

Network Paper

In brief

- This Network Paper explores the concept and practice of community-based protection, and highlights opportunities and challenges associated with implementing a community-based protection approach.
- The paper draws on ActionAid's publication *Safety with Dignity: A Field Manual for Integrating Community-based Protection across Humanitarian Programs*, which aims to provide practical guidance for field staff working in humanitarian and development settings on how to integrate community-based protection across sectors and contexts.
- A community-based protection approach to humanitarian and development programming reflects the right, capacity and desire of crisis-affected communities to engage in international humanitarian efforts to enhance their protection. It recognises that effective protection for crisis-affected people requires strong and genuine partnership between communities, states and international actors, in order to understand and address the complex factors involved in achieving safety and dignity for people in crisis situations.

About HPN

The Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience. *The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or the Overseas Development Institute.*

Safety with dignity

Integrating community-based protection into humanitarian programming

Commissioned and published by the Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI

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think-tank on international development
and humanitarian issues

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, the humanitarian and development sectors have seen a significant increase in international attention, engagement and activity falling under the banner of ‘protection’. International humanitarian actors have embraced the concept and discourse of protection in various forms — through mainstreaming, integration and stand-alone protection projects and programmes. But has this growth in protection resources and response capacity enhanced the safety, security and dignity of populations at risk? Have these efforts actually achieved effective protection for people in crisis — or have they simply progressed the agendas of international actors?

Reflecting on the internationally accepted definition of protection, global frameworks for protection and the field-based practice of protection, this paper examines the international community’s approach towards, and impact on, those whom we seek to protect. The paper questions whether the international community’s increased engagement in, and development of, protection policy and programming has somehow lost sight of the core subject, goal and agent of protection — namely crisis-affected communities themselves. Are our definitions and frameworks in need of revision, or is it the practice of protection by humanitarian and development actors that needs to evolve? Are we, as international humanitarian and development actors engaged in protection work, becoming as much a part of the problem as part of the solution?

This paper draws on insights and operational experiences gained through the development and field-testing of ActionAid’s publication *Safety with Dignity: A Field Manual for Integrating Community-based Protection across Humanitarian Programs*.¹ *Safety with Dignity* seeks to

provide practical guidance for humanitarian field staff on how to integrate a community-based protection approach into programmes across diverse sectors and contexts. It draws together key protection concepts, methods and tools being used and developed by NGOs and other humanitarian agencies into one user-friendly manual designed to promote increased community engagement in humanitarian programmes.² The participatory protection assessment and analysis tools outlined in the manual encourage humanitarian actors to actively identify, support and build upon the capacities of those at risk, while engaging relevant state and international actors to respond to threats and vulnerabilities in a complementary manner. The manual follows the programme cycle so that field staff can see how a community-based protection approach can be systematically and practically applied to all programming efforts.

Drawing on the manual’s approach and field experiences, this paper considers how humanitarian organisations and agencies can better provide protection. It explores the concept of community-based protection and the various challenges it faces. We argue that the importance of communities as active agents in their own protection has not featured highly in the international protection agenda, which has focused largely on the role of states and international actors. This understanding of protection often fails to recognise communities both as a critical source of support and assistance for crisis-affected populations, and as a source of threats and harm. We advocate for a reorientation of operational protection frameworks that reflects the right, capacity and desire of crisis-affected communities to engage, and be engaged, in international humanitarian efforts to enhance their protection.

Chapter 2

The concept and approach of community-based protection

Current approaches to humanitarian protection

When reflecting on the concept and practice of humanitarian protection, the major issues, debates and ideas that arise generally revolve around international and state actors. Indeed, protection is often conceived as an activity or process that is required and/or delivered as a consequence of humanitarian crises of sufficient scale and impact that they prompt an organised international humanitarian response. Equally, protection is often seen as a response to the most visible, acute and serious human rights violations perpetrated by states, armed groups or international actors. These conceptions focus our attention on primary (i.e. state in question), secondary (i.e. other states) and tertiary (i.e. international mandated and non-mandated humanitarian actors) levels of protection engagement. As such, it appears that the international community's understanding of humanitarian protection is largely centred on the actions and efforts of international actors.

This understanding of humanitarian protection arguably detracts from, rather than enhances, the protection of crisis-affected populations. First, it often fails to recognise and respond to pre-existing protection problems, that is, problems that are independent of a humanitarian crisis or which may be exacerbated by one; examples include violence against women, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect of the elderly. Second, it often fails to involve affected people in the design, development and implementation of humanitarian programmes and interventions, resulting in decreased safety and dignity and diminished community capacity, self-reliance and resilience. Lastly, it may lead to protection problems related to the humanitarian response itself.

While the role and responsibility of primary, secondary and tertiary duty-bearers for protection is not in question, the role and responsibility of at-risk individuals, families and communities has arguably been marginalised in current international protection discourse and practice. Yet the part that crisis-affected populations and communities play in surviving and responding to protection threats is critical — not simply as beneficiaries of international humanitarian assistance and protection, but as active analysts and agents of their own protection. One might easily argue that the role of crisis-affected people is assumed as an integral feature of humanitarian protection. After all, the accepted definition of protection — ‘all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law’³ — clearly places affected individuals at its core. However, it is less easy to see this subject and agent of protection front and centre in the

protection agenda when we consider current humanitarian protection practice — both in terms of what international humanitarian and development actors do, and the way in which they do it.

Defining community-based protection

Safety with Dignity defines community-based protection as ‘activities aimed at facilitating individuals and communities to achieve respect for their rights in safety and dignity’.⁴ Essentially, the process whereby individuals achieve physical, economic, social and psychological well-being must be safe and dignified, and free of insecurity and discrimination.

As an approach to humanitarian and development programming, community-based protection encourages affected communities to identify, analyse and prioritise the protection problems they experience, and bring them to the attention of external assistance and protection providers. Community-based protection assists communities in identifying and strengthening positive local protection strategies that either pre-exist, or emerge in response to, the humanitarian emergency, and will continue to exist after the departure of international humanitarian actors.

Community-based protection directs the attention of crisis-affected populations towards protection problems and areas of influence over which they have some control, active agency and responsibility. This is possible even in circumstances where the most serious human rights violations are being perpetrated by state, non-state or international actors (such as detention, torture, rape and sexual violence, forced displacement, forced recruitment and military attacks against civilians), or in situations of large-scale disaster and displacement. While individuals and families themselves may be able to do little to stop or prevent such problems, they play a critical role in immediate, remedial and environment-building responses to restore dignity and enhance the physical, economic, social and psychological security of those harmed or affected by such rights violations.⁵

Community-based protection also recognises that many protection problems of concern to individuals and communities *pre-exist* a humanitarian emergency and may be exacerbated by such a crisis. These problems can include harmful traditional practices, domestic violence, public violence and criminal behaviour, neglect of persons with special needs and exclusion or discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity or other social grouping.

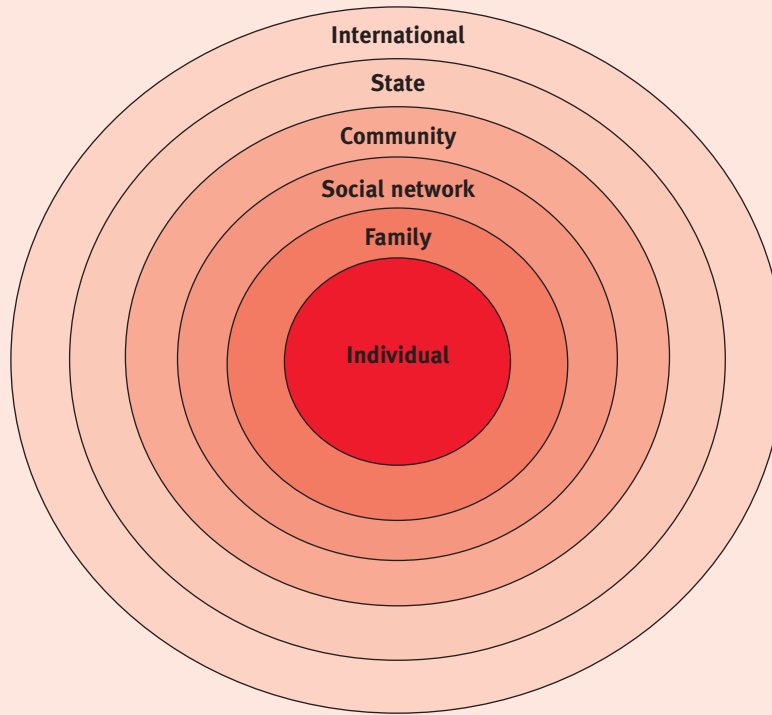
Community-based protection is more than communities being consulted or taking part in participatory assessment exercises. It is a continuous process which engages communities as analysts, evaluators and implementers of

Box 1

The Onion: layers of protective and counter-protective influence

The Onion diagram⁶ illustrates the various actors involved in protection. People can best access their rights in safety and dignity when all actors fulfil their responsibilities to build and maintain a protective environment. The actors within the onion layers can also coerce, deprive and harm the vulnerable individual or

group at its core. With limited protection and assistance, vulnerable individuals or groups are less able to resist, recover from and prevent future protection problems. When multiple actors in different layers harm or fail to assist those in need of protection, vulnerable individuals or groups can be at greater risk.



