



Tool

Advocacy Football Listening clubs Material support Radio Referrals
Sensitisation Theatre

📍 Global

Guidance on community-led sensitization¹

Introduction

As outlined in the [guidance on community-led advocacy](#), reducing protection risks requires influencing relevant practices, behaviours and policies. This is also the objective of sensitization, which aims to increase the knowledge of a group of people about a subject, often encouraging or discouraging certain practices.

This document outlines how to design and implement a range of sensitization activities. It is intended to serve as a reference document for community members, especially members of community protection structures (CPSs), and the staff of supporting humanitarian organizations. It can also be used to guide trainings.

Objectives

Sensitization activities can be tailored to meet various objectives, as outlined below.

Reducing threats

Sensitization activities can form part of efforts to reduce protection threats. This is especially the case for threats posed by community members themselves: protection actors may seek to sensitize communities to harmful practices that are at the root of such threats. For instance, community members may be made more aware of the importance of sending girls to school, as a way of combatting child marriage; or of the importance of supporting survivors of sexual violence, as a way of reducing discrimination and stigma.

Sensitization may also seek to reduce threats posed by duty bearers. Sensitization activities may be a first step in presenting a specific protection topic, such as denial of freedom of movement, introducing a protection theme to authorities and thus pave the way to changing their behaviour. This may be further supported by [advocacy](#) efforts on specific protection incidents.

Strengthening capacities

As seen in the [guidance on self-protection](#), knowledge is one of the pillars of communities' self-protection capacities. Sensitization can strengthen this knowledge through the direct provision of information essential to communities' efforts to ensure their own protection.

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

For instance, sensitization activities may focus on disseminating information about people’s rights, informing efforts to ensure such rights are respected and enforced by duty bearers. As such, sensitization supports [community-led advocacy](#). Sensitization activities may also support referrals by disseminating information about services and how to access them – for instance, they may emphasize the importance of accessing medical services within 72 hours in case of sexual violence. Sharing information on rights and services are common objectives of sensitization activities.

In its support to both advocacy and referrals, sensitization can also strengthen the [engagement pillar of communities’ self-protection capacities](#) by enabling better-informed engagement of duty bearers and service providers.



Sensitization, advocacy and referrals

[Advocacy](#) and sensitization can engage both duty bearers and rights holders, both as sources of protection and/or threats, with the common objective of influencing them. Despite the similarities in their objectives and types of interlocutors, advocacy and sensitization have different scope. While advocacy targets specific sources of protection or threat who may contribute to reducing a risk, sensitization activities target a group of people among whom *may* be sources of protection or threat. Advocacy entails engagement either directly through persuasion, or indirectly through mobilization or denunciation. Even when done indirectly, advocacy efforts aim to influence a specific interlocutor, rather than the entire group they belong to.

Sensitization is largely about information sharing. This includes information that can contribute to reducing threats, as well as to strengthening capacities. Thus, while advocacy is solely focused on threat reduction, sensitization’s objectives also encompass capacity strengthening.

Capacity-strengthening sensitization includes activities aimed at sharing with community members information on services available and how to access them. Thus, sensitization also has close links to referrals, as it supports self-referrals and contributes to facilitating access to services.

Box 1: Example scenario showing advocacy vs sensitization

For example, if a community protection structure learns that a family is planning to marry their 12-year-old daughter, CPS members may engage the family directly in a dialogue aimed at persuading them not to proceed. This would be an advocacy effort.

Conversely, if child marriage is a common issue in a community, a CPS may organize sensitization sessions about the importance of girls' education and the disadvantages of marrying them before they completed their education. This would be a sensitization effort.

Both cases concern the issue of child marriage; however, in the first case CPS members are engaging the sources of the threat (in this case, the family), while in the second they are engaging a larger audience (the entire community) in which child marriage is an issue.

