

📍 Somalia/Somaliland

# Candlelight's experience creating forums for discussion of protection concerns

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Protection is a very sensitive topic in Somaliland, especially in rural or village communities where patriarchal dominance is still the norm. Protection project managers must take communities' understandings and boundaries into account in order to avoid confrontation. Creating opportunities for the exchange of ideas and finding solutions to common protection problems together is a proven approach to helping.

## Community participation

As part of its protection work, Candlelight created discussion forums in which respected community members from different walks of life, who had some familiarity with protection issues in the community, can meet around protection questions. In these forums, Community Protection Facilitators exchange with authorities, including the judiciary, police, and district or regional officials. The Community Protection Facilitators are in some cases people that communities recommend to be trained as such. Others are selected on the basis of their position in the community, for example, representatives from schools, camp management committees, women-led organizations, village or community leaders, religious leaders, or university students. These forums can play an important role in the prevention of violence, as well as being an outlet in the community that project staff can draw upon.

## Stakeholder participation

Candlelight encourages different stakeholders to attend the discussion forums. These include authorities at district, regional and sometimes national level, as well as NGOs, community organizations, village committees, and women's and youth groups. They are invited to attend training sessions and refreshers on psychosocial first aid and gender-based violence, among other topics. In one project, Candlelight set up a WhatsApp group to send invitations and reminders, and in which members can have discussions on protection issues. In some areas, Candlelight works with district and/or regional authorities to invite members and other stakeholders to attend.

In some cases, Candlelight facilitates and provides refreshments for meetings organized by authorities. However, high turnover of attendees is sometimes a challenge. In such cases, taking and sharing meeting minutes may help.

## Perceptions

Different people in communities have different feelings about the forums: some take them seriously, while others see them as any other project-based activity. Some people are very appreciative of the work of the forums and protection facilitators; however, others see them as fighting local traditions and culture. The latter need to be continuously engaged to change their attitudes – it is thus important to engage elders, religious leaders and other influential community members who are positive about tackling protection issues.

Some stakeholders, especially from communities, are deeply connected and engaged with the forums and see them as a platform to share experiences and challenges, and find common solutions to protection issues.

## Impact

Some of the issues discussed in the forums included access to social services, the security of women and girls in camps, and gender-based violence, including rape and female genital mutilation/cutting.

For example, during one forum, it was observed that survivors of rape faced difficulties obtaining a medical examination, as well as getting the regional hospital report necessary to pursue prosecution if they wish to take legal steps. It was reported that both the fees charged for the consultation and the report were too high. As a result, most of the survivors from rural and poor households opted not to seek medical help or report the incidents to the police, leaving them without access to medical care or justice.

As a solution to this, one of the NGO stakeholders in the meeting committed to paying a medical doctor in the regional hospital to provide free medical examinations and reports to all survivors of rape.