International: UN, regional political bodies, international courts, UN agencies, ICRC, INGOs, peacekeepers.

State: Police, army, courts, local, district and national government, emergency services, health, education and social services, media.

Community: CBOs, local services, unions, schools, religious institutions, business, media.

Social network: Friends, neighbours, clan/tribe, ethnic, language, religious groups, colleagues.

Family: Immediate and extended family, husband/wife.

Individual: Individual skills, knowledge and health.

their own protection. As such, it can and should be integrated into humanitarian and development programmes across response sectors and across humanitarian contexts.

The role of communities in protection

Communities — families, friends, neighbours, religious institutions, local charities, community-based organisations

(CBOs), local NGOs, local media and social movements — engage in their own protection on a daily basis. They do this by addressing threats and vulnerabilities that may predate a humanitarian crisis; result from conflict or natural disaster; or arise when states or international actors fail to incorporate a protection approach into their response. Communities can help reduce exposure to harm, and assist vulnerable community members to access services to

prevent, respond to, or recover from incidents of violence, coercion, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.⁷

Communities are often the first line of protection for people affected by crisis and can be a source of continuing support. Communities can organise their resources and develop local strategies to increase the safety and dignity of the most vulnerable. Communities can also connect with NGOs, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), local institutions and local service providers to seek assistance, advocate for support and develop collaborative approaches to address protection problems.

At the same time, communities can also *cause* protection problems. Individuals, families, social networks and community structures can be perpetrators of violence. Community power dynamics, exclusion and discrimination can deliberately harm, neglect and isolate people, creating and perpetuating protection problems independent of any humanitarian emergency. Communities may also be sources of unintentional harm and abuse. Families and local networks may not be aware of the harmful impact of their actions, or may be unable to identify alternative strategies to address the problem. This can be particularly damaging when communities accept or condone these abuses or fail to stop them for fear of their own safety. It is therefore essential to recognise that communities are critical agents of protection, both as sources of support and assistance and as sources of threats and harm.

Placing community-based protection within the global protection architecture

Conceiving of protection solely in terms of international or state violations, for which specialised, external political, security, humanitarian or military protective actions are needed, and over which crisis-affected populations have little or no control, essentially dismisses the relevance and agency of the affected population. This can result in a counter-protective impact that cultivates a reliance on external aid, promotes feelings of helplessness and effectively encourages an attitude of continued entitlement to material assistance among crisis-affected populations. Such aid-induced problems are particularly evident in chronic conflict and long-term displacement contexts, where self-protection capacities are arguably replaced by populations that become ‘professional beneficiaries’. The end result of humanitarian protection interventions that fail to recognise and reactivate community-based protection mechanisms is the disempowerment and disengagement of the affected population.

The concept of community-based protection must be expressly recognised within the global protection architecture. This

assertion is not intended in any way to detract from the primary role of states to protect their citizens, as stipulated under international human rights and humanitarian law. Nor does it reject the secondary role and responsibility of other states — through the UN and other intergovernmental bodies — to intervene for the protection benefit of crisis-affected populations, or the tertiary role of mandated and non-mandated humanitarian and development actors engaged in protection work. Indeed, at every level of the well-recognised global protection hierarchy — along with the commonly accepted definition of protection — affected populations are, ostensibly, the central subject and object of attention. It could be argued, therefore, that community-based protection is indeed the essence of humanitarian protection — at least in theory.

In practice, however, reflections gathered from crisis-affected individuals and communities in the development of *Safety with Dignity* suggest that humanitarian actors are failing to genuinely engage affected communities in a manner that promotes their rights as well as their responsibilities for their own protection. This sentiment is reflected in the words of a volunteer with a community-based organisation (CBO) in Gaza: ‘First we lost our lives, then we lost our dignity in the way that we were treated by international humanitarian agencies — it seemed like international agencies had their own agendas. They paid no attention to our own capacities to cope with the crisis’. A further gap highlighted by crisis-affected communities was the failure of international humanitarian actors to critically reflect on and learn from interventions that were ‘blind’ to the concept and practice of community-based protection.

Placing community-based protection explicitly within the global protection architecture — in policy and in practice — requires increased recognition and promotion of this critical layer of protection in humanitarian response programming. It involves acknowledging that:

- Crisis-affected populations engage in their own protection every day.
- Human rights, humanitarian and development organisations can and should work with affected communities to prevent and respond to protection problems arising from the actions or inactions of the state, families, social networks or communities.
- Affected communities are the keystone in a protection system where all actors, at all levels, have responsibilities for respecting and protecting rights.
- It is essential to identify and build upon existing community capacities and locally-based protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development programming.
- Building and maintaining protective environments rests on a collaborative, integrated, inter-agency approach.

Chapter 3

Overview of *Safety with Dignity*

Background to the manual

One of the key challenges for those advocating for increased attention to the role of communities in protection has been the perceived lack of operational frameworks, practical guidance and flexible tools applicable to a range of protection contexts. Existing manuals on humanitarian protection focus on the role of states, non-state actors and international organisations, while participatory community-based approaches have, until recently, often been limited to longer-term ‘community development’ settings or programmes. Sectoral response programmes utilise tools and standards specific to respective sectors, which are generally perceived as separate from protection. Thus, although continuing developments in the humanitarian field, such as the cluster approach and the SPHERE Handbook revision, seek to encourage increased protection integration across all sectors, and child protection organisations have been linking community engagement with cross-sectoral protection interventions for some time, the lessons learnt and methodologies used have arguably not been taken up by other protection mandated and non-mandated agencies.

Against this backdrop, ActionAid staff, working with local partners and communities, identified the need for practical, field-driven guidance to increase operational understanding of community-based protection. ActionAid Australia led the development of *Safety with Dignity*,⁸ in cooperation with ActionAid International and with funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). It is hoped that the tools in the manual, combined with guidance on how to engage communities throughout the programme cycle, will contribute to enhanced operational awareness of and better practice in community-based protection among humanitarian and development actors.

Objective and content of the manual

In developing *Safety with Dignity*, two key commitments formed the foundation for the manual’s content and approach:

- community-based protection lies at the core of effective humanitarian protection; and
- humanitarian protection — in terms of enhancing safety, security and dignity for crisis-affected people — is an essential component of humanitarian and development programmes across all response sectors and contexts.

The aim was to develop a practical guide that demonstrated how community-based protection can and should be integrated into humanitarian programmes across diverse sectors and contexts. In developing the manual, the intention was to avoid further fragmentation of protection concepts, definitions and frameworks, and instead draw together and build on existing tools and resources already

being used by humanitarian agencies engaged in protection, community development and a range of response sectors. Such tools and frameworks were incorporated and adapted with a focus on promoting genuine community engagement at all stages of the programme cycle. Inclusion of well-recognised tools, such as the risk equation⁹ and protection egg,¹⁰ ensure consistency and continuity with accepted and widely-used protection terminology and models.

