

4



Knowledge, skills, attitudes and multi-functional teams

This section outlines the most important knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by humanitarian staff and the way in which a multifunctional team approach, which combines different professional skills and functions, can strengthen the community-based approach. It also provides guidance on how a team can first establish contact with the community.

4

4.1 Knowledge

“Not to know is bad; not wishing to know is worse.”

Applying a community-based approach requires an understanding of group processes, conflict-resolution and mediation. This will enable the collective processes we eventually develop to take into account an individual’s or sub-group’s rights, and ensures that institutional and community objectives are met.⁶³ The multifunctional team should be equipped with basic knowledge, including:

- An understanding of social sciences and expertise in communication techniques, which are essential for ensuring participation and under-

taking in-depth social analyses from an age, gender and diversity perspective;

- Knowledge of international, regional and national legal instruments, which is useful when working with members of the community on human rights issues, and also helps us to be clear about the standards we must uphold; and
- An understanding of UNHCR's policies, including EXCOM Conclusions and guidelines, particularly those relating to women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities and the prevention of and response to SGBV. We should also be familiar with such supporting tools as the use of resettlement, the operations management cycle, Standards and Indicators, ProGres, and relevant policies on HIV/AIDS. We should be fully conversant with the Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and UNHCR's Code of Conduct.

In addition, it is important to be willing to learn from those around us, including national and international staff, partners and government officials, to increase our knowledge and understanding. We should invest time in gathering information about the community, its history and current dynamics; at the same time, we should understand how our own age, sex and background facilitates or hinders their engagement with particular groups and communities. Knowledge of oneself and one's own weaknesses and strengths is useful in knowing how best to support community processes.

4.2 Skills

A few specific skills are required to ensure that the participatory process is successful and to support a rights- and community-based approach. The most important:

Communication skills are crucial in enabling people to work together on a common task or towards a common goal. Communication is a two-way process: Information is both received and transmitted through sharing and listening. Persons of concern can participate meaningfully only if they have access to the same accurate information as humanitarian workers.

Listening is the most important part of communication. Active listening requires a demonstration of interest in hearing what is said, in clarifying points and in being able to summarize information accurately. Communicating respectfully means **talking *with* people**, not at them.

Negotiating skills are important in facilitating complex processes with many different stakeholders who have various levels of power and decision-making capacities. Persuasion and negotiation are constantly required to open discussions about sensitive issues.

Good **observation** skills and **curiosity** enable people to discover many things that are happening in a community that might not be spoken about, such as how children are treated and what activities they are engaged in, or whether or not persons with disabilities are given a role in the community or are absent from community life. Observation also allows us to notice and interpret non-verbal behaviour. This is essential when trying to learn about how those who have less voice, or feel less free to use their voices, participate. It also helps us to be more aware of what effect we have on the community.

Learning from the Nairobi-based multifunctional team

Previous assumptions	New assumptions
Urban refugees tend to be single young men.	Urban refugees comprise a diverse population that includes women and men, girls and boys, and people with a variety of specific needs.
Urban refugees are passive; they are waiting for UNHCR to solve their problems.	Urban refugees have developed a variety of coping mechanisms to protect themselves and establish livelihoods in the urban setting.
Urban refugees want resettlement and engage in manipulative behaviour to get it.	While resettlement is attractive, many refugees have built their lives and communities in the country of asylum.
Urban refugees are aggressive, requiring that UNHCR staff take additional security precautions when visiting refugee communities.	Urban refugees welcome interaction with UNHCR staff in their own communities, and it is generally safe to visit them, taking the usual precautions while in Nairobi.
UNHCR already knows everything it needs to know about urban refugees.	UNHCR can use multiple sources of information, including mapping, indicators, and community work, to learn about refugee communities in greater depth, particularly about persons who might not approach the office regularly.
Urban refugees come to UNHCR if they have problems.	Many of the most vulnerable refugees are unable to approach the office at all, while others approach infrequently.

4.3 Attitudes

Above all else, our attitudes and the values we transmit will determine the nature of our relationship with people of concern. They will also enable good coordination and teamwork with other humanitarian agencies. It is all too easy to become burned-out and detached from the work, and sceptical of those with whom we are working, when there are few, or no, quick results.⁶⁴ Offices should make sure that there are opportunities for frontline staff to be debriefed in a constructive manner regularly to reduce stress and maintain a positive approach.

UNHCR's Code of Conduct requires that staff "always seek to understand the difficult experiences that refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR have faced and survived, as well as the disadvantaged position in which they – particularly on the basis of gender, age or disability – may find themselves in relation to those who hold power or influence over aspects of their lives."⁶⁵

Our attitudes towards members of the community and our humanitarian peers are demonstrated in both verbal and non-verbal ways, and we need to be acutely aware of these signals to ensure that we maintain respect and impartiality in our work.

