn about CP concerns and priorities in the community, including approaches and practices prior to emergencies, and if/how those have been affected by the emergency (positively or negatively).
- Identify what resources the community can bring to protection efforts (e.g., human, financial, physical, spiritual, social, and cultural).
- Consider what the potential influence (positive and negative) the involvement of external actors may have in community CP.
- Understand if there are CP issues that community members would not want to or be able to address, and why.
- Understand what external actors can do to engage with communities more effectively and appropriately (e.g., communication, behaviors, actions, attitudes).
- Obtain a deep understanding of culture and practices, and respect for these, along with a respectful dialogue to advocate for a focus on the best interests of the child in line with international child rights standards.

Characteristics of a deep context analysis

- The external actor takes a low profile from the start, allowing community members to guide the process while the external actor plays a facilitating role.
- Take time to build relationships and emphasize patient listening.

- Learning and analysis should be ongoing; deep context analysis is not a one-off exercise.
- Use open-ended questions (not “yes or no”), followed by probing questions.
- Use participatory methods (e.g., observation, group discussions, interviews, consultations).
- Conduct a power analysis in the community to ensure representative views from many perspectives in the community, especially those that are not always heard (For example, depending on the context, this may be women and girls, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities).

Challenges in undertaking a deep context analysis

In any setting, but particularly in humanitarian contexts, there are challenges to undertaking the slow, deliberative approaches that evidence informs you are the most effective in meaningful community-level engagement. There may be reluctance to discuss particularly sensitive topics, for example. Safety and security risks of organizing community meetings should also be considered. Some challenges might include:

- Discussing particularly sensitive or taboo issues may be difficult, or need more time for community’s internal discussions to sensitively address the topics.
- Some CP risks/issues may be more effectively addressed than others, and that can present a challenge if funding is focused on addressing a specific issue or issues that may not be effectively or realistically addressed by a community.
- CP actors may have different CP understandings and priorities than the community.
- The urgent needs in acute phases of emergencies may not allow time for a slow, deliberate process to really understand the context and allow the community to mobilize itself to protect children.
- Insecurity may constrain adequate, ongoing access to communities.

For guidance on methods and approaches to developing a deep context analysis, please refer to the following Part 4, [Guidance Notes 1-6](#).

KEY CONSIDERATION 3:

Effective Engagement with Communities



Community engagement begins the moment you begin your work, be it during an initial rapid assessment in the response phase, establishing preparedness programming, or starting new programming in a recovery context. Engagement is about how you assess, design, implement, monitor, and evaluate your programming. Effective community engagement relies on more than technical expertise in CP. There are “soft skills” critical to building trust and collaborative relationships. These are core competencies of CCP approaches.

Facilitation by external actors

- Create space for diverse stakeholders to have their voices heard, which is motivating and builds commitment.
- Use highly participatory approaches that promote mobilization of internal resources (e.g., group processes).
- Work to build trust, which comes with transparency, feedback, responsiveness, and accountability.
- Seek to understand deeply the sociocultural context.
- Possess strong conflict sensitivity skills you can bring to group processes.
- Use patient, flexible, dialogue-oriented approaches that focus on shared understanding, responsibility, and collective problem-solving. Avoid “top-down” lecture approaches.
- Effective capacity building from external actors focuses on long-term strengthening of community capacity to positively influence CP; some examples include:
 - Support and mentoring by an external agency
 - Adapted to context; not “one size fits all”
 - Ongoing, not one-off trainings
- Focus not just on technical training, but on social change processes and on building organizational capacity (e.g., to access and manage funds).

Focus on community structures, systems, and resources

The literature review and field consultations conducted as the foundation to this Reflective Field Guide tell us that beginning discussions with rights-based language can alienate some communities, and create barriers to building trust and respect. We know, however, some community actions and norms can cause harm to children. Therefore, when appropriate to do so, work together to establish locally agreed standards (reflecting international standards) for child protection work (e.g., safeguarding children, children’s participation, and the base rights of the child).