Field staff of international humanitarian agencies are the intended target audience as they are the primary humanitarian actors working with crisis-affected communities, local humanitarian organisations (such as CBOs and NGOs) and local service providers. As such, the manual was designed to be as field-friendly, concise and practical as possible, with content that could easily be adapted to different humanitarian settings, sectors, organisations and local populations. While the manual is aimed primarily at international NGOs and humanitarian agencies, its guidance and tools can also be used by local NGOs and CBOs. The manual is written with the assumption that international humanitarian organisations generally work in partnership with local CBOs and NGOs. However, this is an ongoing challenge, particularly in rapid-onset emergencies where local capacities are often overlooked, with international NGOs and UN agencies directly delivering humanitarian services to the affected population.

The manual is divided into three parts:¹¹

- **Part A** covers the foundations of community-based protection, including protection concepts, the international legal framework for protection and key ‘dos and don’ts’.

Box 2

Safety with dignity

The title of the manual, *Safety with Dignity*, was chosen to highlight the goal and process of community-based protection. Safety and dignity are key principles of the internationally agreed definition of protection. *Safety* is the situation or condition of achieving physical, economic, social and psychological security. These forms of security are rights to be respected, protected and fulfilled under international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law. *Dignity* is the feeling of having decision-making power, freedom and autonomy over life choices, together with feelings of self-worth, self-confidence and respect. International human rights, refugee and humanitarian law emphasise the right to be treated with dignity.

Safety with Dignity, p. 6.

- **Part B** follows the programme cycle. A short chapter on each of the six programme-cycle steps provides operational guidance on how to incorporate a community-based protection approach.
- **Part C** provides a range of tools to support the integration of a community-based protection approach into prevention and response programmes. The tools utilise participatory techniques and can be adapted to various contexts, sectors and affected populations.

Methodology underlying the manual's development

The manual was developed through a field-driven process involving ActionAid country programmes in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Pacific, covering a range of humanitarian contexts including protracted conflict, active conflict, large-scale displacement, natural disaster and development/poverty reduction settings.

Field staff, local partners and communities were all involved in the manual's development and field testing. This took place through workshops and participatory protection assessments exploring community-prioritised protection issues, local protection strategies and challenges and obstacles to safety and dignity. The field-testing included a critical review of how ActionAid country programmes could integrate protection into projects and intervention strategies. Tools included in the manual were piloted with field staff and crisis-affected communities, and their feedback was incorporated. Following field-testing, *Safety with Dignity* underwent a peer review process involving a range of protection actors from the UN, international NGOs, government and non-government agencies engaged in protection work. Inter-agency workshops reviewing the manual were conducted in Sydney and Melbourne, with feedback and recommendations integrated into the manual revision process.

Safety with Dignity was published in October 2009. Training on the manual's approach, concepts and tools has subsequently been conducted with ActionAid staff and local partners in Jordan, the Solomon Islands, Haiti, Somaliland, India, Kenya and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The manual as a guide to integrating community-based protection throughout the programme cycle

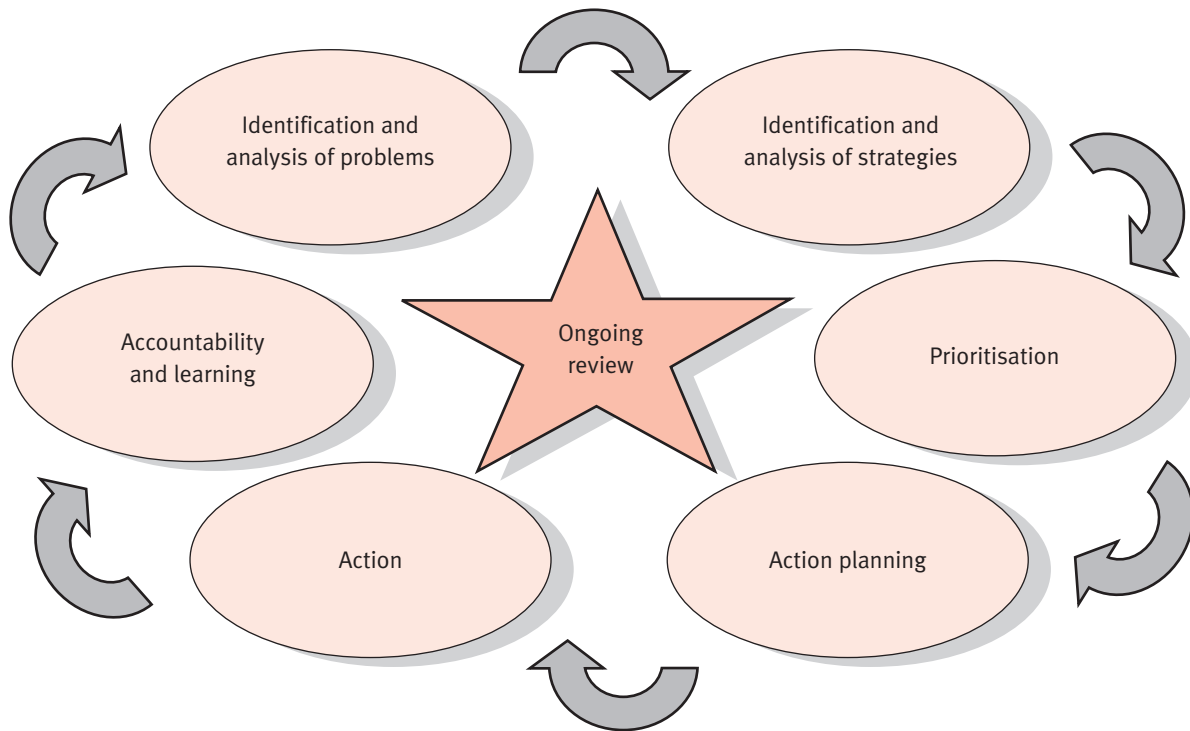
In developing a resource on community-based protection, the challenge was to provide useful, relevant and adaptable frameworks and tools, recognising the importance of community-based protection to all humanitarian sectors and contexts. Our fundamental aim was to make community-based protection accessible to humanitarian actors at the field level. As such, the manual adopts the structure of the programme cycle — covering design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases — familiar to most humanitarian and development actors. This format assists in illustrating community-based protection as an approach

to be integrated throughout all stages of humanitarian programmes. It seeks to address the common misperception that community-based protection is simply a matter of community consultation — engaging affected communities as informants in participatory needs assessments and information-gathering exercises at the beginning of a project or programme. While this is indeed critical to humanitarian programming, it is merely the starting point. Community consultation at the commencement of an intervention is not sufficient to support effective and sustainable community-based protection, or to prevent the possible counter-protective impacts of humanitarian action.

The programme cycle in *Safety with Dignity* is adapted from that most commonly used by humanitarian organisations, except that the initial step of 'information gathering' has been replaced by two inter-related steps that highlight key continuing aspects of a community-based protection approach. The first step refers to engaging communities themselves in *identifying and analysing protection problems*, through a participatory process facilitated by local organisations in partnership with international humanitarian actors. The second step refers to the process of humanitarian actors working with communities to *recognise and analyse existing community protection strategies and resources* that serve to prevent or reduce exposure to harm, and assist the most vulnerable to cope with the impacts and consequences of the protection problems they face. The focus here is on humanitarian actors and communities analysing the positive, negative, intended and unintended consequences of existing protection strategies. These two steps comprise the foundation not only of programme planning, but also implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Community prioritisation of protection problems and strategies is the next step in the cycle. This includes the articulation of objectives, activities and indicators that reflect community-prioritised problems, resources and capacities to respond. Too often there is a gap between the information gathered from groups within affected communities (men, women, youth, children, the elderly, people with disabilities) and the resulting programme, which may focus on priorities identified or presumed by donors, responding organisations or community leaders.

Action planning and action phases must engage affected communities and local service providers, through strong and genuine partnerships with CBOs and local NGOs and effective coordination with other humanitarian actors on the ground. This includes internal analysis on the part of international humanitarian agencies and local implementing partners to ensure that the activities planned not only meet community-prioritised needs, but also fall within the resources, capacity and expertise of the organisations seeking to implement them. Where humanitarian organisations and their partners are unable to meet all priorities, outstanding needs should be referred to other relevant actors or to protection coordination fora for follow-up. Actions undertaken by ill-equipped, inexperienced or inappropriate organisations may result

Figure 1**Programme cycle from *Safety with Dignity***

in decreased safety, security and dignity for crisis-affected communities.

