



Capacity strengthening Community engagement Community protection structures
Exit strategy Monitoring and coaching Sustainability

 Global

Planning and preparing to exit communities in community-based protection programming

Introduction

Planning the exit of a supporting humanitarian organization working directly with community-based protection structures (CPSs) from the very beginning of a community-based protection (CPB) programme is key to a sustainable approach because it helps prepare CPSs for the time after the direct support of the humanitarian organization ends. In addition, it can help prevent false expectations by agreeing jointly what a CPS intends to continue doing after the organization's exit, and what support they can expect to help them achieve the level of autonomy required.¹

This tool explores what an exit plan is, what it can contain and how to develop it. The annexes, a list of suggested questions to guide discussions to develop the plan together with CPS members, a short example of an exit plan and an empty template can be found.

What is an exit plan?

An exit plan is a document developed with CPS members at the beginning of a project and updated regularly. Its objective is to ensure steps are taken throughout the project to develop the sustainability of the CPS and their protection work. The plan should ensure that, once the supporting humanitarian organization leaves, the CPS has the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, acceptance, tools, resources and opportunities to continue with their protection activities to the extent that they wish.

An exit plan should first set out objectives for the CPS's sustainability, e.g., being able to organize regular meetings by themselves, and being able to independently identify clear and positive sensitization messages. At the start of a new project, planning this may seem abstract to CPS members, but staff from the supporting organization can guide them to determine objectives. With each update, the exercise will become more concrete and easier for CPS members.

The plan should identify for each area how CPS are working at the time of drafting/updating the plan (e.g. CPS meetings are facilitated by humanitarian staff) and what the CPSs want this to look like after the organization's exit (e.g. CPS members fully facilitating their own meetings), as well as what needs to happen during the project to make that objective possible (e.g. CPS members first co-facilitating, then facilitating with support and coaching from humanitarian staff).

¹ This global tool builds and expands on existing guidance documents produced by Oxfam's protection team in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Driven by the CPS's priorities, areas that could be covered in the exit plan include:

- Protection activities;
- How the CPS will function;
- Use of resources;
- Capacities and knowledge;
- Community engagement;
- Relations with the authorities;
- Collaboration with other actors; and
- Risk management.

This could involve, for instance, organizing the transfer of tools and other resources; supporting the CPS to develop a plan for how new members will be able to join; brokering relationships with other humanitarian organizations; and providing specific capacity building, such as training trainers.

Developing an exit plan

Developing the exit plan involves joint analysis by the CPS and its supporting humanitarian organization. Staff from humanitarian organizations can prepare themselves for the exit plan development meeting by identifying the key points they would like to propose to the CPS, in case members of the latter struggle to find ideas themselves. Humanitarian staff can also carry out group discussions and interviews with CPS members to take stock of ideas and create space for those who feel more comfortable speaking in smaller groups.

At the planning meeting, CPS members can discuss how they think they would like to work after the project has ended. In short, they should determine what activities they would like to do and in what way. It should be stressed that the supporting humanitarian organization will no longer be there regularly to support them.

At the meeting, humanitarian staff should not put too much pressure on CPS members. They are free to decide to continue all of their activities, or only a few – or not to continue at all (for example, for security reasons).

Next, CPS members can decide on measures that they and the supporting humanitarian organization can take to achieve the objectives for each area. The template in [Annex 3](#) can be used to record the results. It is important to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. Finally, a risk analysis on the plan should be completed with the CPS, this includes considerations such as whether there elements that could create tensions (for example, the management of equipment), and how they might be avoided.

Depending on the context and stage of the project, it can be useful to involve community leaders and other community members, so they can contribute to and feedback on the plan. Identify the roles and responsibilities of the authorities and leaders, and make sure you secure their agreement before including them in the exit plan. If they do not agree, revise the plan together in order to find realistic objectives that they would agree to support.

At the end, the exit plan can be put in writing and signed by the CPS members and supporting humanitarian organization. At the next opportunity, the exit plan should be presented to the rest of the community for their information.

