

**Engagement with communities for protection**  
**A workshop to reflect on good practices**  
**12 December 2024**  
**REPORT**

## Contents

Background and rationale .....	1
1. Community protection structures – which format? Which process to put them in place? .....	2
2. What can community protection structures deliver? .....	3
3. Which incentives to support community engagement for protection?.....	5
4. Focus on support to individuals in need provided by community protection structures.....	5
5. Focus on the role of community structures in addressing community protection concerns .....	6
6. Strengthening capacities for community engagement for protection.....	6
7. Measuring engagement with communities for protection.....	8
Action points .....	9
Annex 1: Agenda .....	10
Annex 2: Level of community engagement by type of activity, as reported by partners .....	12

## Background and rationale

- Empowerment of communities for protection purposes has been a consistent area of work for protection partners in Northeastern Nigeria, with the objective to strengthen the capacities of communities to prevent protection risks and support people in need of protection.
- However, available data suggest that communities may still feel excluded from decisions affecting them. For instance, respondents to the Nigeria Sectoral Needs and Risk Analysis (SNRA 2025) suggested increasing the frequency of community meetings to ensure that all groups, in particular women and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), are included in discussions about aid and security. In general, women, children and PwDs are reported to be frequently excluded from community meetings and decision-making processes. In various LGOs in Borno, respondents expressed that community meetings are either infrequent or non-existent. According to one IDP man, there are no meetings, and the military and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) decide everything, suggesting that communities can be sidelined from discussions. Individuals in formal leadership positions usually have the critical influence in decision-making.
- The work done in support to community protection capacities needs to be documented, so as to strengthen the visibility of this important area of work for protection partners. At the same time, the protection sector needs to demonstrate its impact on communities’ protection capacities and, ultimately, their exposure to protection risks.

The workshop aimed to bring together partners reporting working with protection groups or networks to strengthen the self-protection of communities and reflect on lessons learned and good practices. Indeed, the meeting will create a community of practice among partners of the Protection Sector for Northeastern Nigeria (PSNE) to help them benefit from the experience accumulated so far in this area of protection work.

The objective of the workshop is to ensure that support provided to community protection structures (CPSs) effectively contributes to their meaningful engagement in the protection of their communities and helps them achieve protection gains in terms of prevention, response and recovery.

In particular, the protection sector seeks to:

- Map the various forms of community empowerment, in particular the existing community structures created and supported.
- Identify good practices and lessons learned by protection partners regarding community empowerment for protection.
- Develop monitoring/evaluation methodologies to measure the impact of community empowerment.
- Disseminate quality tools to support protection partners implementing community empowerment activities (in particular for training and facilitation).

Participants represented protection partners implementing community-based protection programmes and working with protection community groups<sup>1</sup>. Four members of protection community groups were also invited to the workshops<sup>2</sup>.

The workshop was co-organised by the PSNE coordination and GISCOR and sponsored by GISCOR.

## 1. Community protection structures – which format? Which process to put them in place?

A questionnaire was sent to participants in advance to the workshop to help map the current practice among protection partners regarding community-based protection and their engagement with community structures for protection. Responses highlight that the structures can take various formats. Protection networks can be put in place, comprising protection focal points in the community. Networks seem mostly used for awareness raising activities, where focal points are in charge of disseminating key messages among communities. Other community structures take the form of groups of community members, who gather to identify and address protection concerns affecting the communities. Community groups can be in place for women, youth, or community leaders. In camps, sectoral committees are put in place, including a protection committee, which have their TOR, and receive capacity building and hold monthly meetings.

Protection organisations generally conduct a mapping of existing community structures or institutions to identify their roles for the community self-protection. When the creation of a protection community group is envisaged, it is important to inform institutions and leaders in place on the project, and explain their composition and roles. Also, community groups should keep local leaders informed about their activities and seek their support for community protection plans.

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<sup>1</sup> Organisations participating in the workshop were: COWACDI, Danish Refugee Council, GISCOR, Grow Strong Foundation, INTERSOS, IOM, IRC, Nkafamiya Rescue Commission, Norwegian Refugee Council, RAAI, UNHCR

<sup>2</sup> Participants from communities came from the following LGAs: Bama, Monguno, Ngala.