Accountability and learning includes project monitoring and evaluation activities which measure progress against impact indicators established by communities during the action planning phase. Regular follow-up and critical review ensure that evolving protection priorities are recognised and addressed. In addition, the protective or counter-protective impact of programme interventions is continually evaluated, and modifications implemented accordingly.

While *Safety with Dignity* is designed around the programme cycle, it is acknowledged that, in reality, humanitarian programming does not occur in a linear process or in a controlled, predictable environment. Changing political, security and humanitarian conditions, combined with evolving awareness of protection issues, means that steps in the programme cycle may happen concurrently, or that staff and partners may move back and forth between different steps. This does not detract from the value or utility of community-based protection analysis tools.

Humanitarian and development actors can use the steps and tools both to guide the design of new programmes and to adapt existing programmes with a view to integrating community-based protection.

Community-based protection, like protection more broadly, is ultimately a context-specific endeavour — different communities face different protection issues and members within a community may not be affected by the same problem equally. Each setting and each at-risk community is unique, and must be approached as such in order to design appropriate humanitarian and protection interventions.

The approach adopted in *Safety with Dignity* emphasises in-depth, community-based, cross-sectoral analysis. The manual contains tools that complement each of the steps in the programme cycle and can be applied and adapted to a range of different contexts and sectors. This enables humanitarian agencies to analyse protection problems and strategies related to their respective sectoral programmes with the direct engagement of local communities, developing locally-driven initiatives to increase safety with dignity.

Box 3

The toolbox from *Safety with Dignity*

Community/participatory tools

- TOOL 1: How to use participatory methods
- TOOL 2: How to hold focus groups
- TOOL 3: How to conduct individual interviews

Problem identification and analysis tools

- TOOL 4: How to review existing material
- TOOL 5: How to identify protection problems
- TOOL 6: How to conduct a root causes analysis
- TOOL 7: How to carry out a Protection Equation analysis
- TOOL 8: How to analyse rights and responsibilities

Strategy identification and analysis tools

- TOOL 9: How to analyse with the Protection Onion
- TOOL 10: How to carry out actor mapping
- TOOL 11: How to draw together your analyses

Prioritisation tools

- TOOL 12: How to carry out participatory prioritisation
- TOOL 13: How to use a prioritisation checklist

Action planning tools

- TOOL 14: How to plan with the Protection Equation and Egg
- TOOL 15: How to analyse and adapt existing programmes
- TOOL 16: How to set programme indicators
- TOOL 17: How to develop a risk assessment

Action tools

- TOOL 18: How to develop internal processes for protection
- TOOL 19: How to develop a referral process
- TOOL 20: How to develop an advocacy strategy

Ongoing review and follow-up tools

- TOOL 21: How to conduct individual meetings

Accountability and learning tools

- TOOL 22: How to use participatory review methods

Chapter 4

Operationalising community-based protection

Operationalising community-based protection requires active exploration of the resources, strategies and capacities within at-risk communities, *alongside* the resources and capacities of external protection actors. This chapter explores some of the key factors humanitarian actors must consider when seeking to operationalise community-based protection.

Community-based protection as an approach to humanitarian programmes

Community-based protection should be the foundation of all interventions across response sectors and humanitarian contexts. While a commitment to community-based protection is fundamental, how it is incorporated into programmes may differ between organisations, and between programmes or sectors within an organisation. Community-based protection can be incorporated into programming through mainstreaming, integration or stand-alone protection activities (see Table 1).¹² Humanitarian agencies may actively employ one or a combination of these approaches within their programmes in one or multiple locations depending on organisational and contextual factors.

Promoting and practicing community-based protection through one or more of the above programming approaches ensures flexibility and adaptability. It is not, however, without its difficulties in terminology, interpretation and application — with different actors and agencies defining and interpreting these terms and approaches in different ways. Indeed, the development of common understandings for mainstreaming, integration and stand-alone protection programming approaches remains a challenge among and even within humanitarian organisations.

Community-based protection rests on the conviction that humanitarian and development actors have a minimum responsibility to ‘do no harm’, referred to by some protection

actors as ‘mainstreaming’. Protection mainstreaming in this sense should form part of all humanitarian and development work. The second type of protection-oriented programming, ‘integration’, goes further by actively incorporating safety and dignity considerations into and across sectoral programming. In a protection integration approach, considerations of safety, security and dignity are factored into all stages of the programme cycle and within all sectoral programmes (e.g. food, non-food items, water/sanitation, livelihoods, shelter, education, health). Like mainstreaming, protection integration is a ‘generalist’ protection approach requiring sound community-based context analysis. In contrast, the ‘stand-alone’ protection programming approach describes protection interventions focused entirely on increasing safety, security and dignity for an affected population. In stand-alone projects, *all* objectives and activities are specifically focused on safety and security (e.g. gender-based violence and access to justice projects). This approach to programming falls outside the experience and expertise of many general humanitarian actors and requires either the engagement of specialist protection agencies or specialist protection staff within general humanitarian agencies to ensure that the risks associated with community engagement on such sensitive protection issues are properly assessed and managed in a manner that does no harm.

Breaking down protection programming in this way acknowledges both its generalist and specialist components. It provides a means of engaging all humanitarian, development and human rights actors in the protection endeavour, as all are encouraged to apply the key principles of community-based protection in their sectoral work. It encourages all humanitarian, development and human rights actors to actively recognise and respect the role and responsibility of crisis-affected communities as central to humanitarian protection and not as an optional, lower or deferred level of protection engagement.

Table 1: Incorporating community-based protection into programming

	Mainstreaming	Integration	Stand-alone
Approach	Aims to take preventative measures to ensure harm is not caused by humanitarian actions, rather than actively improving safety with dignity.	Actively carrying out sectoral activities using an approach throughout the programme cycle aimed at helping individuals and communities to achieve their rights in safety and dignity.	Actively focus on safety with dignity throughout the programme cycle.
Objectives	Programme activities, objectives and indicators do not have any specific protection component. Focus is on sector or programme area.	Programme activities, objectives and indicators can be both protection-oriented and related to the sector or programme area.	Programme activities, objectives and indicators are focused on protection outcomes.

Safety with Dignity, p. 60.

Box 4

Field example¹³

Reducing Violence Against Women (VAW) in Burundi, DRC and Sierra Leone — a stand-alone protection programme in emergency and post-emergency settings

ActionAid’s ‘Reducing Violence Against Women (VAW)’ projects in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone illustrate a ‘stand-alone’ protection programme where the goal, objectives and activities focus on enhancing the safety, security and dignity of women affected by violence. As with many stand-alone protection projects, aspects of legal protection feature prominently alongside social protection activities.

The project was designed following participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) sessions to identify priority protection problems facing women and girls, and to explore possible solutions. These PVA sessions involved actors at community, district and national levels, including male and female community members, tribal chiefs, police and army officers and government officials in charge of emergency response. Participants in the PVA process highlighted patterns of sexual violence affecting women and girls, including abduction, rape and sexual slavery. Actors at all levels noted that the issue underlying this violence was the subordinate status of women in these societies, and the consequent lack of respect for women’s rights in public, private and intimate spaces.

Key programme objectives were to:

- reduce the incidence of violence against women;

- provide appropriate support for survivors of violence; and
- promote and support increased activity among community, national and international actors to reduce violence against women in humanitarian emergencies.

The programme sought to provide services to meet the needs of survivors, along with environment-building activities designed to change social attitudes, policies, laws and institutions that entrench the subordination of women. Activities included the provision of medical care and basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) for survivors of violence, supporting survivors to report incidents to the police and take their cases through the judicial system, training for police, medical staff, emergency response personnel and judicial officers to respond to violent incidents sensitively and effectively and to respect the confidentiality of information provided by survivors, community sensitisation campaigns, psychosocial support for survivors, helping women to strengthen their engagement in peace and transitional justice processes, and building awareness amongst women and girls on international and national laws/policies designed to protect them, and encouraging the self-confidence to advocate for their effective implementation and promotion. These activities have formed the foundation for future ‘stand-alone’ protection projects in these locations. Future programmes will focus on helping women to establish their own community-based and national-level movements for enhancing access to justice for women and girls affected by conflict.