Body language is culture-specific, and **non-verbal messages** can be perceived differently, depending on who is interpreting them. It is important to face people when you are speaking to them, show sustained interest, and make eye contact as appropriate (without staring, since that can be perceived as aggressive). Messages are conveyed when you look at your watch when people are raising what they consider to be an important point, when you arrive at a community meeting with a ready-made checklist, when you sit *with* people rather than apart from them (unless this is part of the ritual if you are a guest), when you walk through the camp, meeting people, instead of remaining in the car.

The tone we use **when we speak** and our opening sentences often transmit clear signals to people about how serious we are about engaging in dialogue. Cutting off people who wish to raise points, not staying after a meeting to see people who are seeking individual time or leaving without making appointments all say something about our priorities. The use of non-technical language and avoidance of acronyms are basic signs of respect.

Showing **respect for traditions and customs** will build trust. Offering information about ourselves can also be helpful in reducing the distance between us and the community.

Seeing people as **human beings**, rather than “individual cases,” “populations” or “caseloads,” makes it easier to treat people with respect and dignity. Regular direct conversations with people, individually or in a small group, put a human face on complex problems and remind us of why we are humanitarian workers.⁶⁶ We should be aware of how we talk with children, and whether they find us approachable.

We should **try not to make assumptions** about people. Just because someone falls into a particular group, this does not mean that he/she will necessarily fit the stereotype of that group. For example, if a woman is described as a widow, we should not assume that she is necessarily in need of particular support (vulnerable). Until more is known about her, all that can be assumed is that her husband has died.

We should maintain respect for the humanitarian principle of **impartiality**.

People will also make assumptions about us and observe our behaviour. We might, for example, be perceived as external saviours or as foreign interlopers. We must clearly outline our proposed contributions and limitations in order to define our relationship with the community.

Ten tips on communicating well and demonstrating a positive attitude

- ✓ Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal behaviour; you are being observed. Take time to listen to people. Listen, too, with your eyes. Do not be afraid to remain silent; people might need to think before reacting.
- ✓ Be aware of what might keep people at a distance from you and what might build good relations.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic and reflect it in your voice and attitude. Be welcoming and reflect this in your facial expressions and body language. Pay attention to those who remain silent; include them by using eye contact.
- ✓ Delivering protection requires internalizing age, gender and diversity analysis and reflecting it in your interaction with communities. Be ready to take a stand and uphold human rights.
- ✓ Do not make assumptions; facilitate. Find out about traditional ways of communicating and use them, if appropriate. Relate theories and concepts to familiar life experiences.
- ✓ Value people's time, capacities and resources. Make sure your demands do not create a financial burden for people. Create the conditions for meaningful participation, including children's participation, without imposing too many new methods and procedures.
- ✓ Prepare with interpreters well in advance so that they understand the process and what you are seeking to achieve. Avoid misunderstandings and second-guessing.
- ✓ Find ways to inform those who do not read. Help people understand.
- ✓ Recognize and document people's contributions. Thank people for their availability, assistance and hospitality.
- ✓ Stop by the teashop or market, walk around the camp, offer to assist in small ways and spend time talking to people.

4.4 Multifunctional teams

International protection involves more than providing legal protection; it encompasses all activities undertaken to uphold the rights of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. It also includes the measures that persons of concern take to ensure their own protection. Three evaluations undertaken on women, children and the role of community services noted that protection was most effectively delivered when teams worked in a multifunctional manner.⁶⁷

In one refugee camp, the water-sanitation agency had established a community-based system of refugee community-outreach workers, while the camp-management agency had established a system through which refugee workers implemented camp-management activities, such as overseeing food distribution. It soon became evident that the philosophy behind each was quite different. One focused on refugee workers becoming community-outreach agents while the other hired refugee staff to oversee and deliver assistance. The resulting confusing and competing methods of working undermined efforts to promote a community-based approach.

4

Reviewing and analyzing protection risks, priorities and solutions through a community-based approach require a multidisciplinary perspective. In launching its age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy, UNHCR promoted the application of a multifunctional team approach to its protection work, providing a useful model for working in the field.⁶⁸ A multifunctional team brings together the expertise of management, programme, protection, field, public-information and community-services staff, both national and international, and government and partner staff to enable a comprehensive analysis and planning process and to ensure common goals and approaches in our work. Rotation is important, as it broadens the expertise available and helps avoid overloading certain team members.

It is essential to work as a multifunctional team when implementing a community-based approach, since the team employs all the expertise available in an operation and thus maximizes the benefit to the people of concern. If a team member or partner focuses narrowly on a task without taking time to communicate with and learn from others, the full advantages of a community-based approach will not be realized.

