Global

Guidance on community-led protection advocacy

Introduction

People affected by humanitarian crises are most often the first responders to their own needs, which include protection from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation. Nonetheless, it is never their responsibility to ensure their own protection. As seen in the protection guidance, the primary responsibility for people’s protection lies always with the state or those holding control over a territory.

Therefore, even though community-based protection (CBP) programming focuses on strengthening communities’ own self-protection capacities, it must be complementary to other efforts aimed at reducing or eliminating protection risks through other means. One of the ways of doing so is through advocacy.

Protection advocacy is a set of activities that aim to influence stakeholders to change practices, behaviours and policies that do or may have an impact on certain protection risks. It can be undertaken not only by humanitarian organizations, but also community members, including community protection structures (CPSs). As such, advocacy is not only complementary to CBP, but can also be part of it.

This document outlines key concepts and strategies for community-led advocacy. It is intended to serve as a reference for both community members, especially members of community protection structures, and the staff of supporting humanitarian organizations, and can be used to guide trainings or introductory meetings.

Types of interlocutors

In order to effect change, advocacy efforts may involve different types of interlocutors, including advocacy targets (sources of protection and/or sources of threats) and allies (influencers).

Sources of protection

The primary responsibility for the protection of people affected by humanitarian crises lies with states and other actors holding control of a territory, such as armed groups. These actors are thus called ‘primary duty bearers’. Primary duty bearers also include internationally mandated military forces and police deployments, such as UN peace operations.

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1. This global tool builds and further expands on existing guidance documents produced by Oxfam’s protection teams in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Lebanon.
From an advocacy point of view, these actors are sources of protection – one of the main targets of advocacy efforts. Advocacy towards sources of protection aims to reduce a protection risk by increasing the protection afforded by duty bearers.

**Sources of threats**
Sources of threats – i.e. the perpetrators of abuse – are also advocacy targets. They can include criminals, community members (including neighbours and relatives) or even primary duty bearers themselves. Advocacy efforts targeting sources of threats aim to reduce a protection risk by reducing the threats themselves.

**Influencers**
Advocacy can also involve interlocutors with influence over sources of protection and/or threats. These can include community leaders, religious actors, civil society organizations, trade unions and other collectives.

Note: Sources of protection and sources of threats are advocacy targets, as they do or may have a direct impact on a protection risk. However, influencers are not advocacy targets, but rather actual or potential allies who can be mobilized to help pressure sources of protection or sources of threats.

**Interlocutors fitting multiple classifications**
The types of interlocutors seen above are not mutually exclusive. An interlocutor can be simultaneously a source of protection and a source of threat, or an influencer and a source of threat or protection. For instance, duty bearers are always expected to be sources of protection and can be engaged as such; however, they may also be sources of threats if, for example, a soldier or police officer is the perpetrator of violence, coercion or deliberate deprivation.

**Figure 1: Interlocutors fitting multiple classifications**

What defines the type of an advocacy interlocutor is their role in relation to a specific risk. For example, a community leader who beats his wife may be engaged as a source of threat. Yet, the same community leader may be engaged as an influencer to pressure authorities to increase policing in an area prone to robberies. Thus, the same interlocutor can be engaged for advocacy from different perspectives – in this case, domestic violence or criminality, respectively.
Objectives

Protection advocacy is aimed at reducing or eliminating a protection risk by influencing the practices, behaviours and policies of relevant stakeholders. When engaging sources of threats, advocacy seeks to change harmful practices that are the source of a protection risk (e.g. torture of detainees). When engaging sources of protection, advocacy seeks to negotiate a positive practice that could help reduce or eliminate a protection risk (e.g. applying disciplinary measures to soldiers found to have extorted money from civilians).