Operationalising community-based protection involves a commitment to the following key principles in humanitarian programming across response sectors and contexts:

- *Human security and effective protection* — achieving the ultimate goals of freedom from fear, freedom from want and the ability to make choices to live your life in dignity requires a community-based, rights-based protection approach to humanitarian programming.
- *Community-based protection as a cross-cutting, cross-sectoral framework* — community-based protection should not be viewed as a sector or area of specialised work separate and distinct from other fields of humanitarian response. Community-based protection comprises an overarching guiding framework or lens through which we plan, design, implement and monitor sectoral interventions (including food, health, shelter, water/sanitation, education and livelihoods programmes) and is best promoted through active engagement with a range of actors and sectoral programmes.
- *Comprehensive protection assessment and analysis*

— community-based protection involves working with communities to identify and respond to protection problems prioritised by them, regardless of whether such problems are pre-existing social problems independent of any humanitarian emergency, emergency-induced protection problems or protection problems arising from inappropriate humanitarian action.

- *Vulnerability and capacity analysis* — community-based protection requires active exploration of communities’ resources, strategies and capacities, as well as their limitations. It also requires external protection actors to critically review their own resources, capacities and limitations, in relation to those identified within their target communities.
- *Local partnerships* — community-based protection involves working with crisis-affected individuals, families, social networks, communities, service providers, local organisations and local authorities in order to develop sustainable prevention and response initiatives that build on local skills and resources and enhance community resilience.

Box 5**Field example****Tsunami-affected coastal villages of Tamil Nadu
— mobilising community protection strategies to secure
land and housing rights**

Following the 2004 tsunami that struck the coast of Tamil Nadu, poor and excluded coastal communities faced the threat of losing their customary rights to coastal lands, with many forced by the state to relocate to rehabilitation sites many kilometres away from the coast, and with inadequate housing, services and facilities. Research indicated that the government was seeking to secure evacuated coastal land for its own construction purposes.

With ActionAid's support, affected communities began a campaign to draw attention to their situation and to demand respect for their dignity and freedom of choice to live on their traditional lands. This community mobilisation initiative began with the production of a film clip entitled 'Our Sea, Our Right'. Volunteers screened the film in over 20 village-level sensitisation meetings, followed by discussion sessions involving community members. From these consultations, the idea emerged to establish a people's organisation and civil society network to help coastal communities retain their homestead rights, and support relocated communities in their efforts to obtain adequate housing and rehabilitation packages. This process resulted

in the formation of the Coastal Community Protection Committee (CCPC) and the Forum for Securing Land and Livelihood Rights of Coastal Communities (FLLRC).

ActionAid helped the CCPC to convene a People's Tribunal for the tsunami-affected villages of Chennai and Thiruvallur. Community representatives made public depositions to a jury of eminent personalities, headed by the UN Special Rapporteur for Adequate Housing. These depositions detailed the impact of the government's programme on the lives of coastal fishing and non-fishing communities, and the lack of transparency in the planning and implementation of the tsunami recovery programme. Following the People's Tribunal, reforms were initiated by the government. Transportation and water facilities were improved in relocation sites, rent and electricity deposits were waived for people forced to relocate and a process of allotting permanent housing was initiated for tsunami survivors residing in transit shelters for more than two years.

Following the Tribunal, the CCPC expanded its membership and became the Coastal Communities Protection Movement. The Movement organises campaigns, rallies and dialogue with government administrators and decision-makers in continued efforts to protect the land, homesteads and livelihoods of coastal communities.

- *Continuous critical review throughout the programme cycle* — humanitarian actors must constantly question whether our actions and interventions are meeting the priority needs and promoting the rights of affected communities in safety and dignity. This investigation relates not only to availability and acceptability (i.e. quantity and quality) of assistance, but also explores safe and dignified access to, and control over, appropriate assistance, resources and services.
- *Coordination* — community-based protection requires effective information-sharing and collaboration with other humanitarian actors including UN agencies, NGOs, the ICRC and the state, where possible.

Building upon positive community protection strategies

Through the development and field-testing of the ActionAid manual, we gained exposure to strategies used by crisis-affected communities and the range of resources — both tapped and untapped — that exist at community level to enhance protection. The types of strategies adopted by communities in crisis situations fall into four general categories.

The first category for attention relates to *positive community strategies*. Individuals, families and communities actively

engage in the mobilisation of resources and allies to develop and implement 'home-grown' strategies for preventing, mitigating and responding to the protection problems they face. For example, in a town in eastern Sri Lanka, community organisations and parents came together to negotiate and advocate with school principals for the acceptance and equal treatment of children of lower caste. Teachers had previously beaten and humiliated lower-caste children for arriving at school without books or pencils. The negotiations, initiated and carried out by parents and local actors, were able to bring an end to the violence

The second type of community-based protection strategy relates to *actions that aim to be positive but also have harmful impacts*. Examples can be found in crisis situations such as forced displacement and active conflict, where communities are faced with limited options and must weigh up the relative risks and pursue strategies that, while adding protective value, have counter-protective repercussions. This damaging impact may or may not be clear from the outset. In some contexts, the negative protection consequences only become apparent in the medium to longer term. For example, in the Hebron district of the West Bank parents send their children to live with their grandparents in a town located close to the school in order to protect their children from the physical

violence they face when they pass by Israeli settlements on their way to school. Parents recognise that this strategy succeeds in reducing children's exposure to violence and ensures the continuation of their studies. However, they also acknowledge the damaging impact on family bonds and relationships caused by separating children from their immediate family for nine months of the year. Despite the negative consequences of such protection strategies, communities nonetheless exercise agency in identifying and evaluating their resources, capacities and options.

The third category of strategies relates to *active engagement in negative coping mechanisms*. Here, communities carry out harmful behaviour as a means of coping with pressures arising from macro-level issues, such as armed conflict or displacement, or life changes such as unemployment, death or divorce, over which they feel they have no control. Examples include alcohol and substance abuse, family violence, public violence and suicide. Individuals, families and communities engaging in these strategies did not recognise their capacity to improve their own protection, their responsibility not to harm others and their active role in identifying and implementing alternative strategies to deal with sources of stress in their daily lives. For example, in participatory protection analysis sessions with Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, men reported that the Israeli occupation, unemployment and restrictions on movement increased their frustration and anger. They admitted to beating their wives and children as a way of venting that anger. When asked about solutions, they replied that this domestic violence would end only when the occupation ended.

The fourth type of community-based strategy identified was that of *unrecognised potential resources and capacities*. We witnessed many situations where communities failed to recognise and utilise available material, human and natural resources to enhance their own protection. This was particularly the case among remote, isolated or marginalised communities, where feelings of helplessness and lack of control over their own wellbeing were prevalent. Through participatory reflection processes, communities were able to identify local strategies that could easily and effectively contribute to increasing the safety and dignity of people at risk.

The above examples illustrate that communities make active choices about their safety and dignity, even where options are limited and even if it means pursuing an option which results in protection gains as well as losses. The process of community-based protection seeks to engage affected communities and the international humanitarian actors engaged in their protection, in critically appraising existing and proposed strategies. Community perceptions and approaches should be cross-checked between different groups and with local and international organisations. This is important as individuals, families, community members, local organisations and international actors may not be fully aware of current or potential local capacities to protect, nor of the potentially negative or counter-protective impacts of their chosen protection strategies, on themselves or on others.

In examining community-based protection strategies, the distinct yet complementary protective roles of communities and states must be acknowledged. Communities play an essential role in protection, but they do not stand alone. Communities do not replace the state, or its vital functions of security, justice, legislative and social services. However, communities must be engaged to change attitudes and behaviours and advocate for justice, accountability and social support. Community-based protection means helping affected or at-risk communities to take action to prevent and respond to protection issues. This includes supporting communities to join with other actors at state and international levels in order to promote and strive towards the achievement of effective protection.

Recognising, promoting and supporting local capacities

Community-based protection must be applied in a manner that builds on local capacities. This involves not only direct participation and consultation with affected groups, but also engaging with local NGOs and CBOs.

Many CBOs and local NGOs in crisis-affected countries have been engaged in protection work since their inception. A growing number, however, fail to recognise that the work they do is crucial and foundational to protection. They report a loss of confidence in their ability to respond to the needs of their communities, and are progressively neglecting or suspending their own activities as they are increasingly overshadowed and undermined by international humanitarian protection efforts. This results in a loss of community confidence in local NGOs and CBOs and a consequent lack of community support for, and engagement with, these groups.