Annex 1: Suggested questions to guide the development of an exit plan

Although some questions below focus on the current state of the CPS, the discussion should consider what the work should look like after the project has concluded. For instance, when asking who facilitates a certain type of meeting at the moment, the discussion should also include who will facilitate those meetings after the supporting humanitarian organization exists.

Protection activities

- What activities does the CPS want to continue implementing after the project? What resources and capacities are needed for this?

Functioning of the CPS

- How does the CPS currently work? To what extent is it autonomous?
- How does communication and collaboration between different CPSs take place?
- What meetings are currently held? Who organizes and facilitates them? What could that look like after the project? Where are they held? Where could they be held?
- Is there a code of conduct or a set of internal rules?

Use of resources

- What resources does the CPS have? How are they managed?
- How will the CPS finance its activities after the project?

Capacities and knowledge

- What areas of capacity need to be reinforced (e.g. sensitization, advocacy, facilitation of meetings, referrals)?
- What are the weakest protection-related areas?
- Who can refresh and reinforce the CPS's capacities after the project?

Community engagement

- Do community members know about the CPS and understand its functions?
- How is the CPS perceived by the community?
- How does the CPS consult community members? How do community members provide feedback?

Relations with the authorities

- What are relations between the CPS and the local authorities like?
- Are regular meetings held? Who organizes and facilitates them? Who sends out the invitations?
- Are there any specific allies for different areas of work?
- Who introduces the CPS to new authorities when they change?

Collaboration with other actors

- Are there any structures or organizations in place that can continue to support the CPS?
- Will the supporting humanitarian organization still be present in the area with other programmes?
- Who receives alerts from the CPS? Who can receive them after the project?
- How does the CPS collaborate with other groups, structures, associations and advocacy networks?

Risk management

- Does the CPS carry out regular risk assessments themselves?
- What will the CPS do in the event of a sudden change of context after the project?

Annex 2: Example of an exit plan

Location: _____

Date: _____

Name of the community protection structure (CPS):

Objectives of the CPS:

- Even after the project, we want to continue to meet regularly
- We want the community to continue to engage actively with us on protection
- We want to continue doing awareness-raising sessions
- We want to facilitate roundtables with authorities ourselves

Area	What will the CPS (continue to) do after the supporting humanitarian organization exits?	What will the supporting humanitarian organization continue to do after exiting?	What will be done during the project to prepare the CPS function autonomously?
Functions of the CPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CPS will continue to meet every 1st Wednesday of the month; meetings are facilitated by CPS members on rotating basis ▪ Each month, a workplan for the next six months is developed/updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct a follow-up visits at 3, 9 and 18 months after exit to check on how the CPS is doing ▪ During visit, offer coaching to CPS members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Throughout the project, the CPS members will increasingly take over facilitation of CPS meetings, with the staff from supporting organizations increasingly acting as observers ▪ Staff from the supporting organization will provide feedback to CPS members on how facilitation went
Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CPS organizes regular community dialogues to discuss protection situation and receive feedback on their work (at least every three months) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support CPS members to organize and facilitate community engagement activities, and support them to establish a routine
Capacities and knowledge of CPS members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internally train new CPS members on protection topics, advocacy, sensitization and negotiation skills ▪ Revisit key protection topics at the beginning of quarterly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During follow-up visits, run refresher sessions on specific topics if needed (agreed via telephone beforehand with CPS members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training of trainers will be conducted for CPS members ▪ During second half of project, CPS members will co-facilitate training sessions ▪ Three months before end of the project, 20 hard copies of training material will be handed over to CPS

Annex 3: Example of an exit plan

Location: _____

Date: _____

Name of the community protection structure (CPS):

Objectives of the CPS:

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Area	What will the CPS (continue to) do after the supporting humanitarian organization exits?	What will the supporting humanitarian organization continue to do after exiting?	What will be done during the project to prepare the CPS function autonomously?