Types of advocacy


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasion</th>
<th>Confidential dialogue with duty bearers and/or perpetrators, with the intention of changing their behaviour.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Mobilizing key stakeholders who can influence duty bearers and/or perpetrators to change their behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denunciation</td>
<td>Publicly condemning an abuse, hoping that public pressure will influence duty bearers and/or perpetrators to change their behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main difference between them is the extent of other actors’ involvement in the advocacy efforts. Persuasion is focused on engaging sources of protection and/or sources of threats; the other two types involve engaging influencers. Mobilization involves engaging a specific set of influencers, while denunciation works with the general public.

Levels of advocacy

Advocacy can be carried out at various levels – from local to international. Advocacy efforts led by CPSs and community members will naturally begin at the local level. However, these efforts may fail, for instance, due to a lack of willingness or capacity among sources of protection or threats. When this happens, advocacy calls may be escalated to other administrative levels in country – such as provinces, regions, national government – or even internationally.

Advocacy at higher levels are likely to be less to community actors. Therefore, supporting humanitarian organizations must be ready to help bring communities’ concerns to higher sources of protection. This may entail facilitating communities’ direct access to regional or national authorities, or supporting the mobilization of humanitarian and civil society organizations and other actors able to carry out advocacy on behalf of the community. Supporting humanitarian organizations themselves may also advocate on behalf of communities.

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Means of engagement

There are several ways of engaging sources of protection, sources of threats and influencers for advocacy purposes, depending on the chosen type of advocacy. Some examples based on the experience of CPSs supported by Oxfam, Oxfam staff and partner organizations are given below.

**Persuasion**

**Regular meetings:** Protection risks can be discussed with duty bearers (approached as sources of protection and/or sources of threat) during regular meetings, if these are in place. This is the case, for instance, in DRC, where CPS hold monthly meetings with local authorities. These offer an opportunity present the initial community protection action plan and updated versions of it, discuss identified protection risks and follow up on previous discussions. See Annex 1 for an example of a report from such a meeting.

**Ad hoc meetings:** When regular meetings are not in place, or when a protection risk requires immediate action, advocacy actors can organize ad hoc meetings with their advocacy targets. Sources of threat who are not duty bearers are more likely to be engaged through such meetings, since advocacy actors may not hold regular meetings with perpetrators.

**Confidential letters:** Advocacy actors may voice concern over protection risks through confidential letters that may include facts, figures and arguments supporting an advocacy call.

**Mobilization**

**Humanitarian forums:** Humanitarian forums such as Protection Clusters, Interagency Coordination Working Groups, and NGO Forums may provide an opportunity for advocacy actors to mobilise potential allies.

**Ad hoc meetings:** These may be particularly relevant to reach and seek the support of non-humanitarian allies, such as community and religious leaders, and trade unions, who may not partake in the humanitarian forums mentioned above.

**Legislative theatre:**4 "Legislative theatre" is an interactive approach used in DRC since 2016. It consists of a roleplay in which members of the audience – authorities and/or community members – can replace the protagonist and other characters to propose and experiment solutions to protection risks. This allows authorities and community members to put themselves in each other's shoes, which encourages empathy and opens the way for commitments to address a protection risk. As the theatre engages both duty bearers and rights holders, it can be both a sensitization and an advocacy tool.

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4 The legislative theatre and other forms of interactive theatre used in DRC were developed by the organization Theatre for a Change. Their website can be found at https://www.tfacafrica.com/ (accessed in March 2021).

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This document is part of a Resource Pack on Community-Based Protection
Reports: Advocacy reports can be a way of making public certain protection concerns. For example, in a 2020 report on the humanitarian situation in Taiz, Yemen,\(^5\) Oxfam outlined key protection risks – including indiscriminate shelling, the use of landmines and lack of access to healthcare – and made specific recommendations to parties to the conflict, humanitarian actors, and the international community.

Campaigns: Protection risks can also be subject of the advocacy campaigns. For instance, Oxfam’s ‘Rights in Crisis’ campaign advocates for the safety and dignity of people affected by conflict.\(^6\)

Petitions: Petitions entail collecting a large number of signatures, on paper or via a website, in order to gather public support around an issue. An example is Oxfam’s online petition demanding the COVID-19 vaccine be free for everyone.\(^7\)

Events: Events such as rallies, sit-ins, marches and vigils, can also show public support around an issue and attract media coverage.

