



Recommendation

Capacity strengthening Existing structures Exit strategy

Material support Sustainability

 **Somalia/Somaliland**

The sustainability of community-based protection projects and structures

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The challenge

Some projects provide support to community protection structures. However, when such projects end, the structures sometimes slowly start to disintegrate. This is even worse where government structures are weak and/or uninterested in protection issues, and thus cannot support communities.

Sometimes projects and their staff provide the link between community and government structures. When the project ends, such links are broken.

The sustainability of these projects is further aggravated by the absence of information management systems in communities, and the relocation of trained and empowered community members.

The sustainability of community structures can also be challenged by the creation of parallel structures doing similar work in the same community or area. One structure may weaken the other. For example, sometimes those involved may compare the support each provides, fuelling tensions.

Responses

Candlelight has sought to tackle these challenges in various ways, including:

- creating WhatsApp groups, both among the different volunteers and between them and Candlelight staff, in order to improve communication;

- when resources allow, training more than one volunteer;

- in some cases, handing over community structures to other agencies that may be able to continue the work;

- building a strong link with community and religious leaders;

- recruiting some project staff from communities in order to facilitate retention of knowledge, as these staff usually remain in their communities after the project ends; and

- working with and building the capacity of existing community structures where they exist, in order to avoid creating parallel structures.

Advice to organisations

- Where possible, exit strategies should be phased over a period of time.
- Communicate the timeline of your project to community members, so that they know what to expect (including the end of a project) and when.
- Where possible, link community structures to existing government structures, and build the latter's capacity on protection.
- Build the capacity of community-based organizations, women and youth groups that are operating in communities, as these will remain and can operate at minimal cost.
- Train and sensitize community protection facilitators, people in existing community structures, local leaders and other duty bearers, in order to build a team of volunteers with the necessary skills to continue some of the interventions. These individuals will have basic skills in counseling and the rehabilitation of survivors of abuse, as well as knowledge of existing pathways to refer survivors for more specialized management and support.
- Recruit staff from communities, as it is easier for them to work with their communities, especially on sensitive issues.
- Where possible, create a communication channel through which the structure can share updates with authorities, service providers and humanitarian organisations even after the project ends.
- Coordinate with other agencies in the same community – they can potentially support ensuring community members' access to services, or take over the structures when you leave.
- Encourage the community to create their own ways to support one another.
- Build role models/change agents in the communities – such as religious leaders and other influential people. We have sometimes worked with religious leaders to create awareness about protection issues, including female genital mutilation or cutting, from an Islamic perspective.

Advice to communities

- Encourage contributions from the community, especially in kind, for example providing meeting spaces for community structures.
- Offer moral support to the structures and individual protection facilitators.
- Encourage trained community resource people to continue volunteering their time, and use their knowledge and skills for boosting community awareness even after the project ends.