



## **Community-based protection**

*Key issues, references and best-practices*

## 1. Introduction

During consultations with protection actors, community-based protection (CBP) was identified as a topic of interest and the need for focused thematic exchange and discussion was highlighted. To this end, and in collaboration with InterAction, the Protection Cluster convened a workshop on CBP in June and July 2021, which was attended by multiple protection actors. The objective was to develop a common understanding of CBP by facilitating access to global guidance and program resources and by facilitating peer-learning and exchange.

The Protection Cluster has compiled a number of guidance documents and tools in an online *Resources repository*, which partners can utilize to inform their own CBP interventions. **The purpose of this report is not to provide definitive and prescriptive technical guidance to protection actors operating in Iraq, but to offer an overall framework of reference for the development and management of CBP programs** by making reference to some key elements drawn from the global guidance available and by summarizing the key issues, challenges, best practices and perspectives discussed with partners during the workshop, with a particular focus on the context in Iraq. To this end, this report is structured around three sections: program design, implementation and evaluation.

## 2. Program design

### 2.1. Definition and approach

**There is no standardized and globally recognized definition of CBP. However, the definitions and approaches by various organizations all identify and emphasize some key components.** First, CBP is a process and not a project or a predefined set of activities. Second, CBP ought to be community-centered and community-led, meaning that the process should empower the community as an agent of change. Third, CBP is about enabling the community to achieve self-protection and is therefore different from the kind of regular community outreach included in humanitarian programs, whereby community actors are mobilized to implement predefined activities or inform others about services. Fourth, CBP is a strategic approach, which should be integrated into all aspects of a protection program and should not be considered as only a side component of a program.

### 2.2. Risk reduction as strategic objective

**When CBP is not well designed or understood, there is often a lack of clarity about the actual objective and the expected protection outcome,** which in turn results in the focus shifting to the implementation of activities or the achievement of predefined targets without a clear and coherent vision. To address this challenge, CBP programs should adopt an outcome-oriented approach to protection whereby the ultimate objective of the intervention is to produce a defined and measurable protection outcome, understood as a reduction in the level of risk faced by the community.<sup>1</sup>

**To this end, a CBP program should be built upon community-based protection analysis** whereby the type of threats that the community face, its vulnerabilities to these threats in terms of specific circumstances or at-risk groups, as well as its capacities to address, mitigate or cope with these threats, are analyzed. It is essential **to link the components of the risk equation (threats, vulnerabilities and capacities) with the specific actions, attitudes, behaviors, perception etc. of various actors that the community will aim to influence** and change throughout the CBP process.

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<sup>1</sup> InterAction identifies an outcome-oriented approach to protection programming as one of the three components of a broader framework for results-based protection, alongside continuous and context-specific protection analysis as well as multi-disciplinary strategies. Accordingly, protection actions should be developed by using a clear causal logic to define the goal as a measurable reduction in risk. A number of methodologies for project design and planning can be used to define how to produce change in behaviors, attitudes, action, policies etc. in order to produce the desired protection outcome. Reference: InterAction, *Mindshift. A Collection of examples that promote protection outcomes* and *Embracing the protection outcome mindset: We all have a role to play*, available at <https://www.interaction.org>.

**The production of in-depth and nuanced community-based protection analysis is attached to a number of requirements and best practices.** First, it can only come after acceptance by and trust from the community have been built and once extensive relationships have been developed. This, in turn, requires significant time and effort which should be fully factored into any CBP program (see section 3.1). The work of relationship and trust-building in a community indeed should be considered programming activities, and therefore supported with resources of time and staff, as it is central to the success of the larger program. Second, a wide range of diverse stakeholders need to be included into the analytical process, including community leaders and members following an Age Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach, but also existing community groups and actors, civilian authorities and security actors as relevant. Third, the analysis should be considered a continuous process to be revised and repeated at different stages of the CBP intervention, rather than as a one-off exercise to only be conducted at the onset of the project. This also requires maintaining strong community relationships over time. Fourth, protection analysis should aim to explain risk and risk factors using the risk equation, rather than just identify protection issues and needs through monitoring. Fifth, community-based analysis should be participative rather than extractive, meaning that feedback loops to the community and validation of the findings by the community need to be built in.