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The process

The process of an advocacy activity starts with the identification of protection risks that a protection actor, such as a CPS, will act on. This often builds on a protection analysis as part of the creation of a protection action plan. At this stage, it is usually not yet clear whether advocacy will be suitable to address the risks identified.

The protection actor must then set the advocacy objective, e.g. through the use of problem and solution trees, i.e. the practices, behaviours and/or policies that must be changed in order to reduce or eliminate the protection risk. This must include an assessment – based on a strong power analysis – of what impact the change may have on different groups in the community. For example, they could exacerbate existing gender and power dynamics, inequality or marginalization.

This should be followed by the identification of advocacy targets and allies, which can build on the stakeholder mapping that is commonly part of protection plans. Efforts to set advocacy objectives and identify targets and allies may help determine whether advocacy is the best course of action to address a protection risk.

The protection actor must then analyse the risks involved in engaging the potential interlocutors. This risk analysis is the last crucial step in determining whether advocacy should be carried out. If the risk analysis supports it, an advocacy strategy is then established, based on which the protection actors can engage the interlocutors identified in the strategy.

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This document is part of a Resource Pack on Community-Based Protection
Box 1: The conditions that make for successful community-led advocacy

Oxfam’s experience in supporting community-led advocacy shows that advocacy efforts are more likely to succeed when based on trust-building and non-confrontational dialogue with advocacy targets – especially sources of threats. This requires protection actors to position themselves as cooperative, intending to support interlocutors in addressing protection risks. In other words, it entails treating sources of threats as potential sources of protection.

After engaging the selected interlocutors, protection actors must follow up, in order to assess whether the intended change was achieved. If the situation did not change, or changed only partially, protection actors must update their advocacy objective and restart the process from that stage.

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A community protection structure (CPS) learns that the community has not been able to access the well near their village. According to the information collected, soldiers of armed group X have occupied the area around the well and are denying access to community members. Many families have resorted to paying the armed men for access to the well. Some community members were beaten when negotiating access and threatened with rape.

Identify the protection risk based on protection analysis

Set advocacy objectives

Influence soldiers to allow for unimpeded access of community members to the well.

Identify advocacy targets

1. Officer in charge of soldiers, on site (armed group X).
2. Commander in charge of the area (armed group X).
3. Commander of government forces nearest to the site.

Identify allies

1. Traditional authority in charge of the area.
2. Religious leader of neighbouring village, who is also one soldier’s cousin.

Identify risks

1. Traditional authority in charge of the area.
2. Religious leader of neighbouring village, who is also one soldier’s cousin.

Set strategy

CPS, together with traditional authority in charge of the area, to engage Commander of armed group X in a non-confrontational dialogue. This means treating the Commander as an ally equally interested in ensuring the protection of civilians (even if that is not the case in reality). Thus, CPSSs are merely presenting information on certain abuses, in order to support the Commander’s role as a source of protection. Seek Commander’s commitment to do something about the issue, not just acknowledge it.

Engage

CPS and traditional authority meet with the Commander, who agrees to order the soldiers to allow community members access to the well.

Follow-up

CPS learns that, even though reports of violence by the soldiers have significantly reduced, they continue to demand payment in exchange for access to the well.
Documentation

It is important to keep a record of what issues were raised with which advocacy interlocutors, and the outcomes of such discussions. This allows for a better mapping of past and ongoing advocacy efforts, which can inform future follow-up.

Annex 2 includes a template ‘advocacy log’ used by Oxfam’s protection team in DRC, including real examples of advocacy efforts conducted.

Practical tips

- **Confidentiality:** Do not mention the names of individuals or any personally identifiable information pertaining to a protection incident with advocacy interlocutors. If absolutely necessary to reveal personal information (e.g. to obtain reparations for an abuse), this must be done with the consent of the survivor and based on a risk analysis that approved the sharing of information.