Types of sensitization activities

Sensitization activities can take various forms. Interactive formats are particularly effective because they allow for more engagement with the target audience, clarification of questions and more in-depth and personal discussions. A non-exhaustive list of example activities from Oxfam's experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) follows:

- 1. Community dialogues.** Dialogues with a group of people in the community (sometimes separated by gender) on a topic. Normally, the dialogues are more structured and follow a programme or series of questions to guide the conversation.
- 2. Conversations with neighbours and friends.** Conversations between CPS members and their neighbours and friends, in which they share the information they have learned during protection trainings, notably on rights.
- 3. Meetings with traditional and religious leaders.** Traditional and religious leaders have an important influence on the attitudes of different segments of a population; sensitizing them to certain issues may be strategically important for sensitizing the community.
- 4. Discussion circle.** A group of friends or members of an association who discuss a topic every week or month, for example, a group of mothers discussing different protection themes.
- 5. Community meetings.** Formal meetings to discuss a specific topic, e.g., the importance of enrolling girls in school.
- 6. Competitions.** Competitions can be used to stimulate interest, especially among young people, in a theme. For example, a CPS may organize a contest on the best song or poem about a protection issue. CPS members can serve as a jury and reward winners in public, taking the opportunity to emphasize key messages from the songs or poems, and if needed add any messages that were not covered.
- 7. Theatre.** Theatre may instigate reflections about a subject. For example, plays can be used to show a man performing tasks usually done by women, to provoke debate around gender issues. The most engaging form of theatre is participatory theatre, in which the audience – authorities and/or community members – can replace the protagonist and other characters to propose and test solutions to protection risks. For examples of the use of interactive theatre in DRC, see case studies from DRC, by [CEDIER](#) and [GADHOP](#).
- 8. Radio.** Given radio's wide reach, it can be an effective means of disseminating key messages. Broadcasting pre-recorded debates or plays may be more engaging and more effective than straight messages. Interactive radio programmes that audience members can call into are also very popular. For an example of the use of radio as a sensitization activity in DRC, see a case study by [GADHOP](#).

9. **Listening clubs.** Listening clubs are a space for a group of people to listen to a radio show together, discuss it, ask questions to clarify what is being said, and potentially even create their own shows. For more details, the [terms of reference for listening clubs](#).
10. **Sports and games.** Football matches and other sports or games can be a way to encourage people to come together, and also provide an opportunity to discuss certain issues (for instance, before or after the match, or at half-time). For an example of the use of football matches as a sensitization activity in DRC, see a case study by [SOPROP](#).
11. **Mobile voice messages.** In DRC, Oxfam and partners make use of a voice message service to disseminate key messages. The service is provided by mobile provider Vodacom in French, Swahili, Lingala, Tshiluba and Kikongo. Users call a designated number and can then access the messages according to category. For example, they can type 1 for messages on the notion of gender, 2 for general protection notions, 3 for information on services available, 4 for information on gender-based violence, etc.

Box 2: Campaigns

Protection actors, including CPSs, may develop campaigns to raise awareness on certain protection issues. Campaigns involve a series of sensitization activities around a theme, in order to increase attention to the issue. Campaigns may combine different activities, or simply entail carrying out the same activity more than once – for example, at different locations or with different target audiences.

Supporting materials

The activities explored above may require several types of supporting materials. For instance, radio and listening clubs may require radio equipment, and football matches may require sports equipment.

Most commonly, sensitization activities require information, education and communication (IEC) materials that may include imagery and text, e.g. posters, signs, flyers and comics. (Some example posters developed in DRC are included in [Annex 1](#).)

Before developing new IEC materials, CPSs and other protection actors should identify materials that they have used in the past, and/or liaise with other actors who may have materials on a similar theme. If still relevant and appropriate, these may be reused.

When developing IEC materials, it is important to analyse the population groups that will be able to engage with them, for instance:

- Are there materials for people with low literacy?
- What type of materials speaks more to women, youth, different religious groups?
- Which materials are appropriate for people with hearing impairment or visual impairments?
- If displayed in a certain location, e.g. posters in the central market, who is likely to see them? Who is likely to miss them?

Thus, a combination of different IEC materials is often required.

Partnerships

Individuals and groups beyond CPSs and humanitarian organizations may play a key role in the design and/or implementation of sensitization activities. For example, local artists may support the creation of plays or the training of CPS members in acting; local radio stations may support the broadcasting of radio programmes on protection issues.