### 2.3. Link with social cohesion

In Iraq, CBP programs often become concerned with issues of social cohesion, peaceful coexistence and inter-community conflict. **While the objectives of risk reduction and long-term social cohesion are not the same, they also cannot be fully de-linked. Issues of social cohesion directly contribute to protection risks in various ways.** First, individuals or groups who are marginalized or discriminated against often are more vulnerable to various threats of violence and coercion. Second, issues of social cohesion can contribute to the threats themselves, for instance when they act as the driver and motivation behind patterns of deliberate deprivation. Conversely, enhanced social cohesion and subsequent community mechanisms arising from it can contribute to a community's capacity to address certain threats. This is specifically true in the Iraqi context whereby threats to individuals and families such as direct acts of violence, deliberate deprivation from life-saving services and rights as well as restrictions on freedom of movement and blocked returns are often exacerbated by stigma and discrimination stemming from inter- and intra-community conflict and the unresolved legacy of the recent conflict. **Therefore, increasing social cohesion can in certain contexts in Iraq be a key component of risk reduction.**

**In a way, social cohesion can be described as both a prerequisite and an unintended outcome of community-protection programming.** If communities - and more specifically, community groups that organizations work with - do not have sufficient social cohesion, they may not be able to effectively design their own strategies for risk reduction. Organizations that do not fully consider social cohesion in their CBP programs may therefore run the risk of doing harm, or of exacerbating existing conflict dynamics. Additionally, the work that is done by communities in developing and implementing strategies to reduce risks in their community can also themselves contribute to social cohesion. For example, community groups that work on reducing protection risks often also take on activities related to social cohesion as well, and the very act of promoting collective exchange and action through diverse and inclusive groups indirectly fosters trust and participation within the community.

**There is agreement that the objective of social cohesion in itself is not within the purview of humanitarian protection actors in Iraq.** However, different organizations draw that line in different ways, considering organizational mandates, staff skill sets and technical expertise, as well as factors like donor interest and willingness. Communities themselves often do not recognize the distinctions that are made between different sectors or disciplines along the humanitarian-development axis, and if CBP programs are to be truly community-led, we cannot expect that our programmatic boundaries are prioritized. The priority for all actors is to work to create synergies and ground-level collaboration that support those outcomes as prioritized by communities themselves. **In some respects, social cohesion considerations, although not the focus of protection projects per se, should be integrated into CBP programming and mainstreamed into humanitarian programming more broadly.**

## 3. Implementation

### 3.1. Timeframe and sequencing

**CBP is a mid-term intervention, which usually requires to be implemented over the course of one to two years.** Shorter time-frames are not suitable because they do not permit protection actors to effectively go through the main stages of CBP programs. **While there is no definitive and prescriptive model, the development and implementation of CBP interventions is usually structured around five phases,** as follows:

- **Community profiling:** to map out the key actors, to analyze the community structure and dynamics and to decide on the suitability of a CBP program.
- **Community engagement:** to mobilize key individuals and groups, to ensure inclusion and representation of these groups and to build ownership of the community over the intervention.
- **Risk analysis:** to identify key protection risks and to analyze the community's vulnerabilities in relation to these threats and its capacities to mitigate them.
- **Action plan:** to prioritize the risks to be addressed and to develop a community-led action plan to address them.
- **Implementation and follow-up:** to enable the community to implement the action plan through support and follow-up, to measure the level of risk reduction achieved, to revise the risk analysis and action plan.

**Such a comprehensive approach requires time, commitment and resources from the organization supporting communities to achieve self-protection.** This approach also ought to be central to the organization's overall intervention strategy. However, insufficient understanding of the comprehensive and multi-faceted nature of CBP often leads to CBP being considered only as a side component of specific projects and/or being funded through short-term grants. This in turn often results in programs being focused on implementing pre-defined project activities and to produce pre-conceived project outputs, rather than investing in building strategic relationships within the community, producing in-depth and nuanced risk analysis and planning community-led actions, which will effectively mitigate risks. To this end, the significant amount of time required to complete the community stakeholder mapping, to build relationships, to gain trust and acceptance etc. should not be seen as a mere preliminary phase before the activities of a CBP project starts. Rather, **the phase of relationships building should be considered as an integral part of project implementation.** First, because identifying the attitudes, behaviors, actions etc., which underpin the components of the risk equation can only be done through extensive community engagement. Second, building these relationships creates the necessary opportunity to actually influence a multitude of stakeholders with the aim of changing their attitudes and actions and therefore reducing the level of risks to which the community is exposed.

### 3.2. Identification, mobilization and operationalization of community actors

**Working with existing community-based organizations or groups - as opposed to creating entirely new such groups or organizations for the purpose of a specific project - is widely recognized as best practice.** First, it allows to build upon the community's capacity for self-mobilization and organization and draws from existing knowledge and resources within the community. Second, it ensures a higher degree of sustainability of the intervention beyond the cycle of a specific project.