- Place emphasis on the communities' understanding of child risk and protection, while ensuring respect for the best interests of the child.
- Enable a space for discussion between local people to discuss child protection needs and standards for well-being with external actors. This discussion should begin with the generation of ideas, opinions and perspectives of community members as a starting point.
- Build on existing structures, knowledge, skills, and networks (e.g., peer support, volunteers, traditional protective norm/practices, existing groups/structures), as well as a sense of community responsibility to protect children.
- Link CP to wider community development processes, such as economic strengthening, so that communities can see more immediate, concrete benefits.
- Facilitate linkages between the local or informal systems and the formal CP systems.
- Mobilize community resources identified in your deep context analysis that can most appropriately support the priority CP concerns in each context.
- Develop shared definitions of CP-related concepts, as well as of CP systems along with their purposes, functions, and components. The development of this shared vocabulary should form part of a broader effort to develop shared criteria and measures of impact.

Mobilizing Traditional Community Structures for Child Protection in South Kordofan, Sudan

In parts of South Kordofan and Darfur in Sudan, traditional women poets and singers, collectively known as Hakamat, play a critical role in mobilizing communities for collective action. Historically, some of that action has been to inspire community fighters in inter-communal conflict, as well as encouraging crop harvesting. Increasingly, the Hakamat have moved away from involvement in conflict and engaged with humanitarian actors in South Kordofan in using their skills authority to advance CP, education, health, and hygiene initiatives in their communities to use their skills and authority as mediators in communal conflict. They express an enthusiasm for this engagement, and their opportunity to strengthen their communities around priority CP issues.

“We Hakamat stand with the children because they are vulnerable, and we are working to protect and give opportunity for education because they are our future. We have the trust of the community and will continue to give messages to live in peace.”

– Hakamat leaders, Kadugli, South Kordofan, Sudan. October 2018

Involving community members

- Engage adults, youth, and children who are known, trusted by primary caregivers and children alike, influential, and can bring diverse perspectives, networks, and expertise.
- Recognize the roles that parents/caregivers play in CCP systems and find ways to meaningfully involve them in programming approaches.
- Assess with sensitivity, and in coordination with other external actors, how to weigh the sustainability that comes with volunteerism, and the realistic expectations you can have of community volunteer workers.

- Engaging community members who are motivated to help and committed to volunteer has been shown to lead to more effective and sustainable action.
- Explore how they can be supported through non-monetary means, such as ongoing training and capacity building, and ensure community members understand and are confident in their roles and can see the results of their work.
- Manage issues of group power and gender dynamics through culturally sensitive approaches.
- Involve community members in review/monitoring, problem-solving, joint planning, and decision making to encourage ownership of actions.

KEY CONSIDERATION 4:

Meaningful Child Participation



Child participation is a fundamental right of children and is a strong component of effective CCP approaches. Community-level approaches that include meaningful child participation are generally more effective in addressing CP in appropriate and relevant ways. Children play an important role in advocating for themselves and their peers, helping parents and adult community members understand their priority concerns and the ways in which they contribute to protection.

Meaningful child participation is also shown to result in positive outcomes for children. For example, children involved in CCP mechanisms:

- Have increased information
- Have increased confidence
- Are more able to defend their rights and their own self-protection
- Contributed to improved protection of other children
- Are influencing community development plans
- Are more visible in the community; there is increased value in listening to children
- Have increased communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills

How can you meaningfully involve children in CCP?

Make an effort to involve children in ways beyond typical “children’s domains” (e.g., children’s clubs) and involve children in broader efforts in the protection work, as well as in decision making.

- Recognize the role children can play in identifying and mapping the risks of most concern, as well as in changing social norms that influence violence against them, if they are given room to undertake those roles.
- Through children’s groups, create space for children to express themselves freely and feel empowered; show how they can still play an important role if strong linkages are made between the children’s groups and other elements of the protective system.
- Ensure inclusion of especially vulnerable children, as their perspectives, concerns, and resources are often absent from public forums.
- Understand why they may not be participating in the existing community-level initiatives; for example, limits in mobility, resources, time, as well as if the structure of a mechanism or approach is exclusive (e.g., school-based children’s clubs may not facilitate inclusion of working children, married children, very poor children).
- Identify capacity-building content and approaches that are developmentally appropriate and focus on social-emotional skill building (e.g., leadership, communication, group problem-solving, advocacy, etc.).
- Consider the role of peer education as a valuable approach in CCP.
- Take care to ensure children’s participation is voluntary, safe, and appropriate to their developmental abilities.
- Ask community adults and children how children can be key participants in relevant and appropriate ways, without causing additional protection issues.