- **Build on existing relationships:** At the beginning of a project or programme in a certain area, conduct an analysis of existing mechanisms to engage duty bearers and other advocacy targets.

- **Constructive relationships:** When engaging duty bearers and other interlocutors, refrain from casting blame. Seek instead to build a relationship of trust and collaboration, instilling a sense of ownership over their protection responsibilities.

- **Community leadership:** Whenever possible, CPS members and other community members should be the ones presenting protection risks to and negotiating solutions with advocacy interlocutors. However, if they are uncomfortable with this, supporting humanitarian organizations may take the lead.

- **Women's participation:** Encourage, but do not force, women to make presentations on the topics in plenary. This can contribute to challenging gender stereotypes and build the confidence of female community and CPS members.

- **Collaboration:** Identify existing community structures, civil society organizations and other actors that you could potentially work with in advocacy efforts. Encourage CPSs to conduct collective advocacy as a way of reducing the risk of reprisals.
### Annex 1: Report template for regular meetings with local authorities in DRC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area of intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Topics to discuss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community 1: the meeting took place on [DATE]. It focused on conditions of detention and free provision of food to inmates.</th>
<th>Types of authorities/community associations</th>
<th>CPS participants</th>
<th>Commitments from authorities (protection principles)</th>
<th>Observations/recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities and community leaders:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 1]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 2]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 3]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 1]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 2]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 3]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ACTOR] committed to ensuring cleanliness of cells, using cleaning products and water to prevent dust from accumulating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Forum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[ACTOR] did not make any commitment regarding food costs as, according to them, this is provided in/at [LOCATION] by the prosecutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants advised to advocate at province level about charging food in jail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Community 2: the meeting took place on [DATE]. It focused on threat of theft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authorities and community leaders:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 1]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 2]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[AUTHORITY 3]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 1]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 2]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[LEADER 3]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Forum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The representative, [ACTOR], said they were satisfied with this meeting.
## Annex 2: Advocacy Log used in DRC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>End date</th>
<th>Advocacy level</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>What was the issue?</th>
<th>What action was taken?</th>
<th>What was the result?</th>
<th>Update</th>
<th>Change for which actor?</th>
<th>Source/evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>[DATE]</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Arbitrary arrest of a man in his forties on [DATE] by [AUTHOR], for owning a fighting stick.</td>
<td>Change agents advocated to [AUTHOR]'s commanding officer on [DATE], demanding the person's release.</td>
<td>Immediate release, without condition.</td>
<td>Nothing to flag.</td>
<td>[AUTHOR]</td>
<td>CPS Synergy Network Oxfam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>[DATE]</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Three persons, aged 35 to 40, including a woman, were severely tortured by [AUTHOR].</td>
<td>The auditor was informed and the acts of torture ended the day after.</td>
<td>Nothing to flag.</td>
<td>Auditor of [LOCATION]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>[DATE]</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Persistent forced labour due to [AUTHOR] forcing civilians in and around [LOCATION] to carry luggage and war ammunitions.</td>
<td>The commanding officer committed to put an end to this behaviour.</td>
<td>No cases flagged since the advocacy actions.</td>
<td>[AUTHOR]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Recurring incursions from armed criminals at night in [LOCATION]. They steal, kill, and abduct village inhabitants.</td>
<td>The area leader, with the security committee, committed to working on the issue, to eradicate insecurity in the locality. [ACTOR]'s commanding officer committed to increase the number of patrols at night and during the day, to put an end to incivilities.</td>
<td>Nothing to flag.</td>
<td>Security committee of [LOCATION]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Recurring incursions of [ARMED INDIVIDUALS] in [LOCATION] followed by incivilities and extortions from inhabitants after the departure of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.</td>
<td>The two locality leaders acknowledged the issue and said they would contact the group leaders.</td>
<td>The frequency of this type of events is still monitored.</td>
<td>[ARMED INDIVIDUALS]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>