In contrast, **creating entirely new protection groups is generally not considered as the most pertinent approach.** First, it is less likely to result in risk reduction and leads to a sustainable, something best achieved through meaningful relationship building with community actors who are already mobilized, as noted above. Second, establishing entirely new committees for the purpose of a specific project can produce an unbalanced power dynamic and a high-level of dependency between the protection organization - a powerful actor in this context with access to significant resources and actors - and the community. This in turns can be in contradiction with the principle of community ownership and leadership which is at the core of community-based protection. Ultimately, artificially creating entirely new committees for the purpose of a specific project isn't the most pertinent and effective approach, even if it can be utilized to demonstrate that specific activities are rapidly being implemented and pre-defined output indicators are rapidly met.

**However, establishing new community-based protection structures may be necessary and/or preferable in specific circumstances**, for instance when no community groups or actors are already mobilized and when existing groups and organizations are neither diverse or representative of the community, or otherwise perpetuate traditional power structure or promote harmful practices.

**It is considered best practice to develop some governance mechanisms - Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct - for the community-based structures and groups.** First, such mechanisms are often an effective tool to promote inclusion, diversity and representation within the group, a key component of CBP. Second, governance mechanisms allow to put in place a degree of accountability from the committee towards the broader community. **However, developing these mechanisms can be a challenge or become counterproductive**, for instance if the ToRs and CoC are imposed from the outside by the protection organization without ownership by the community committee or if the focus on putting in place such governance mechanisms becomes an end in itself and divert the group's attention from actually taking collective action towards risk reduction.

Depending on the context, **community actors may not necessarily be collective entities - whether formal committees or informal groups - but can also be individuals**, who have extensive relationships, knowledge and influence. In certain contexts, such individuals can effectively serve as actors of change within their own communities. To this end, protection organizations may need to adapt their modalities of engagement and support, the type of activities implemented and the nature of protection outcomes anticipated.

### **3.3. Support to community actors and resources allocation**

**The primary role of protection organizations is to provide support and resources to community actors to enable the community to effectively undertake key actions towards its own self-protection. Typically, protection organizations focus on providing technical and human resources** in the form of training, technical resources, mentoring, connection with different stakeholders etc. **In contrast, it is less common for protection organizations to provide financial and material support to community actors.** When financial support is provided, it is often limited to volunteer's stipend and small activity-related costs and rarely includes small-grants and other forms of financial resources allocation.

**The question of whether or not financial support should be provided is complex.** On the one hand, the commitment and efforts made by the persons who are involved in CBP initiatives need to be recognized, valued and supported, including through financial support when relevant. On the other hand, the self-mobilization of communities towards their self-protection needs to be the primary driver of CBP, something that financial incentives and interests risk to undermine. There is also a stark contrast between the level of financial and material resources available to protection organizations - including for the purpose of implementing CBP projects - and the very limited resources available to community-based actors. In some aspects, this contrast can be perceived as duplicity by community actors.

**At the individual level, it is important that protection organizations make the participation into community-led protection actions cost-neutral for the persons involved.** Communities where CBP projects are implemented often face multiple and competing priorities to meet their various humanitarian needs. In such circumstances, engagement into CBP action is a major commitment for the persons involved as it means that their time and energy are not invested in generating income or addressing some other urgent need. Therefore, covering activity-related costs, transportation costs, phone credit etc. and even providing volunteers stipend is a way to recognize that the persons who are in an already dire situation do not lose money or incur additional cost when engaging into CBP.

**The provision of financial and material support at the level of the community group or committee should be approached with great caution, but should not be ruled out entirely or on principle.** First, as noted above, the allocation of financial resources in the form of small grants risks undermining the genuine and financially disinterested mobilization of community-groups towards their own self-protection. Second, it risks making community actors dependent on external financial support, which would be detrimental to sustainability of the community's capacity for action. However, the allocation of financial and/or material resources can be an effective enabling factor to achieve a given protection outcome under conditions. In particular, such financial support should remain relatively small in scope, bound to a short time-frame and directly linked to a specific action that the community group wants to undertake to address a specific risk as part of its own action plan.