**Box: Hierarchy of traditional leaders in Borno State**

Borno State is divided into eight emirates, each governed by an emir. The emirates are Borno, Bama, Damboa, Dikwa, Biu, Askira, Gwoza, Shani, and Uba. Each emirate is led by a Shehu, who presides over an emirate council with a four-tiered system of authority:

The Shehu of Borno is the supreme leader, supervising all Emirate-level Shehus. The structure is:

- Shehu of Borno (State level): The overall authority
- Shehu (Emirate level): Heads each Emirate Council, reporting to the Shehu of Borno
- Aja/Ajiya (District level, also known as Hakimi)
- Lawan (Ward level)
- Bulama (Neighborhood level)

The Borno State Government, through the Ministry of Local Governments and Chieftaincy Affairs, oversees the functioning of the emirates, including confirmation of appointments and depositions in case the leaders violate the traditional and official guidelines.

The composition of the community protection structures is agreed upon by the community. Members are selected by communities, through elections or designations conducted with communities

**Box: Procedure for the creation of a protection committee (Grow Strong Foundation)**

- Conduct a participatory mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders and influential figures within the community
- Map the vulnerabilities, capacities, and resources within the community.
- Engage with traditional, religious, and local government leaders to gain buy-in and insight into potential candidates.
- Organize focus group discussions (FGDs) with women, youth, and other underrepresented groups to identify active and trusted individuals.
- Define clear selection criteria based on roles and objectives of the structure. Common criteria include:
  - Trustworthiness: Must be respected and trusted by the community.
  - Commitment: Willingness to actively participate and allocate time.
  - Representation: Ability to represent specific groups (e.g., youth, women).
  - Skills/Experience: Relevant knowledge or experience in humanitarian or community work.

Participants recommended that the choice of members should be left to communities. While elections are recommended, the choice of members is often left to community leaders, based on guidance and TOR agreed with the community. In case the selected member is found unsuitable, members of the community should decide whether to change the member and identify a new member.

**2. What can community protection structures deliver?**

The terms of reference for community protection structures commonly include the following responsibilities:

- Support the identification of individuals in need of protection. While community members bring cases to the attention of protection service providers, referral is generally seen as exceeding the

capacity of community structures (see below). With the exception of obvious needs, the recommendations to community protection structures is to alert protection partners about particular cases.

- Provision of basic protection support: as for referral, it would not fair and reasonable to expect from community members that they provide services. However, simple forms of protection support can be delivered by community members, such as psychosocial first aid (PFA).
- Alert system: While referral goes beyond the capacity of community groups, they can be expected to raise the attention of protection organisations on protection issues, both affecting particular individuals, groups in the community or the whole community. It was agreed that community groups should not be expected to conduct protection monitoring (as designed by the PSNE, comprising interviews of community members at household level and key informants, and the use of Kobo forms).
- Awareness raising activities: Protection structures can be entrusted with the dissemination of key protection messages in the communities. DRC mentioned that community groups are provided with modules detailing the messages by themes. It is also recommended to coach and monitor community members at the initial stage of information campaigns, to ensure that messages are not distorted and are meaningfully transmitted. The module also includes FAQ to help volunteers for more complex messages. Awareness campaigns can take the form of radio listening groups or house to house visits, conducted by community members. Messages should be endorsed to local authorities and traditional leaders to enable community volunteers conduct information campaign safely.
- Protection mainstreaming: protection community groups can interact with other sectoral community groups (for instance groups in charge of managing WASH facilities) to raise awareness on protection concerns, such as accessibility for people with disability, and safety for women and girls.

**Box: "Majalisa", a useful target for community awareness activities**

"Majalisa" is a term in Hausa which designates a group of people or congregation. At the community level, informal groups of like-minded people, for instance among youth, can be referred to as Majalisa. Majalisa are often approached in the context of awareness-raising campaigns, to disseminate protection or other messages in the communities.

The word has its origin in the Arabic work Majlis, meaning 'sitting room'. It is used to describe various types of special gatherings among common interest groups of administrative, social or religious nature in countries with linguistic or cultural connections to the Muslim world (source: Wikipedia).

In the context of the camp decongestion and closure, and the return or relocation of IDPs from camps, participants agreed that CPS are critical to help communities prepare for and face protection concerns in return/relocation areas. CPS can be approached in anticipation of the relocation/return of their community to identify protection concerns and agree on prevention or mitigation actions. It is also possible to remain in contact with the CPSs in return/relocation areas where access may be limited. Protection partners can contact members of the CPS through phone calls, or meet when the CPS members visit garrison towns for instance.

