Terms of reference for community protection structures

Introduction

The terms of reference (ToR) for existing or new community protection structures (CPSs) define the latter’s purpose and structure. ToRs also provide the framework for CPSs to undertake their work and against which they can be held accountable by communities. They can also be referred to by CPS members when explaining their roles to duty bearers, community members, service providers and humanitarian organizations. This is why it is important for the ToRs to be clear, easy to understand and specific to each CPS.¹

There is no predefined format for CPSs, which can, for instance, be mixed groups of people (such as protection committees), women-only groups (such as women’s forums), and/or individual volunteers who act as entry points to a community (such as protection volunteers or focal points).

This tool describes what ToRs should contain, how humanitarian organizations can support communities and CPSs to develop or revisit them, and provides a template that can be adapted by humanitarian organizations, CPSs and communities when setting up a new structure or reviewing an existing one.

Developing terms of reference

Since CPSs work on behalf and for the protection of all members of their communities, their roles and responsibilities should be agreed upon with the wider community itself, making sure that all its layers and groups, including marginalized people, are involved in this process. This allows for community members to have greater ownership of activities. This also allows for a greater sense of accountability of CPSs towards their communities.

¹ This global tool builds and expands on documents produced by Oxfam’s protection teams in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Somaliland/Somalia, Yemen and South Sudan.
There are different ways in which community members can be engaged in shaping the roles and responsibilities of CPSs. For instance, humanitarian organizations can organize large community workshops during which the roles and responsibilities are decided. If, however, such wider workshops are not appropriate or safe to hold, e.g., because women would not have space to raise points or because gatherings of larger groups are prohibited, staff from humanitarian organizations can conduct smaller gatherings with different groups. Whatever form is chosen, the different groups present in the community should be represented and take part in the decision-making process. Attention should be paid to particular needs, e.g., the physical accessibility of venues or avoiding days and times that clash with specific care responsibilities. The security context, especially safety for women, needs to be taken into consideration when determining the location and timing of meetings.

The same workshops should also agree on a selection process and selection criteria for CPSs.

The agreed roles and responsibilities should be written down in a ToR document and presented to the whole community. The way that the finalized ToRs are shared with the community should be agreed during the aforementioned workshops.

**Box 1: Developing ToRs with existing community structures**

When working with existing structures, it is important to agree with them on how they will add community-based protection (CBP) to their existing work, if it is not yet part of their ongoing focus (e.g. through focal points or a new sub-committee). The CBP-related ToRs should therefore build on their current ways of working.

Together with the existing structures, humanitarian organizations can organize consultations with the wider community to define the scope of CBP work.

**Box 2: CPSs in larger communities**

In larger communities, several community protection structures should be present – whether existing or new – in order to allow as many groups as possible to be represented. These groups can be organized according to location (e.g., a block in a camp, a neighbourhood), social group, or according to specific protection topics.

A coordination committee can be set up in which representatives of the sub-groups meet on a regular basis to share priorities and plans, enable peer-to-peer learning and organize joint meetings and actions for several or all CPSs in the community.

**Content of terms of reference**

ToRs should, as a minimum, contain the following points:

- A definition of the CPS, including whether it is a formal or loose structure, and its type (e.g., committee, volunteer network, network of representatives of local associations, focal points);
- The aims and objectives of the CPS;
- The composition of the CPS (i.e. number of members, quota for e.g. women and men);
- The roles and responsibilities of members; and
- Membership, including duration.
- Ways of working.
In addition, the following sections can be included in ToRs or be kept as separate documents:

- **Internal rules and code of conduct**;
- **Selection criteria and selection process**; and
- **Community feedback and accountability mechanisms**.

**Box 3: Inclusion**

Especially in bigger and more heterogenous communities, it may not be possible or feasible for every population group to have a representative in the CPS. It may also not be safe for marginalized groups in some contexts.

Together, those under- or unrepresented groups should identify ways of integrating their voices into CBP and CPSs’ work. Consider, for instance, setting up consultation mechanisms between CPSs and wider communities.

When discussing the roles and responsibilities of a CPS, staff from supporting humanitarian organizations should ask participants whether suggested roles and tasks are acceptable, safe and appropriate to undertake. Similarly, in order to avoid overstretching the (future) members of the CPS, the prospective workload should be assessed during the workshop.
Annex: Template terms of reference for community protection structures

Terms of Reference for Community Protection Structures in [insert name of location]

Definition
A community protection structure is a committee/group/network [select appropriate] of volunteers/focal points/representatives [select appropriate] selected by community members/camp residents/local associations [select appropriate] to address protection concerns.

While [supporting humanitarian organizations] supports the work of the [type or name of CPS], it is supported and owned by the community/communities of [location(s)]. The members of the committee/group/network [select appropriate] are not renumerated for their work.