Appropriate implementation of community-based protection therefore requires international humanitarian actors and affected communities themselves to actively recognise and promote local capacities for protection. It demands that international humanitarian and development actors consider the relative value and protective impact of engaging in direct delivery of assistance and services to affected populations — as against partnering with and building the capacity of local organisations to respond to the needs of their communities. Mobilisation of local individuals, families, social networks and communities requires local knowledge, skills and action, and local organisations are often best placed to source and stimulate community engagement in their own protection. It is this feature and commitment of community-based protection — engaging with and implementing response programmes through local CBOs and NGOs — that recognises the equal importance of respecting and protecting the dignity of crisis-affected populations, and embraces this component of protection alongside safety and security objectives.

Integrating a community-based protection approach into different sectors and contexts

Community-based protection is not an abstract concept. People in need of shelter, education, livelihoods, food, basic

Box 6**Field example****Operationalising community-based protection in Gaza — promoting and strengthening local interagency partnership to respond to the needs of key vulnerable groups**

As part of its community-based protection work in Gaza, ActionAid partnered with a local NGO on a project entitled ‘Community-based Perspectives on Protection’¹⁴. The project sought to document reflections from local people and organisations on:

- their understanding of protection in their daily lives;
- their views on the actions and impact of the international community on their protection;
- their experiences of community-based protection efforts and existing community capacities, resources and resilience; and
- their ideas for more positive engagement with international humanitarian actors to enhance humanitarian protection.

Through this project, local people and organisations highlighted the need for increased attention to the dignity dimension of protection. Concerns were raised regarding the mode of operation and agenda of international humanitarian agencies in Gaza. Local individuals and organisations expressed the need for international humanitarian agencies and donors to show greater respect towards local organisations and develop a more effective partnership model of collaboration. There was also a clear desire for humanitarian programming that moved beyond an emergency relief ‘culture of coupons’ and sought to build community resilience and community capacities to deal with the continuing violence, coercion and deprivation arising from the Israeli occupation. Local organisations stressed their reluctance to approach donors with time-intensive, often intangible, resilience-building initiatives, in an environment of constant competition for funds and where donor preference was decidedly in favour of visible material assistance activities.

ActionAid is now working with several local organisations to develop an integrated community-based protection project. The project concept seeks to bring together a group of inspiring, dynamic and entrepreneurial Gazan individuals and organisations — working with key target groups of women, older people, children and young people — to develop a series of creative activities and events around the theme of ‘Reaching Beyond the Wall — Sharing the Strength & Spirit of Gaza and its People’.

The project seeks to support these vulnerable groups to express and share their experiences, along with their determination, courage and dignity in overcoming the problems they face. For example, one proposed joint activity encourages older people to engage in story-telling sessions with groups of children and young people, sharing stories about history, cultural traditions, heritage and life experiences. These stories can then be reproduced by children and young people using creative arts and multi-media techniques, including animation, photo essays, film, painting or illustrated short stories, and presented to the wider community in exhibitions and community festivals. This activity emphasises not only the tangible outcome, but also the intangible process of healing, experience-exchange, learning and psychosocial support between generations.

The project promotes collaboration rather than competition between local organisations, and supports the creative engagement of key vulnerable groups in activities designed to bring them together to help each other in meeting their different needs. In this way, the project aims to build community awareness and understanding of the problems facing these different groups, and generate general (as opposed to specialist) community-based psychosocial support mechanisms.

The process of developing and securing funding for this project concept represents an effort to embrace core principles of community-based protection identified by local organisations as absent or seriously lacking, including:

- Creative collaboration and cooperation between community organisations to share their knowledge and explore how their programming outreach and impact might be enhanced through developing joint activities and operational (not necessarily funding) networks at local, national, regional and international levels.
- Project design by local organisations and their respective target communities, rather than by donors or INGOs.
- Recognition of the joint responsibility of INGOs and local organisations — as implementing agencies - to sensitise donors to the needs of vulnerable groups, aside from material assistance and emergency relief, and to their self-protection capacities.

Through this project, ActionAid seeks to demonstrate community-based protection as an activity, a process and a goal, and in doing so enhance the understanding and practice of community-based protection among CBOs, INGOs and donors.

items, water or sanitation may need support in response to violence, coercion, deprivation or neglect by families, communities, social networks, states and international actors. Recognising the relationship between protection and humanitarian assistance involves recognising that the protection and assistance needs of communities rest on power dynamics within families, communities and states. The safety and dignity of crisis-affected populations is intrinsically linked with the type of assistance and services that humanitarian organisations seek to provide, and the way in which such services are delivered.

Community-based protection acknowledges that sectoral humanitarian assistance alone can have but a limited impact on the ability of affected communities to prevent or respond to protection issues. Integrating community-based protection into programmes across different sectors engages communities in identifying resources and capacities to respond to protection problems that are generally not limited to a single sector. For example, home garden or animal-raising projects targeting vulnerable women displaced by natural disasters may have food security, health, nutrition, livelihoods, education and women's rights objectives, which can be linked together in a collaborative programme. A range of local partners can be engaged to achieve broader protection objectives aimed at building resilience and enhancing safety, security and dignity for this target group, individually and collectively.

So too, community-based protection comprises an operational keystone linking different phases of humanitarian action that

are often perceived and pursued as separate and distinct. A community-based protection approach recognises that building the resilience and self-protection capacity of crisis-affected communities is a goal, process and activity common to disaster risk reduction, emergency response, early recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation and development/poverty reduction phases, in natural disaster, man-made disaster and conflict-based contexts.

Appropriate and effective implementation of community-based protection across response sectors and contexts (in a manner that seeks to maximise protective outcomes while doing no harm) can be promoted by international humanitarian actors through the following key actions:

- Designing and delivering training for UN and NGO staff on the concept and practice of community-based protection and ways to incorporate this approach throughout the programme cycle.
- Ensuring that staff engaged in participatory protection assessment and analysis processes are appropriately trained in facilitation skills and methods, and a range of participatory tools that can be applied in different contexts, while not exposing people to harm.
- Building staff and partner capacity to understand protection issues and approaches, and the relationship between protection and meeting basic needs for food, water, health, shelter, education and livelihoods.
- Developing baseline data and programme indicators relating to safety, security and dignity, reflected in behaviour and attitudinal changes that increase individual and collective protection.

Chapter 5

Challenges and opportunities in engaging communities

In advocating for increased attention to community-based protection, it is important to recognise that many challenges remain, both in theory and in practice.

Limitations of communities

Appropriate implementation of community-based protection requires us to recognise the limitations of communities themselves. In turning attention towards the protective capacities of communities, we cannot forget that, as much as the power to protect exists within communities, so too does the power to abuse; not all community-driven and -determined action is positive or protective in process or impact. As international humanitarian and development actors seeking to enhance protection at the field level, we cannot ignore the fact that social distinctions and constructs — based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexuality, caste, class, geographical origin and language — pervade communities, entrenching power inequalities which give rise to protection issues. The process of community-based protection must therefore also examine social divisions, power dynamics and other underlying causes and contributing factors to protection problems.

Effective implementation of community-based protection involves striking a balance between the importance and value of community-driven, community-owned protection initiatives, while also recognising that entirely internal community protection processes are equally as prone to abuse as entirely international and/or state interventions. Serious protection problems, such as violence against women, domestic violence, child abuse, marginalisation of minorities and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation pre-exist and post-exist large-scale humanitarian crises, and may derive from, or be exacerbated by, local community power dynamics, interests, patterns of behaviour, social attitudes, beliefs and norms. Such protection issues require frames of reference external to the community to support vulnerable people within the community — and the community at large — to acknowledge the existence of such problems, critically analyse their situation and develop appropriate interventions.

Challenging such protection problems and encouraging social change can be sensitive and dangerous. We need to be aware that community-based protection interventions which encourage people to prevent and respond to abuse may place those most vulnerable, or those seeking to help them, at risk of further harm. Traditional mandated protection actors have often expressed concern at non-specialist, non-mandated agencies engaging in protection work without the requisite skills or expertise to respond appropriately to sensitive protection issues. It is an ongoing challenge to ensure that helping vulnerable individuals and groups to identify and respond to protection problems

does not increase their exposure to harm or to subsequent protection risks. Fundamental to a community-based protection approach is the principle of ‘do no harm’, and the commitment to work with communities to develop strategies and approaches that are sensitive to their capacities, culture and security.