### 3. Which incentives to support community engagement for protection?

Participants discussed the incentives for CPS, acknowledging that community members can only devote limited time to community consultations. Some protection NGOs provide equipment to community spaces (matts or chairs, table for instance). Refreshments for meeting may also be available. Bicycles may be provided to enable CPS members to reach out to more distant groups. One partner also reported paying small incentives to community members, but with specific expectations, in particular regarding the identification of people at risk, or information dissemination. While community members are often ready to join a protection group out of good will and genuine commitment for their community, there can also be the hope to ultimately get a job from the protection organisations. This expectation must be clarified with the members of the CPSs. The provision of prepaid phone cards also helps CPS members in their role, for alerting, networking and advocacy.

Risks related to the provision of incentives to members of the CPS or to their community should be assessed beforehand. A partner shared the experience of a generator provided to a community group, and which was later diverted to the benefit of a community official. Community leaders in community groups may often be in situation of conflict of interest, which need to be identified. The mapping of leadership and the risk assessment require triangulation with different sources, which can explain the dynamics at the community level from different perspectives, such as IDPs, refugees, returnees, women, minority groups etc.

#### **Box: Participation of community members in the Stabilization Committee (Ngala)**

In Ngala, a stabilisation committee has been put in place which brings together authorities, service providers and community leaders to discuss various issues. Meetings are held on a monthly basis. These meetings are opportunities for community representatives to raise various issues with authorities, including regarding protection.

### 4. Focus on support to individuals in need provided by community protection structures

As mentioned above, TOR for CPS can include protection support to individuals or households exposed to protection threats. Participants acknowledge that members of PCS can play a critical role there, either by providing this support themselves, or mobilizing other volunteers in the community to provide this support.

In various locations, CPSs and community volunteers have mobilized to support people with specific needs, such as older people or people with disability. They can ensure their accompaniment to key services, and help them to participate in community events, which they would other not be able to reach alone. Volunteers have also helped with translation for people not fluent in language in their host community.

Participants agreed that community members cannot be responsible for referral as such. Issues of confidentiality, possible conflict of interest as community members, or exposure to pressure, may compromise their safety and the safety of the persons in need of referral.

While not in charge of referral as such, CPS and their members can identify people in need of protection and alert protection partners, which then refers them to the relevant services, and ensure the management of cases. CPS are critical resources to help partners map services for referral. In some cases,

CPS are trained to conduct service mapping themselves (DRC). UNHCR also enrolls community volunteers to work at help desk, which ensures a stronger acceptance of information and guidance by the community.

Partners working on Housing, Land and Property (HLP) issues often mobilise community leaders for conflict resolution. Training is provided to them for this purpose, with positive results. [More from HLP coordinator).

## 5. Focus on the role of community structures in addressing community protection concerns

Beyond support to individuals/households in need of protection, community protection structures can also make a difference in response to protection concerns affecting the community as a whole, or even particular groups in the community, and be “agents of change”. There are many examples of CPSs addressing issues of security for civilians, violence against women, child labour (See box below).

### **Box: Community initiatives against GBV**

In Ngala, through the community-based protection committee (CBPC) as a community structure, they supported Identification and resolution of numerous cases of Intimate Partner Violence related cases. The community-based group, supported in the reduction IPV by organizing house to house visit talking to men about the risk, they further visited Majalisa groups (during evening hangs outs) which has supported in the reduction of IPV cases their actions demonstrated the lasting impact of empowering locals to lead in safeguarding their communities.

In Jere, amidst frequent attacks by AOGs, men agreed to keep watch groups while women, organized through a group established and trained by DRC under the EMAP intervention, took proactive steps to support them. The women led efforts to purchase essential items such as flashlights, mosquito nets, and raincoats. They also approached the local military, requesting additional support during the men’s watch duties. (DRC)

CPSs members are often engaged in advocacy with authorities, with the support of PSNE partners. Protection volunteers are invited to meeting with officials, including police, to discuss protection concerns directly with them (UNHCR/GISCOR). The case of refugee communities in Adamawa was also mentioned as an example of the capacity of communities to advocate with authorities. Refugees had a dialogue with migration services to raise concerns of harassment, which decreased as a result of their advocacy.

Some partners work with CPS on protection concerns affecting communities. In one project, a partner shared findings from the protection monitoring with communities and discussed the most concerning protection concerns identified. Meetings were held with communities to develop community action plans in response. However, it was observed that the current practice of protection partners does not seem to sufficiently focus on community responses to protection concerns. As a result, the role of communities in prevention can be more strongly supported, as a lot can be done to mobilise goodwill in the communities, for instance to promote common protection values, or to advocate with authorities for protection.

## 6. Strengthening capacities for community engagement for protection

The participants of the workshop were formed into two groups: one focusing on the community protection structures and the other on protection workers. Each group engaged in discussions to identify capacity-

building needs and subsequently presented their recommendations tailored to community structures and protection workers respectively.