Objective
The [type or name of CPS] contributes to improving the protection situation in their community by supporting community members to identify protection risks and put in place or enhance mitigation and self-protection strategies. It strengthens the community’s/communities’ [select appropriate] capacities in self-protection by working to increase knowledge around protection risks, protection services and self-protection strategies; by engaging duty bearers on their responsibility to protect civilians; and by contributing to social cohesion. They do not replace duty bearers in their responsibility to protect civilians. The [type or name of CPS] also serves as an interlocutor for humanitarian organizations on protection, e.g. to contribute to the assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian protection programmes.

[Insert more context-specific objectives as needed, if focusing on specific groups (e.g., internally displaced people, refugees) or specific protection topics, etc.]

Composition
The [type or name of CPS] is composed of [number of members], with equal representation of women and men. At least [number] of the members are [e.g. youth, people over 60 years, people with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced people, members of the host community etc]. To ensure meaningful representation, members of the [type or name of CPS] come from [areas, blocks in a camp, neighbourhoods of a village or town, etc].

Roles and responsibilities
[adapt and complete this section as needed]

- **Analysis and planning:** [type or name of CPS] carries out analysis of protection risks affecting their communities through a gender-sensitive lens and devise community protection action plans accordingly; they share the results with community members and other stakeholders (e.g. supporting humanitarian organizations) as appropriate.

- **Community engagement on protection:** [type or name of CPS] actively exchanges with community members and different community groups and community-based organizations on protection issues; they organize, for instance, house-to-house visits, social activities, community meetings and consultations on protection, and feedback sessions with community members. They ensure that all groups in the community – including women and girls, people living with disabilities and older people – can participate. They mobilize community members, and ensure their involvement in project activities, including activity design, objective setting, implementation, monitoring and feedback.

- **Advocacy:** [type or name of CPS] conducts power analysis and identifies duty bearers and community leaders with influence on the identified protection risks. They engage duty bearers in order to present the protection challenges faced by the community and advocate for solutions; they advocate with humanitarian organizations for protection support.
Sensitization: [type or name of CPS] sensitizes community members (and sometimes duty bearers) on protection risks and ways to reduce them, and shares information of people’s rights and services available.

Training: [type or name of CPS] provides training to community members on protection.

Access to protection services: [type or name of CPS] facilitates referrals, respecting confidentiality, safety and responsible data management. As part of this, [type or name of CPS] develops and keeps a community-based service map up to date. They identify barriers in the access to these services and work to reduce them.

Monitoring protection trends: [type or name of CPS] monitors protection risks in their community, and monitors the community’s support needs in terms of protection, sharing information with protection actors as relevant and appropriate. They monitor population flows, including displacement and return, and share relevant information with local authorities and service providers, as appropriate.

Social cohesion: [type or name of CPS] may carry out activities aimed at strengthening social cohesion within or between communities.

Self-protection outside the CPS: [type or name of CPS] may also contribute to self-protection strategies initiated spontaneously by community members who are not part of this CPS. They may facilitate community dialogues in order to collectively prioritize protection concerns and support communities to develop their own initiatives.

Coordination: [type or name of CPS] coordinates with other community groups on protection, as well as with humanitarian organizations intervening in protection and humanitarian assistance in general.

Learning: [type or name of CPS] participates in training sessions, coaching and mentoring provided by supporting humanitarian organizations, as well as in learning and review activities.

Risk management: [type or name of CPS] analyses the risks that they or other community members might face as a result of their activities and proactively put in place measures to mitigate those risks. They ensure that their activities, including sharing information with authorities, do not expose or directly cause any harm to community members’ life, dignity, rights or wellbeing. They pay particular attention to preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment that could result from their activities.

Limits: [type or name of CPS] is not a watch group or community police group that helps authorities maintain security, nor a group that gathers evidence of or investigates protection incidents. It is not a feedback and complaints desk for assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. They are expected to listen to complaints and feedback if conveyed and discussed in meetings, and should be able to direct these to appropriate staff in supporting humanitarian organizations. However, they are not tasked to proactively collect feedback about assistance.

Ways of working

Workplan: [type or name of CPS] develops a work plan based on their community protection action plan.

Meetings: [type or name of CPS] meetings take place twice a month and are led by CPS members on a rotating basis with support from [supporting humanitarian organization, if appropriate]. Meetings with duty bearers, community meetings and sessions with marginalized and vulnerable groups are organized as needed but at a minimum of once per quarter. The latter meetings are organized and led by CPS members.
- **Reporting:** [type or name of CPS] develops monthly/quarterly [select appropriate] reports on the situation in their communities, with a focus on prioritized protection risks. They will share these reports with [supporting humanitarian organization/s].

**Membership**

- Adult women and men who fulfil the selection criteria identified by the community members in the selection procedure can become members of [type or name of CPS].
- Duty bearers, government-appointed leaders and children cannot become members of [type or name of CPS].
- Members of [type or name of CPS] are elected by the community for [duration], and can be re-elected [indefinitely or number of times] OR the duration of membership is open-ended.
- Members can leave [type or name of CPS] at any time by informing the other CPS members.
- A member can be excluded from [type or name of CPS] for not respecting its internal rules (listed in a separate document).

Version from [date].