ANNAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
1 – 3 JULY 2015 - International Conference Center Geneva

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Session Title: Community-based Protection – from Rhetoric to Reality

Date: **2 July 2015**

Time/Room: **09h00 – 13h00 – Room 2 (break-out rooms 5 & 6)**

Background

This 2015 session on Community-based protection draws from and builds on a stream of collaborative work among NGOs, UNHCR, and academics over the past two years. Important building blocks and milestones in this collaboration include:

- UNHCR's 2013 Standing Committee Paper, in which UNHCR places renewed emphasis on the need to integrate community engagement into all aspects of its protection work, including workforce adjustments to better position UNHCR country offices for Community-based protection;
- UNHCR's 2013 "Understanding Community-based Protection" Paper, which lays out key lessons intended to support UNHCR and partners' understanding of Community-based protection;
- The 2014 Survey undertaken by NGOs, UNHCR, and academics, which lays out a range of understandings of Community-based protection (see below);
- The June 2014 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations Session on Community-based protection, which concluded: "that more emphasis needs to be placed on identifying and assessing Community-based protection mechanisms … to help better target support, develop untapped community potential, and minimise the risk of unintentionally undermining existing community structures," including through further research to *map and analyse how local communities protect themselves*, *documentation of operational examples*, development of more *effective tools*, and *adapting funding modalities* to facilitate Community-based protection.

This year's in-depth, four-hour session on Community-based protection is designed to meaningfully further our collective conversation around Community-based protection, providing ample time to more deeply explore the recommendations noted above, with sufficient rooting in real case examples.

Understandings of community-based protection

In 2014, participants found it helpful to use the following descriptors to unpack *Community-based protection*:

✓ Agency-led protection that ***is informed by*** communities (e.g. external agencies hire community outreach staff, undertake focus group discussions, participatory assessments, etc.)

✓ A method used by agencies ***to better engage*** communities in their own protection (e.g. external agencies initiate working with community actors to map threats, undertake safety audits, create a 'problem tree,' create an action plan, etc.)

✓ Protective action that ***originates within and is led by*** communities to protect (e.g. community actors control resources and decision making; external agencies seek to understand and map existing community structures, support local decision making, etc.)

Community-based protection across displacement into solutions

Local community structures are a bedrock component of civil society, including in displacement and solutions contexts. Local communities – including those displaced, host communities, and a combination of the two – are constantly organizing themselves in ways that can provide remarkable protective impact. They do so before, during, and after displacement.

As outside agencies consider how protection outcomes can best be achieved throughout the displacement cycle and into solutions, a keen eye toward these community structures and mechanisms is critical. How can they best be identified and supported or reinforced during displacement? How can they be used as a means of protection as solutions are pursued and realized? How can the interventions of outside agencies – even while communities are still displaced – best foster resilient civil society? How do these interventions best position individuals, families, and communities for self-reliance and durable solutions?

This session will begin with brief remarks in plenary to frame the overall session, and then quickly break into three breakout groups to pursue the following discussions:

Breakout topic one | Self-protection in situations of armed conflict

This breakout group focuses on contexts where communities face severe protection risks and where outside agencies often have limited or no access; these are locations where governments – those with primary responsibility to protect – can pose significant protection threats, including as party to conflict. While meaningful protection is highly challenging in such context, notable and innovative self-protection strategies often emerge in such contexts.

This discussion kicks off with reflections from a Sudanese civil society leader on how women in South Kordofan have organized to protect themselves in active conflict. The breakout will then invite all participants to probe key questions:

- What innovative self-protection strategies have communities used in situations of armed conflict?

- What types of risks have these strategies addressed? What has been the protective impact? What could be unintended or harmful consequences?

- What external financial or other support has been provided to such communities seeking to protect themselves? By whom? What have been the benefits of this external support? What additional supports are needed?

Breakout topic two | Interlocutors: Linking UNHCR with local community structures to achieve protection outcomes

This breakout conversation focuses on how NGOs – local, national, and international – can help link UNHCR with local community structures to achieve protection outcomes. It considers the role of interlocutor, often played by NGOs, including building relationships and trust with local community structures over time. As UNHCR and NGOs look ahead to playing out their commitments to Community-based protection, this conversation will take special note of the investments needed to best link UNHCR and other mandated protection actors with local community structures.

This discussion kicks off with personal reflections from a protracted urban refugee context in India, where a local NGO has worked with and supported self-organizing community structures, serving as an interlocutor with UNHCR to better achieve protection outcomes. The breakout will then invite all participants to probe key questions:

- What are most important roles and responsibilities of outside agencies in Community-based protection?

- What skill sets, attitudes, and other characteristics are needed within outside agencies that liaise directly with communities for purposes of protection?

- What are the opportunities or challenges related to UNHCR directly engaging with local community structures? What opportunities or challenges stem from NGOs doing so?

- How are these skills and approaches translatable to the pursuit of solutions?

Breakout topic three | Community-based protection among highly marginalized groups

UNHCR's [Age Gender and Diversity](#) approach provides a helpful way of understanding the diverse characteristics of persons of concern that can dramatically increase their vulnerability to patterns of risk. As fellow displaced populations and host communities can both pose threats and play protective roles, extra care is needed when considering Community-based protection for those who face particular stigma or discrimination. This conversation focuses on how to meaningfully and safely engage communities in the protection of highly marginalized groups within specific operational contexts.

This discussion kicks off with notable lessons learned in mobilizing diverse local communities to advocate for the protection of stateless populations in the Dominican Republic. It then highlights lessons learned in community-based protection among refugees with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in Kenya. The breakout will then invite all participants to probe key questions:

- Which groups are highly marginalized in our operational contexts? How do we identify and assess the patterns of risk they face? How can we best reach out to these marginalized groups?

- How have highly marginalized groups organized to protect themselves? What protection outcomes have resulted? How have outside agencies helpfully supported this process?

- When might engaging broader communities in the protection of marginalized groups create additional risk? What strategies have been successful in the mitigation of these additional risks?

- What special considerations or sensitivities are needed when pursuing solutions for highly marginalized groups?

Final plenary discussion

Drawing on the breakout group discussions, participants will return to plenary for an interactive dialogue facilitated by a leading thinker in community-based protection. The plenary discussion will explore:

- What did we learn during our breakout group conversations? What needs further exploration?

- What are the most important investments that UNHCR and NGOs can make in Community-based protection over the next three years? What attitude shifts, operational models, systems adjustments, or partnership models are required?

- What specific recommendations do you have after today's discussion? Who is best suited to take these recommendations forward? How?

- How does today's discussion inform our collective thinking about solutions? How can we ensure our pursuit of solutions is rooted in our commitment to Community-based protection?