### **Group with community members**

- **Strengths as a community activist or as a member of a community protection group**
  - Awareness raising on protection concerns in various locations.
  - Making referrals to service providers.
  - Advocacy on protection concerns to the government, partners, and community leaders.
  - Strengthen inclusion of persons with disability during distribution/humanitarian services and advocacy on ensuring accessibility of services for people with disabilities.
- **Type of activities most challenging as a member of a community protection group**
  - Unavailability and service provision gaps after they make referrals to service providers.
  - Advocacy on sensitive protection services specifically when the perpetrators are community leaders and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).
- **Recommendation on the type of support needed to strengthen the community protection groups**
  - Leadership skill training.
  - Capacity building on dispute resolution to enable the community groups to resolve some disputes at their level.
  - Mines risk reduction training.
  - Orientation on family tracing, case management, and PSS services availability.

### **Groups on protection workers**

- **Skills needed by protection workers in their engagement with community protection groups**
  - PFA training for protection workers to cascade to community-based protection groups.
  - Identification of protection risks.
  - In-depth interviewing skills, norms, and tradition
  - Protection principles to better engage with CBPGs.
  - Conflict sensitivity for peacebuilding and social cohesion.
  - Limits to referrals and confidentiality.
- **Tools needed for Protection workers**
  - Guidelines on protection risks/awareness raising.
  - SOPs/tools for protection analysis.
  - Community engagement kits, building trust, mobilization, and conflict resolution.
  - Harmonize tracking tools on CBPG activities.
  - Develop/harmonize management skills and coaching tools.
  - Database of existing CBPGs per thematic areas.
  - Strategic plan on engagement with CBPGs.
- **Recommendations**
  - Distinguish community-based protection groups from community workers.
  - Organize structured meetings with community-based protection groups and protection monitors.
  - Regular thematic updates on PSEA and other protection advocacies
  - Small impact projects – mitigate projects/community safety plans to observe how the community groups intake ownerships.

The PSNE coordinator asked participants to suggest two priority needs for training/capacity-building needs. See table with the list of recommendations. [NOTE: The list will be discussed with participants in a follow up session online to identify training resources which partners can use, and agree on a training action plan for the PSNE (in complement to existing resources, if necessary.)]

**Table: Full list of priority training needs identified by partners (nb of votes)**

Community-Based Protection and Engagement (16)	Protection monitoring, analysis, and mainstreaming (11)	PFA & Referral (4)	Civil-military and Security (3)
Social cohesion and community-led dialogue (5)	Protection analysis (3)	Psycho-social First Aid (PFA) (2)	Safety and Security (2)
Community cohesion and mobilization (2)	Protection monitoring (2)	Referral Pathway (2)	Civil-military relations (1)
Community-led advocacy and negotiation skills (2)	Protection mainstreaming (3)		
Community-based protection and community engagement (2)	Prevention and mitigation of protection incidents (1)		
Accountability to the affected population (2)	Protection in HLP (1)		
ToRs for CBPGs (1)	Inclusion of persons with disability (1)		
Training for community leaders, traditional rules and religious leaders (1)			
Project cycle management (1)			

## 7. Measuring engagement with communities for protection

The final session was devoted to the monitoring of engagement with community protection structures and the choice of relevant indicators for that purpose. The PSNE coordinator highlighted the need to give more visibility to the engagement with communities by protection partners. Currently, partners are requested to report merely on achievements at the output level (see below). However, there is a need to document the outcome and impact of community engagement on their protection. The humanitarian response in Northeastern Nigeria is in a transition phase, where both State authorities and donors expect partners to pave the way to durable solutions and contribute more vigorously to consolidate protection capacities at community and State level. The humanitarian community should therefore endeavour to measure and document its impact on these capacities. For protection partners, the community engagement is also an area where partners should be able to demonstrate the durable impact on the protection of targeted communities.

At the output level, the PSNE currently uses the following indicator: Nb of community networks trained/enabled to work on protection risk mitigation and response. In 2024, the target under this indicator was 1,200 networks, while the total reported by partners reaches 8,448, as there is confusion between networks and community members within these networks. The PSNE will revise the note explaining the indicators to clarify this.



There is no indicator for the outcome of community engagement. The Global Protection Cluster confirmed to the coordinator that there is currently no particular indicators recommended, and provided only examples taken from various projects (mostly OXFAM)(see box). Partners participating in the workshop also do not measure the outcome of their community protection work.

