Supporting and accompanying community-based protection structures

Introduction

Humanitarian organizations can support community-based protection structures (CPSs) in many different ways. The form this support takes depends on a CPS's familiarity with protection, experience and level of autonomy. In addition, support typically decreases over time as a CPS becomes more independent, and humanitarian organizations prepare to exit a context. Humanitarian organizations and CPS members should decide together what support is needed and feasible in each case — formally writing this up if suitable. Typically, a mix of different forms of accompaniment is needed. Based on experience of Oxfam staff in various contexts, while training sessions have been found to be useful, they are not sufficient because such one-off punctual support must be bolstered by regular engagement.

Joint preparation and implementation

It is important for staff from humanitarian organizations to engage with CPS members in some of their daily work by jointly carrying out activities, especially in the initial stages of a programme, including:

- holding regular meetings;
- conducting initial protection analyses;
- developing and implementing community protection action plans;
- conducting safe programming risk analyses;
- reviewing and evaluating community-based protection work and their outcomes.

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1 This tool builds on existing guidance documents produced by Oxfam’s protection teams in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

This allows CPS members to learn ‘by doing’, as well as by observing and talking with staff from supporting humanitarian organizations. While initially those staff may take a stronger leadership role in chairing, facilitating and carrying out activities, CPS members should gradually take over.

**Coaching and mentoring**

Staff from supporting humanitarian organizations should regularly meet with CPS members to provide mentoring and coaching as needed. As mentors, staff from humanitarian organizations can observe CPS activities and give regular feedback. Coaching requires staff to actively listen to the concerns, ideas and challenges raised by CPS members, and deepen the latter’s reflections by asking questions that help them explore solutions themselves.

**Box 1: Inclusion and gender dynamics**

Whatever kind of support CPSs and humanitarian organizations agree on, they should pay particular intention to inclusion and gender dynamics, as some forms of support may be more accessible or appropriate for some and less for others. For instance, a two-day formal training session might be difficult for those who work in informal sectors seven days a week and who have caring responsibilities, who are often women. For example, providing childcare during training sessions can make them more accessible.

In addition, separate training sessions, discussion groups and feedback sessions for women, youth and people with disabilities can provide space where they may feel more confident to try out newly acquired skills.

**Training sessions**

Formal training sessions for CPS members should cover topics based on the roles and responsibilities laid out in the terms of reference. Trainings can be conducted by staff from humanitarian organizations or other community members or leaders. Joint training sessions between CPS members and other stakeholders – community leaders, local authorities, humanitarian staff – can sometimes be a good way of creating relationships. Topics can include thematic protection areas (e.g. introduction to protection, rights of internally displaced persons, gender-based violence); approaches (e.g. safe programming, community engagement); and techniques and tools (e.g. advocacy, sensitization, safe referrals, protection analysis, stakeholder mapping, gender analysis); as well as protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

**Brokering relationships and facilitating access to duty bearers, service providers and humanitarian organizations**

In some instances, because of underlying power dynamics, it can be easier for supporting humanitarian organizations than for CPS members to have access to duty bearers, service providers or other humanitarian organizations. Where this is the case, staff from supporting organizations can support CPS members by introducing them and their work to authorities, or by organizing roundtable discussions to start an exchange about protection. They can also relay CPSs’ advocacy messages at higher level, while creating opportunities for CPS members to undertake that advocacy themselves in the future.

In a similar way, supporting organizations can link CPSs to other relevant humanitarian organizations – to broaden their partnerships, carry out advocacy or seek additional resources or support.
Material and financial support to CPS

In order to carry out their activities, CPSs need various materials, such as pens and paper to record meeting minutes; visibility items like T-shirts that identify them as CPS members; phone credit to sustain early warning systems; and education and communication materials such as flyers or posters. Supporting humanitarian organizations can supply these in-kind to CPSs or agree to give the equivalent in cash. CPSs may also need money to carry out certain activities, e.g. renting a location to hold a community dialogue. Supporting organizations can partly or entirely finance those activities based on the community protection action plan.

It is not recommended to provide individual CPS members with financial compensation in exchange for their work, as this can undermine the legitimacy and credibility of CPS work in the eyes of the community and duty bearers; create competition with authorities – protection is after all their primary responsibility; and destroy the intrinsic motivation that attracts many CPS members in the first place. Moreover, it is not sustainable, as it would stop when external funding does.3

An alternative approach to fund work is to support the establishment of small income-generating activities (IGAs) or saving schemes for CPSs. In some countries, supporting organizations have supported setting up IGAs for CPSs that pay for the structures’ activity costs. IGAs should not replace protection as the focus of a CPS. They must be conditional on a successful risk analysis that includes the potential of IGAs creating tensions between CPS members. Importantly, the income should support the CPS in conducting its primary activities.4 Depending on the IGA chosen, relevant experts (e.g. livelihoods, agriculture) should be brought in to support their establishment.

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