Each person brings particular skills to the multifunctional team:

- Expertise in community mobilization and outreach work, communication techniques and facilitation skills will help mobilize the community to participate, build trust and confidence, and foster the development of action plans that are based on their capacities and priorities.
- Field officers' knowledge of the daily lives of persons of concern is essential in helping other staff to understand community dynamics so that they can make contact with community members.
- An understanding of legal and human rights instruments is important in reviewing and discussing human rights with the community.
- Programme-management, planning and monitoring skills are crucial in ensuring that adequate support and follow-up is provided for agreements made with the people of concern.
- Skills in disseminating information and designing appropriate material are necessary for ensuring that all members of the community have access to information.
- In addition to their own expertise, government staff and local authorities understand the local situation and system and can facilitate processes and resolve many problems.

UNHCR Nairobi's views on what is required to support a community-based approach

A number of conditions needed to be in place for UNHCR Nairobi to implement these new strategies and changes in assumptions. These included:

- ***Accessibility and transparency vis-à-vis operational partners and refugee communities.*** The office needed to open its doors to operational partners and be much more transparent about its procedures, including their strengths and weaknesses. The office also had to reply promptly and thoughtfully to partners and refugees.
- ***ProGres.*** The advanced, office-wide use of the ProGres registration system can ensure high-quality, efficient individual case management.
- ***Senior management's vision and good inter-unit collaboration.*** All staff members working with individuals and communities need to share assumptions and collaborate on strategy. Senior management played a crucial role in articulating this vision. It was particularly important for protection and community-services staff to understand this vision and develop management structures for cooperation since much of the strategy focuses on working with refugee communities to enhance protection.
- ***Commitment to participatory assessment.*** Participatory assessment is an occasion for staff to forge a common understanding of the main issues affecting urban refugees, and to see them in their own neighbourhoods and community spaces, rather than in the UNHCR office. To be a credible exercise, the office must follow up the participatory assessment with specific actions.
- ***Small amounts of additional financial support.*** UNHCR in Kenya must devote most of its resources to camp-based refugees, leaving little flexibility in the urban budget. However, small amounts of money from outside sources, such as the Strengthening Protection Capacities Project, can have a significant impact. For example, a grant of \$30,000 allowed the office to organize programmes jointly with the city's education authorities. As a result, there is now a commitment to enrolling refugee children in free primary education.

Openness to change. The new programme required a willingness to take risks and revise assumptions and projects as lessons are learned. Supportive and flexible managers have empowered staff to be innovative.

The main purpose of the multifunctional team is to support the representative and the office by following up on the implementation of UNHCR's age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy⁶⁹ through participatory assessments, ensuring proper analyses and follow up, feedback to the community and targeted actions to support those persons of concern who are discriminated against. The team may also identify skills gaps within the office and/or among partners and coordinate training events or coaching activities on such subjects as facilitating participatory assessments; age, gender and diversity analysis; sexual and gender-based violence; Best Interests Determinations; and identifying and registering persons with specific needs. Multifunctional teams are expected to strengthen internal and external coordination and situation analyses and thus improve the delivery of protection.

Interpreters play a crucial role in the work of any team, as they can have a significant impact on how the office's efforts to promote a community-based approach are received. Interpreters should be supported to understand the approach, the aims of the office and of the community, and how to translate what people say, rather than providing their own version of what those people said. Training for interpreters should focus on improving skills in interpreting, their self-awareness regarding their facial expressions and body language, and in fostering an openness to what they will be told.

Ten tips on building an effective multifunctional team

- ✓ The nationality, age, sex, religion, ethnicity and combined skills of the team members should be carefully considered. Team members should be able to communicate with different sections of the community.
- ✓ Partners should be part of the team. The team should facilitate coordination among all UNHCR staff.
- ✓ The attitude and behaviour of team members, including interpreters, is critical. If colleagues make inappropriate statements, we should challenge them in a constructive manner.
- ✓ Team members should clearly identify their roles and create a positive relationship, without raising false expectations. Work in small teams when conducting participatory assessments.
- ✓ The team must respect the community and enjoy spending time with community members.
- ✓ All team members should build skills in analyzing the situation from an age, gender and diversity perspective.
- ✓ The team should ensure that the results of the participatory assessment and follow-up decisions are shared and evaluated with the community.
- ✓ In IDP settings, a multi-agency team should be established to facilitate coordination.
- ✓ The team should ensure that the office has a documented community-outreach strategy and a confidential individual case-management system and committee for follow-up on persons at heightened risk.
- ✓ The team should meet regularly with the Representative/Head of Office, who is responsible for guiding and leading the team. The team could also develop an annual plan with the office to guide its work and evaluate what it has achieved.