- Consider the timing of children’s participation (around school, home, work responsibilities) and negotiate with parents.

Challenges to meaningful child participation

What does “meaningful child participation” really mean?

- Even if children have a voice, if they do not have decision-making power followed up by successful action their participation will not influence change.
- There may be attitudes or beliefs that children can/should not play a role in the public space, especially as it relates to decision making.
- Stigma exists around children’s incapacity/inappropriateness to perform roles and responsibilities.
- Children often have many competing demands on their time and must prioritize meeting the needs of their families and education.
- The most vulnerable children are often the most invisible in their communities, making access to them and advocating for their participation in protection mechanisms particularly challenging.
- Cultures and practices may hamper children’s participation (e.g., early/forced/arranged marriage).
- The economic situation of the family can hinder children’s participation.
- Political struggles may make children’s participation challenging.
- Geographical location can hinder access (armed conflict/disaster prone areas; far-flung areas).
- The level of prioritization, awareness, and understanding among parents/caregivers on CP can impact children’s participation.

For further guidance on effective engagement with communities, please refer to Part 4, [Guidance Note 2](#), [Guidance Note 3](#), [Guidance Note 5](#), and [Guidance Note 7](#).

KEY CONSIDERATION 5:

Facilitating Strong Linkages Between Formal and Informal Systems



CP efforts, both in development and humanitarian contexts, have undergone a significant shift in the past decade, from a focus on addressing risks and categories of vulnerable children, to a recognition that a systemic approach to protection provides a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to protecting vulnerable children and building resilience to mitigate the potential impacts of future harm.

CP systems strengthening is not only possible, but critical in humanitarian situations, as emergencies can provide opportunities to strengthen community-level systems leading to integration into formal systems post-emergency. Where CP systems were previously weak, humanitarian response with a systems approach offers the possibility to mobilize humanitarian resources to “build back better” and establish effective and sustainable CP systems in the recovery process.

How do you understand child protection systems (briefly)?

- Systems exist at different levels.
- Elements are needed in the middle to link the two in meaningful ways, bringing congruence between different elements that may feature tension.
- There is a need for strong grassroots protective environments for prevention and locally appropriate response.
- There is a need for strong formal systems, such as legal/normative frameworks at the national level (“top-down”).
- There is a need to contextualize legal/normative frameworks at the local level to support community-level approaches.
- Community-level efforts will be more successful if there is a meaningful legal/normative framework and functioning structures at the higher levels.
- Linkages will be facilitated more effectively if there is a strong similarity between the priorities and practices of the systems at different levels.

What have you learned about facilitating linkages between the informal and formal CP systems?

- Link and engage with a formal system at different levels from the beginning to build long-term commitment for support after external support ends.
- Advocate for formal recognition of the CCP approaches with accompanying resource support, and invest in CP generally – plan, budget, and action.
- Facilitate linkages, which requires strong networking and coordination between CCP efforts and relevant elements of the formal systems (especially in cases of more difficult-to-address CP issues that require referral pathways).
- When linkages are established “bottom-up,” at the request of the community, there is greater acceptance of services, and more positive relations between community and service providers.

- Link to other formal structures at the community-level (e.g., village committees, health committees, development committees, education) to ensure linkages between CP and other development activities and funding opportunities.
- Emphasize inclusiveness, participation, and convergence in every step of the establishment of community-level approaches; make an effort to link with formal system(s).

For further guidance on effective engagement with communities, please refer to Part 4, [Guidance Note 9](#).

KEY CONSIDERATION 6:

Community-level Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: The Need for a Shift in Mindset



Humanitarian crises around the world have challenged the humanitarian system to meet unprecedented protection risks and needs of children in communities, with limited available resources. More localized humanitarian action provides opportunities to deliver efficient, effective, and sustainable preparedness and response actions. Humanitarian CP actors recognize that communities, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and local governments are at the forefront of humanitarian response. While international agencies will continue to play a role in many crises, they will need to reflect on how they, as institutions, can be better partners to work alongside communities to reach common goals.

What would your roles look like?