The process

- 1. Theme.** First, you must identify the protection issue about which to raise awareness. As with advocacy, this first step usually builds on a protection analysis and power analysis, and is part of developing a [protection action plan](#). Themes for sensitization can also be identified during CPS meetings and other gatherings of protection actors, building on continuous monitoring and analysis.
- 2. Objective.** The objective of the sensitization activity specifies the practices, behaviours and/or policies that it seeks to change, in order to address the identified risks. This may include changing harmful practices, raising awareness on people's rights and/or sharing information on services available. Setting objectives requires considering how the intended change may impact existing power dynamics, and taking active measures to ensure it does not perpetuate inequalities and/or marginalization.
- 3. Target audience.** Identifying the target audiences can build on pre-existing stakeholder mapping. A sensitization activity or campaign may target an entire community at once, or sub-groups to engage separately. In certain contexts, it may be good practice to involve authorities and community leaders in developing the key messages and in implementing sensitization activities. This helps increase the reach of the activity within the community but can also be a way of engaging them as a target audience themselves.
- 4. Risks.** Protection actors must carry out a [risk analysis](#) that considers the potential risks of discussing the themes, pursuing the objectives and engaging the target audiences identified.

The risk analysis will determine whether and how the sensitization activity or campaign will be carried out. Its conclusions may restrict what can be done and how, and thus require changes to themes, objectives and target audiences. It may also influence the content and type of sensitization.

- 5. Content:** Defining the content of sensitization activities involves agreeing on key messages and images to be used, and the discussions that the activity or campaign intends to encourage.

Such content should be defined by CPS members and other people from the community, as they know their own community and context best, thus ensuring that it is relevant and appropriate.

The content should avoid portraying local authorities in bad light, in order not to damage relations with them and avoid potential risks. Maintaining a good relationship with authorities may also require sharing the content of activities with them in advance.

Box 3: Sensitizing young people

Oxfam's experience in DRC has shown that young people listen better to messages from their peers. Thus, CPSs and other protection actors are encouraged to work with youth associations and representatives in the design and implementation of sensitization activities.

Table 1: Lessons learned on sensitization content by Oxfam’s protection team in DRC

Lesson learned	A bad example	A good example
Encourage reflection without repeating overly used messages	The message: ‘No to rape’	The message: ‘Every individual has a responsibility to support victims/survivors of violence’
Focus on positive messages	An image of a woman who has survived intimate partner violence, with the message: ‘No to domestic violence’	An image of a woman and her husband talking amicably, with the message: ‘I have respect for my wife and we discuss our problems together. What about you?’
Respect the dignity of women and men	An image of a woman lying on the ground or being attacked	An image of a man accompanying his wife to the health centre

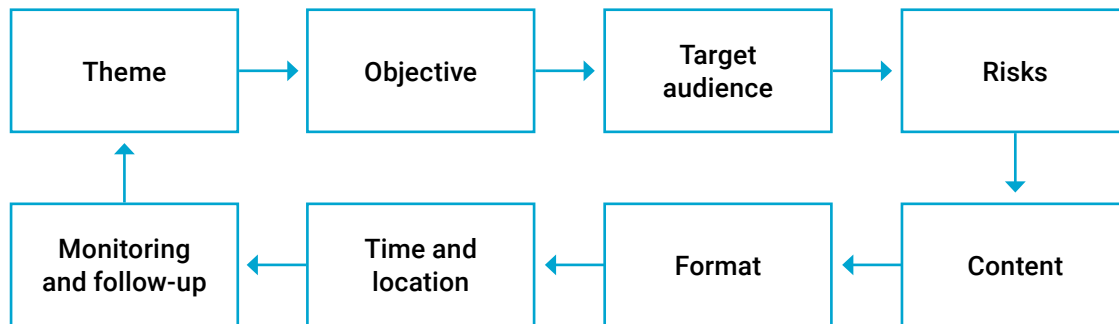
- 6. Format.** The formats of the sensitization activities must be determined in line with the identified themes, objectives, audiences, risks and content. This requires agreeing on the types of activity to be used and the supporting materials and partnerships required to carry them out. An important point to consider is who is sensitizing whom. For example, on gender-based violence, it may be most appropriate for women to sensitize other women, and for men to sensitize other men.
- 7. Time and location.** The time and location of a sensitization activity may be influenced by several factors, such as the target audiences, formats and risks. For instance, sensitization through radio broadcasts may be planned for times when families are at home and have access to the radio, as illustrated by [GADHOP in DRC](#). Sensitization through theatre may target public spaces, such as markets at busy hours, as done by [CEDIER in DRC](#). Sensitization on issues affecting a specific group may be done through discussions with members of that group only, as was the case with [human trafficking affecting women in Bangladesh](#).