**Box: examples of outcome indicators for protection community engagement**

% of women and men in target communities feeling better able to take actions to identify, prevent and respond to protection threats

% of women and men in target communities reporting at least one new self-protection behaviour compared to beginning of the project

% of women and men in target communities that state they have the confidence to approach authorities in order to raise protection risks and conflict prevention

The choice of indicators should be made by the communities themselves. In particular, when developing a protection action plan, members of the community group should agree on how to measure the success of their plan and the outcome expected on their protection. The PSNE encouraged partners to pilot the development of outcome indicators in selected communities in 2024 and offered to coach one or two national NGOs interested to strengthen the monitoring of their engagement with communities.

**Action points**

- Hold follow up meeting to finalise an actionable training plan to strengthen capacities of protection workers and community members on community protection
- Identify existing training and guidance resources which are relevant to support community capacities for self-protection
- Support the pilot monitoring of protection outcomes from the engagement with community structures
- Publish a briefing note on community engagement with communities with examples of current projects illustrating the various protection activities implemented by community protection structures and the results on their protection

## Annex 1: Agenda

Time	Topic	Notes
8:30	Registration of participants	
9:00	Opening Introduction of participants Review of the agenda	
9:15	<p>Session 1: An overview of protection community structures in place</p> <p>Expected outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Main models protection community structures in place with their strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>- Practices for the creation and the composition of community structures/groups.</li> </ul>	<p>PSNE presentation of mapping of existing community structures supported by protection partners in key settings (such as camps in urban areas, return communities)(based on questionnaire to participants)</p> <p>Discussion: what works best in terms of groups, their creation, composition and coverage? Strengths and weaknesses of models in place? Do community structures weaken or strengthen other community protection mechanisms (such as traditional leaders or religious leaders)?</p>
10:30	Break	
10:45	<p>Session 2: Protection achievements of community structures</p> <p>Expected outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples of protection achievements by community structures</li> <li>- Recommendations on engagement with communities in the context of relocation from camps</li> </ul>	<p>Presentation by selected participants: Where do community structures make a difference regarding protection? What is/can be the role of community structures in the context of the relocation/return/camp decongestion process?</p> <p>Discussion: Where are usually the strengths of community groups regarding protection? Can community groups engage more in protection issues? Which ones? How?</p>
12:00	<p>Session 3: Group work Capacity building for community structures and community engagement</p> <p>Expected outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- List of essential skills/knowledge/tools for which community members and protection workers need for community empowerment for protection</li> <li>- Recommendations regarding support to protection community-led projects</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion in smaller groups: What support do community structures need to strengthen their capacity for protection? In terms of capacity building? Community protection projects?</p> <p>What tools/skills do protection workers need to engage efficiently with community structures on protection issues?</p>
12:45	Lunch	

13:45	<p>Session 4: Capacity building for community structures and community engagement</p> <p>Expected outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- List of skills and training materials to support community engagement for protection</li> <li>- Recommendations for capacity building of protection workers on community engagements</li> </ul>	<p>Presentation by groups on capacity building needs and discussion in plenary</p>
15:00	Break	
15:20	<p>Session 5: Reporting and measuring achievements</p> <p>Expected outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indicators to be used to measure deliverables and impact of protection community engagement</li> <li>- Recommendations for strengthening the visibility of community engagement work by protection organisations.</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion: How can we measure the our community engagement work? What indicators can be used to measure accurately outputs/outcomes and impact of protection community engagement? How can be strengthen the visibility of our work on community engagement</p>
16:30	Conclusion	<p>Review of main recommendations</p> <p>Next steps</p>
17:00	End of workshop	

Annex 2: Level of community engagement by type of activity, as reported by partners

Themes	No engagement by community groups	Weak engagement by community groups	Somewhat effective engagement by community groups	Strong engagement by community groups
Identification of people in need and referral to protection partners		COWACDI	NRM	GSF GISCOR NRC DRC UNHCR
Community initiatives or actions in response to insecurity (for instance, organizing joint movements, community patrols etc)		NRC	NRM COWACDI UNHCR	GSF GISCOR DRC
Advocacy with security forces (police, armed forces, JCTF) on security concerns		NRM COWACDI DRC	NRC UNHCR	GSF GISCOR
Support to information dissemination on protection or other issues			COWACDI	NRM GSF GISCOR DRC UNHCR
Conflict resolution and social cohesion	NRC	NRM	GSF	GISCOR DRC UNHCR
Other (indicate)			NRC (Mobilization of community stakeholders for meetings, events, and other advocacy concerns)	COWACDI DRC (data sharing)