No checklist

Community-based protection is not immune from the challenges facing the wider protection field in developing commonly agreed definitions, parameters and tools. Community-based protection, as with the more specialised protection field, emphasises in-depth analysis of the context as the basis for designing appropriate preventive or responsive action. As such there is no comprehensive checklist of questions or issues that covers all factors to be considered in every situation. Community-based protection is an approach and a process determined by the specific characteristics of each humanitarian setting. It is based on constructive, collaborative, community-centred contextual analysis, and as such does not lend itself to a ‘cookie-cutter’ or standardised checklist approach.

This calls for humanitarian actors and agencies to be flexible and to spend as much time with affected communities as the humanitarian and security situation allows, working together to analyse issues and develop local strategies to improve protection. This in turn requires donors to understand and support community-based protection objectives. Supporting humanitarian organisations to undertake more time-intensive participatory assessment and analysis with affected communities will serve to promote the development of humanitarian programmes that actively embrace community-based protection principles. It will also serve to reduce the practice of desk-based programme design by staff far from the field, which results in activities, indicators and objectives that fail to reflect the priority needs or promote the rights of target groups.

Linking community-based protection across sectors

Despite considerable efforts to integrate protection into humanitarian response in all sectors, many in the humanitarian world still see it as a specialist field for lawyers, human rights activists, women’s rights activists or mandated protection agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR and the ICRC. This is true even for INGOs that include protection as a programming area in their operational and strategic plans. Organisations may have stand-alone protection programmes (e.g. violence against women projects) and dedicated protection staff working on these issues. At the same time, however, staff working in livelihoods, education, food or health units often work on projects and

Box 7**Field example****Women living with HIV/AIDS in Somaliland — supporting the most vulnerable to meet their needs and promote their rights in safety and dignity**

In 2008, ActionAid worked with a group of women living with HIV/AIDS in Somaliland. The project involved production of a documentary on the lives of this vulnerable group. Through this process, ActionAid became aware of the extreme isolation and severe stigmatisation experienced by these individuals, resulting in serious protection concerns across various sectors (particularly food, shelter, health and livelihoods). These women lived in constant fear of the negative reaction of family, friends and community members if their HIV status was discovered. Many experienced physical and emotional abuse, verbal harassment, intimidation and abandonment by family, neighbours, friends and other community members. They faced expulsion from their homes and communities. In addition, many of these women were caring for their children, some of whom were also infected, on their own.

In Somaliland there is limited awareness among local and international humanitarian actors of the problems facing this vulnerable group, and no assistance or support programmes address the specific threats and vulnerabilities these women face. This prompted ActionAid to convene a workshop aimed at encouraging these women to recognise their individual and collective self-protection capacities as a starting point for building their own psychosocial support mechanisms.

In early 2009, ActionAid supported a five-day workshop for women living with HIV/AIDS. Most women were illiterate, uneducated and displaced from their villages of origin. The workshop was conducted as a step towards restoring the dignity, self-worth and well-being of the women, individually and collectively. The workshop covered a range of topics, including:

- Information dissemination on HIV/AIDS prevention, transmission and treatment.
- Skills training in general supportive listening and counselling, and informal support group activities.
- Confidence-building and assertiveness exercises to strengthen participants' ability to respond to prejudice and overcome challenges to their participation in private and public space.

Following the workshop, the women formally established an organisation called Women Living with HIV/AIDS (WLWHA). The objective of WLWHA was to enable women living with HIV/AIDS to help each other, recognising the value of the support that they themselves can offer to each other, compared to service providers that do not

understand first-hand their daily experience. ActionAid is working with WLWHA to build its capacity to engage in awareness-raising, advocacy and fund-raising activities. In July 2009, ActionAid conducted a participatory review and reflection session with WLWHA, to review experience to date and help the group prioritise the protection problems faced by their members. Participants used the protection problem matrix (Tool 5 in *Safety with Dignity*) to identify examples of violence, coercion and deprivation. Participants analysed these protection problems by exploring the stakeholders, attitudes and behaviour that caused or contributed to their occurrence, as well as identifying existing capacities and strategies to respond. They noted that local media, religious leaders and government officials promoted HIV/AIDS as a 'killer disease', leading to a general community perception that infected people were effectively dead and therefore not in need of care and support.

WLWHA asserted that economic empowerment would help affected women to gain community acceptance and reduce stigmatisation as the community would then see that women living with HIV/AIDS are people with resources, capacities and abilities. They recommended training in alternative skills for income generation (other than food processing), including poultry farming and the production and sale of clothing. They recognised that income generation would provide them with funds to rent shelter when they are forced to relocate due to eviction from home or abuse of their children in schools and neighbourhoods in their village of origin. WLWHA then linked these ideas with potential positive actors that could support them. For example, they believed that advocacy with the government could assist in the allocation of land on which they could build their own shelters when they were forced to relocate from their original villages to the capital city, Hargeisa. If such advocacy for land allocation was successful, they felt that they could then approach INGOs or private businesses for assistance. Finally, they suggested that advocacy and awareness-raising with religious leaders, teachers and school principals could assist in changing community attitudes and stopping harassment and abuse.

After proposing these solutions, participants expressed frustration at the ongoing challenge their organisation faced in establishing connections between WLWHA and other stakeholders and institutions, in part for fear of exposing their HIV status in an environment dominated by prejudice. In response to this challenge, ActionAid is now working with WLWHA to plan a roundtable meeting on Women Living with HIV/AIDS, bringing together key stakeholders and decision-makers, including the National Somaliland HIV/AIDS Commission, UN agencies, international and national NGOs and local CBOs.

Box 8**Field example****Community-based protection in Gaza — a mechanism for promoting links between humanitarian contexts**

ActionAid began working in Gaza in February 2009, following the 23-day Israeli military offensive. Despite the influx of a great many INGOs following the offensive, and the strong presence, reach and capacity of Palestinian civil society, emergency programmes largely failed to support local NGOs and CBOs to address pre-existing problems and vulnerabilities associated with the Israeli occupation. In response, ActionAid focused its efforts on building community resilience by partnering with local NGOs and CBOs to support livelihoods recovery and poverty reduction, psychosocial activities, CBO capacity-building, and awareness-raising of community-based protection among local and international humanitarian actors.

A key objective of ActionAid's programme was to build the capacity of CBOs to assess and respond to the immediate and longer-term needs of their constituents. This involved three key steps:

- Training for CBO partners on a community-based, rights-based approach to protection, including tools for participatory assessment and action-planning. The programme included guidance on how to document, analyse and report on information gathered from participatory protection assessments.
- Supporting partner CBOs to conduct participatory community protection assessments through focus groups. The results of these assessments were used to

inform and develop community-based activity plans for each of the CBOs to address prioritised needs.

- Supporting CBO staff to implement their activity plans with technical capacity-building in financial and project management, monitoring and evaluation.

Key protection problems highlighted by communities included domestic and family violence, high rates of youth unemployment and lack of opportunities for household income generation, violence against women, deteriorating family relationships, interruptions to children's education, early marriage, and trauma associated with exposure to violent conflict. Community members identified a number of local assets, capacities and resources to address family violence, domestic violence and early marriage concerns. These included a social culture that emphasises a strong family bond; the willingness of women to engage in income-generation activities to increase household income; active CBOs that support families and empower women and girls; religious leaders and legislators engaging in community sensitisation to reduce the incidence of early marriage; teachers that include women's rights in their curriculum; and a strong desire among young girls to continue with their education.

In exploring solutions to these problems, partner CBOs implemented a range of community projects, including vocational training, micro-enterprise support for vulnerable women, including handicrafts production and livestock-raising, training and skills development for CBO staff on psychosocial support and gender-based violence, education on women's rights and psychosocial support for children.

programmes independently of each other and separately from the staff of the protection unit. As such, sectoral staff understand little about protection and how it relates to their programmes. Likewise, local NGOs or CBOs implementing protection programmes with the support of an international organisation or donor may not see the links with sectoral programmes. Consequently, complex protection issues that cut across one or more sectors are often addressed through isolated programmes that fail to meet protection needs in a manner that increases people's safety and dignity.