Table 2: Example of formats, locations and times for sensitization activities aimed at supporting access to services

Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services available and how to access them Need to seek medical support within 72 hours in case of sexual violence
Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the groups within community X
Supporting materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large signs Flyers
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service providers Local authorities Religious leader from local church
Location and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the entrance to the market, on market days (Tuesdays and Saturdays) At the village’s main intersection, on weekdays Door-to-door visits, especially in areas far from the village centre, during the weekend At the church, right before and after Sunday mass

8. **Monitoring and follow-up.** After implementing the planned sensitization activities, protection actors must continue monitoring the situation, to assess the extent to which their objectives were achieved. If not achieved or only partially achieved, they may have to reassess the relevance and appropriateness of the objective and whether the content or format were not effective in achieving the objective and then restart the process.

Figure 1: The sensitization cycle



Annex 1: Examples of posters used in DRC to sensitize communities on various protection themes²

Heritage

Title

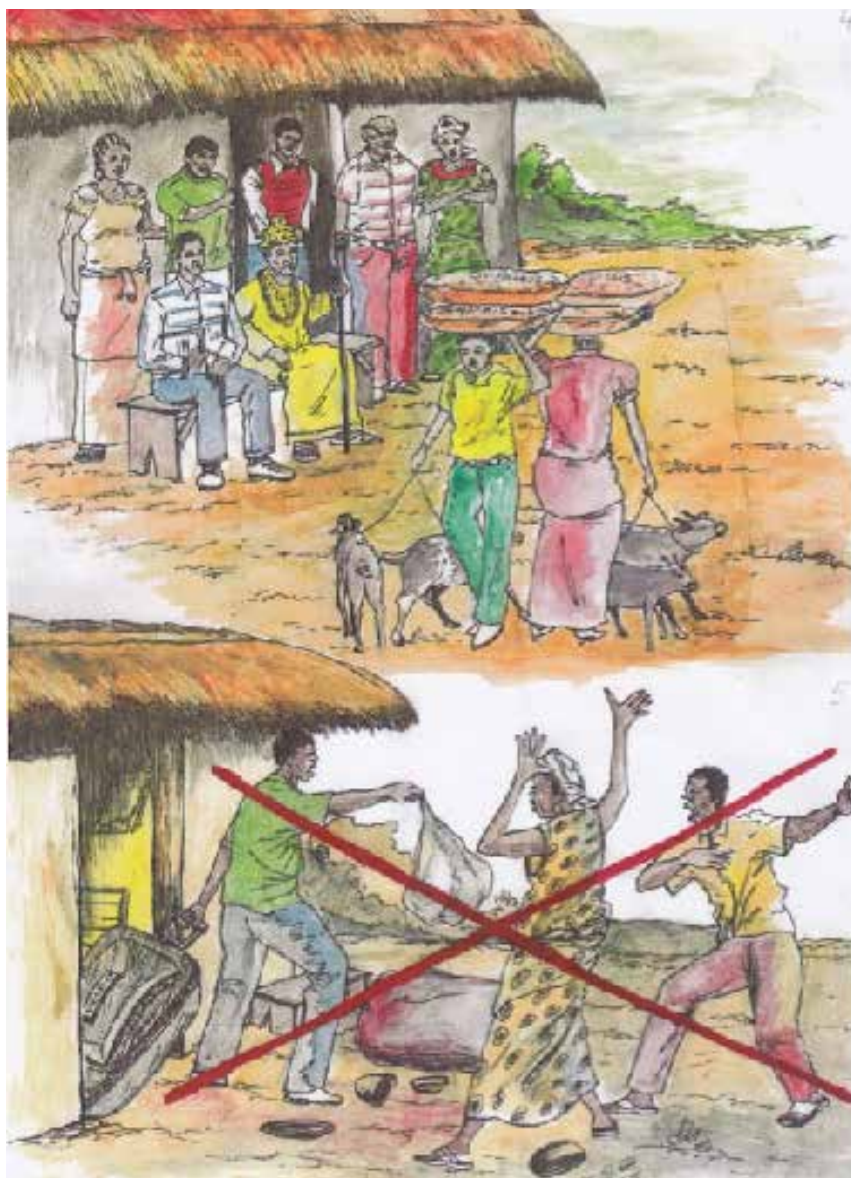
Widows and young girls have the right to inherit the property of their parents or their husbands

Key messages (on the back of the image)

Women and girls also have the right to inherit property from their parents and husbands as well as men.

The widow has the right to use the house and property, including the fields she used to farm with her deceased husband.

No-one is allowed to drive a widow out of her house.



² This is an extract from Oxfam in DRC's Image Box on Protection, unpublished.