## 4. Measurement and evaluation

### 4.1 Challenges

Measuring protection outcomes continues to be a significant challenge for humanitarian actors, and community-based protection interventions are no different. In fact, given the community-led nature of the work, it can be more difficult to measure the outcome of activities that organizations are less closely involved in. **Too many programs, and donor requirements, continue to rely on output-focused measurement instead of attempting to measure outcomes.** Understanding the changes that lead to protection outcomes - risk reduction at the community level - is a crucial component of an intervention. In addition to demonstrating the effectiveness of an intervention, continuous measurement enables both communities and organizations to adjust their strategies along the way.

### 4.2 Opportunities

Measuring protection outcomes of risk reduction at a community level is difficult; there are both practical and ethical issues that often prevent the direct measurement of risk. This is also true in Iraq of the specific issues that CBP programs aim to address. As such, organizations often rely on measuring proxies for risk in order to understand the change that is happening in communities. **Protection analysis that uses the risk equation for understanding the components of risk - threat, vulnerability and capacity - also enables effective evaluation using the measurement of those same components.** A number of methods for measurement and evaluation which are often used in development contexts, and can be modified for humanitarian contexts, are relevant to CBP interventions.<sup>2</sup>

#### Results Journals

Results Journals, a component of a larger process of outcome mapping, are a method whereby expected results - put into categories of 'expect to see,' 'like to see,' and 'love to see' - are tracked over time. These results can be tracked quantitatively over time to see if expected changes - or unexpected ones - come about. This method is effective for collecting information that relates to changes in the components of risk, and can be done by agency staff, or community members themselves. This method can either be used to track pre-defined indicators of change, or adapted with a more open-ended approach to capture unintended – and sometimes unforeseeable – changes across the community, household and individual levels.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a very brief summary of some of the methodologies presented during the workshop. For more detailed information, please access the *Resources library* at: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/198i-KRMNXmGRyOxjP0\\_150Ej1kQwPhM](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/198i-KRMNXmGRyOxjP0_150Ej1kQwPhM)

## Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change is a method that does not require the identification at the design phase of a project of specific outcomes expected to be achieved. Rather, it directly asks participants and community members what they see as the most significant change in the areas that the program is hoping to affect. Typically, Most Significant Change approaches seek to investigate changes in one of 3-5 domains of possible change, of relevance to the project in question. For instance, the evaluation of a community-based protection program might look for stories of change in the areas of physical security, social cohesion, or gender equality. Then a process of selection of which stories are the most significant change is done, and secondary analysis is done. This method works well when outcomes are unknown, which is common in CBP work as the specific protection outcomes are determined by the community themselves and therefore cannot be pre-determined by the program team. Most Significant Change is an indicator-free methodology, which also lends itself to the kind of qualitative measurement that is required for measuring risk reduction.

## Outcome Harvesting

Outcome harvesting is a method whereby outcomes can be identified after the course of a project, and then is traced back to the contribution of the program or intervention. Outcome harvesting is unique in its focus on treating all outcomes observed equally during the analysis stage – regardless of their relationship to the planned results of the project or program in question. This can be useful when a program has changed significantly from the beginning or has a large amount of unintended consequences, both of which can happen in CBP programs. These outcomes can then be analysed in relation to the risk analysis that has been done in order to identify contributions to risk reduction. Analytical tools such as Contribution Analysis or Process Tracing can be used to help this step of the outcome harvesting process.

**Whether with these methods or others, more effective measurement of protection outcomes are a powerful tool to improve CBP programs themselves.** When data collection is done at a community level, ideally with the participation of community members themselves, it allows decisions on changes to the intervention strategy to also take place at that level, which is a core tenant of community ownership in CBP programming. Moreover it contributes to community empowerment and leadership, itself an objective of CBP programs. In order to integrate more outcome-oriented methods for evaluating programs, both donors and organizations need to ensure that resources are provided for them, and that programs are provided sufficient flexibility.

## **5. Conclusion**

In Iraq, CBP programs are being implemented that aim to address significant risks communities face. Organizations have developed strategies and continue to refine their approaches; focusing on issues including how to work with existing community organizations, appropriate time frames and resource allocation. More work needs to be done to measure the protection outcomes these programs aim to achieve in order to ensure that they are most effectively contributing to risk reduction. The issues of social cohesion in Iraq are closely intertwined with protection risks and organizations must consider how to integrate these issues into CBP programs while maintaining the overarching objectives of risk reduction. **Community-based protection programming is a critical component of humanitarian action that aims to achieve protection outcomes. Communities are knowledgeable about the risks they face and have their own strategies to address them. Programs that center on those capacities, like CBP programs, are key to produce a durable protection impact and building a more protective environment in the long-term.**