Linking community-based protection across contexts

Recognition of community-based protection as an approach to humanitarian programmes has arguably faced additional obstacles related to its 'community' focus. Community-based protection has been hampered by assumptions that it is only applicable in situations of relative stability, where communities are not experiencing acute or severe risks

to their physical safety. This is due to the time involved in engaging in participatory processes with communities; the increased risk of harm that affected populations may face if they are engaged in protection actions in volatile or insecure environments; and the idea that addressing protection problems such as violence against women requires long-term behavioural and attitudinal changes. Community-based protection may therefore be perceived as an approach limited to development contexts, rather than emergency settings.

In fact, supporting community-based protection is a continuous, long-term process. Changing attitudes and behaviours to address pre-existing protection problems does take time. However, this does not render community-based protection incompatible with emergency or humanitarian work. Indeed, community-based protection is critical to emergency and humanitarian work in order to ensure that protection interventions and impacts endure beyond the timeframe of the crisis, and to avoid aid-induced protection problems.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Community-based protection helps at-risk or affected populations — *and* the humanitarian actors seeking to assist them — to identify the protection risks of greatest concern to the community, exploring the causes and consequences, and reflecting on existing prevention and response strategies. Community-based protection actively engages affected populations in assessing their own individual and collective resources and capacities as an essential component in developing potential ways to reduce threats and vulnerabilities and strengthen community resilience.

Community-based protection is therefore a necessary and indispensable component of humanitarian protection. Yet humanitarian protection is often seen as a field of engagement somehow separate and distinct from local capacities, local protection strategies and affected communities themselves. And it is this flawed separation and distinction that results in protection problems caused by ‘protection-blind’ humanitarian action. This underlines the need to enhance operational awareness and practice of community-based protection among local, national and international actors engaged in protection work.

It is recognised, however, that community-based protection is not without its difficulties. Humanitarian operational environments are complex and the realities of the

field will always present challenges to implementing a community-based protection approach. It is essential that we openly examine these challenges and regularly assess the protective impact and effectiveness of this approach. Community-based protection should not be exempt from critical appraisal, whether it is pursued by UN agencies, international organisations or local NGOs and CBOs. As an approach that aims to ensure communities are the key subject and agent of protection, accountability to affected populations must remain at its core.

Community-based protection does not preclude or exclude the role of international humanitarian protection actors — it simply shifts the focus away from international humanitarian and development actors as the starting point of protection interventions, and towards supporting community and local partners in their own efforts. Effective protection requires strong and genuine partnership between state and international protection actors and local, community-based actors — a partnership that recognises the multi-layered complexity of sustainable protection for people in crisis. This calls for a reorientation in humanitarian protection discourse, practice and commitment that — without detracting from the roles and responsibilities of external protection actors — equally embraces the protective agency of crisis-affected individuals and communities and their rights to safety, security and dignity.

Notes

1 *Safety with Dignity: A Field Manual for Integrating Community-based Protection across Humanitarian Programs*, ActionAid Australia, October 2009, see <http://www.actionaid.org.au/index.php/protection-manual.html>. The manual was developed by ActionAid Australia and the ActionAid International network between June 2008 and July 2009 with funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

2 Although the term ‘humanitarian programming’ is often used in reference to emergency contexts or humanitarian assistance activities only, here it refers to *all* contexts in which protection problems arise — including emergency response, early recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation, disaster risk reduction and longer-term poverty reduction and development settings.

3 *Strengthening Protection: A Search for Professional Standards* (Geneva: ICRC, 2001).

4 The term ‘community’ refers to actors with some sense of common identity, language, characteristics or social organisation. It includes individuals, families, social networks (friends, neighbours and colleagues), local organisations/charities and civil society (including social movements, local media and activists). In using this term, it is acknowledged that defining ‘community’ is problematic as it assumes a level of homogeneity, unity and common identity which may not in fact exist. For example, humanitarian organisations often refer to the ‘refugee camp community’ or a ‘local community’ to describe a population in a geographic area, yet these people may not in fact share a common identity or have any organised network.

5 The terms ‘immediate’, ‘remedial’ and ‘environment building’ actions derive from the Protection Egg model (see below, p. 000).

6 This diagram is adapted from child rights/child protection frameworks. See, for example, *Child Rights Programming Handbook*, Save the Children Alliance, 2002. *Safety with Dignity* has developed this framework into a stakeholder analysis tool called ‘The Onion’ (Tool 9).

7 *Safety with Dignity* describes protection problems as the ‘risk, threat and occurrence of violence, coercion and exploitation, and

deprivation and neglect’ (p. 19). This draws on the terms used to describe protection problems in child protection discourse (for example *Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies* (UNICEF, 2009) and Sophia Swithern and Rachel Hastie, *Safety of Civilians: A Protection Training Pack* (Oxfam, 2009).

8 Austcare joined the ActionAid International network on 1 June 2009 and became ActionAid Australia. Austcare’s protection programme was established in 2005. The programme includes a Rapid Response Register of Protection Officers, protection policy development, action-research and protection integration across ActionAid International country programmes.

9 The risk equation has been used by disaster risk reduction and humanitarian actors for some time. The equation used in *Safety with Dignity* is adapted from ProCap training materials written by Liam Mahony and Christine Knudsen.

10 The protection egg model was developed in a series of workshops organised by the ICRC in the 1990s. It is now widely used in protection action. See *Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards* (Geneva: ICRC, 2001).

11 The manual also contains an annex of additional information, including a glossary of terms, a list of abbreviations and acronyms, a summary of key international treaties and reference to further protection resources. Field examples from ActionAid programmes in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific are provided throughout the manual as practical illustrations of community-based protection in action.

12 Based on the terms used in Sorcha O’Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report 26, December 2007.

13 The field examples included in this paper illustrate different aspects or principles of operationalising community-based protection in a variety of country contexts. They are intended to provide brief glimpses into operational possibilities, not in-depth analyses of humanitarian and protection contexts.

14 Sharek Youth Forum ‘Voices from Gaza: Our Safety, Our Dignity’, <http://sharek.ps/voices-from-gaza.html>.

Network Papers 1999–2009

Network Papers are contributions on specific experiences or issues prepared either by HPN members or contributing specialists.

- 31 *The Impact of Economic Sanctions on Health and Well-being* by R. Garfield (1999)
- 32 *Humanitarian Mine Action: The First Decade of a New Sector in Humanitarian Aid* by C. Horwood (2000)
- 33 *The Political Economy of War: What Relief Agencies Need to Know* by P. Le Billon (2000)
- 34 *NGO Responses to Hurricane Mitch: Evaluations for Accountability and Learning* by F. Grunewald, V. de Geoffroy & S. Lister (2000)
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- 36 *Food-security Assessments in Emergencies: A Livelihoods Approach* by H. Young, S. Jaspars, R. Brown, J. Frize and H. Khogali (2001)
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- 63 *Measuring the effectiveness of Supplementary Feeding Programmes in emergencies* by Carlos Navarro-Colorado, Frances Mason and Jeremy Dhoham (2008)
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- 67 *Evidence-based decision-making in humanitarian assistance* by David A. Bradt (2009)

Good Practice Reviews

Good Practice Reviews are major, peer-reviewed contributions to humanitarian practice. They are produced periodically.

- 1 *Water and Sanitation in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1994)
- 2 *Emergency Supplementary Feeding Programmes* by J. Shoham (1994)
- 3 *General Food Distribution in Emergencies: from Nutritional Needs to Political Priorities* by S. Jaspars and H. Young (1996)
- 4 *Seed Provision During and After Emergencies* by the ODI Seeds and Biodiversity Programme (1996)
- 5 *Counting and Identification of Beneficiary Populations in Emergency Operations: Registration and its Alternatives* by J. Telford (1997)
- 6 *Temporary Human Settlement Planning for Displaced Populations in Emergencies* by A. Chalinder (1998)
- 7 *The Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance Programmes in Complex Emergencies* by A. Hallam (1998)
- 8 *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* by K. Van Brabant (2000)
- 9 *Disaster Risk Reduction: Mitigation and Preparedness in Development and Emergency Programming* by John Twigg (2004)
- 10 *Emergency food security interventions* by Daniel Maxwell, Kate Sadler, Amanda Sim, Mercy Mutonyi, Rebecca Egan and Mackinnon Webster (2008)

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