- Act as a catalyst or facilitator and avoid jumping in too early and directing discussions. To the extent possible, create space and support for the work of the community at its own pace, and placing emphasis on community priorities. This means supporting their decision making, even when it does not “align” to the priorities of the agency, while ensuring respect for the best interest of the child.
- Understand the barriers that prevent the meaningful participation of some groups (e.g., children, women, marginalized groups).
- Promote and maintain transparency; be candid about the agency’s mission or purpose, funding priorities, guidelines, approaches, etc., at the appropriate time and with sensitivity.
- Establish from the outset the expectation that your agency will leave, which means discussions with community members and agencies should have a mutual understanding of the scope of the work that will be done together, and how community members will continue that work beyond the partnership with the agency.
- Ensure there is meaningful community engagement in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating community-level approaches.
- Recognize that in humanitarian settings, it is normal for agencies to want to work as quickly as possible to address protection risks in the community. This can often lead to the establishment of CP Committees or other agency-driven structures, which can seem as if they originate in the community but are really mechanisms created by the agency. Avoid creating such structures and seek out existing mechanisms and community supports, considering what is familiar and acceptable to the communities.
- Humanitarian actors often seek to extract information from community members about the crisis and risks to children but fail to provide feedback to the community on what they have learned. This can create misconceptions, false hope, and distrust. Involve community members in your assessment/context analysis efforts and ensure the information is made available to the community members to demonstrate accountability.
- Much of your work with communities is often linked to payment and/or in-kind support, which undermine traditional community systems, and tends not to be sustainable over time. These factors can eventually lead to the failure of the community group/mechanism once the supporting agency has left. Agencies should acknowledge the time and efforts of individuals, consider the long-term impacts of financial incentives, and weigh decisions about payment with other forms of recognition.

- Make space for accessible and meaningful community feedback and decision-making to refine approaches based on community perceptions.
- Ensure strong coordination with other relevant actors, such as national and international CP agencies, relevant government bodies (if present), and actors from related sectors, such as education, WASH, shelter, etc.
- If and when appropriate, act as an intermediary, linking communities with the formal CP system and institutions. This brings grassroots knowledge to higher level decision-making bodies and broadens the protective environment for children.
- Identify strengths in the community and maximizing internal resources.
- Limit the use of external resources (financial and human), but focus on motivating activities, natural commitment to volunteerism, etc. Channel resources after internal resources have been mobilized, in small amounts.
- Focus on human rights as a foundation for action, not necessarily an action itself (as in training on child rights).
- Use training and capacity building as opportunities to strengthen community members to facilitate positive social change from within communities themselves. The focus should be on their priorities, and building on their capacities.
- Engage with donors to adapt funding systems, timeframes, and reporting for different levels of community involvement.
- Work to strengthen the local CP workforce capacity.
- Strengthen collaboration mechanisms among humanitarian actors at all levels (e.g., local, regional, national).

Challenges to changing the way you work

Attempting to influence the way humanitarian organizations, from CSOs to International NGOs (INGOs), approach community engagement can seem daunting. Humanitarian CP actors often, understandably, feel the need to move quickly to respond to risks to children and fall back on prior ways of working – such as CP Committees and children’s groups – without taking the time to first analyze existing structures and mechanisms in the community. CP actors also may not feel confident in designing alternative community engagement approaches. Donors’ budgets, timelines, and expectations may also challenge community-level approaches that require longer timeframes.

Attitudes, skills, and capacities needed to adapt the CP actors’ approaches

- Cultivate attitudes such as: respect, humility, listening in a deep and engaged manner, empathy, flexibility, compassion, respect for and understanding of local culture, and patience.
- Develop the practice of reflection, learning, and adapting approaches. Begin by considering what you bring to your community engagement work.
- Be comfortable with flexibility and adaptability.
- Listen deeply to community members, their concerns, hopes, and fears, and facilitate discussions toward group problem-solving without injecting personal or organizational bias, but provide options. Create space for community people to decide what harm(s) to children to address and how.
- Focus on building trust among community members and between humanitarian actors through discussion and time spent together – the relationship is a long-term investment.
- Respect community members’ local understandings of risks to children, the resources they have at hand, and the supports they require.

Strengthen our capacities to:

- Analyze subtleties among community members, understand gender and power dynamics, and create opportunities to change social norms and make space for marginalized voices.
- Mobilize communities, energize individuals, and create teamwork around positivity.
- Reflect internally on the attributes of effective community engagement, and consider these in staff hiring, orientation, and professional development.

For further guidance on effective engagement with communities, please refer to Part 4, [Guidance Note 11](#).