



Who's in the Driver's Seat?

Centering Locally Led Protection Analysis Across Planning, Response & Transition

Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW) | 4 March 2026

Organizer	Protection Analysis Local Actor Network (PALAN), IRC, Global Protection Cluster, Oxfam, Danish Refugee Council, CBM, ProLAC, Action Against Hunger, with support from Sida
Moderator	Sara Brodd, Lead Policy Specialist for Humanitarian Aid, Sida
Panelists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeannette Frangieh, Founder & Executive Director, Himaya Daeem Aataa (HDA), Lebanon • Repent Woroh Odrande, Executive Director, Active Youth Agency (AYA), South Sudan • Medoun Bathily, Project Manager and Protection Lead, Action Mopti, Mali • Mohammed Hamid, Co-founder, Ambassadors Association for Persons with Disabilities, Syria • Adis Victor, Executive Director, Access for Social Inclusion (ASI), South Sudan • Carmen Zenaida Vivas Franco, Director, Observatory of Social Investigations at the Border (ODISEF), Venezuela
Date	4 March 2026
Languages	English, Arabic, French, Spanish (simultaneous interpretation)
Zoom Recording	See the HNPW Event page

1. Background & Purpose

This session was organized by the Protection Analysis Local Actor Network (PALAN), a network of local civil society organizations supported by IRC under a Sida-funded project, alongside interagency research collaborators. The webinar shared emerging findings from a six-month interagency research effort examining what practices promote meaningful inclusion and leadership of local and national organizations in interagency protection analysis processes.

The session aimed to:

- Share key findings and recommendations from local organizations involved in a global research initiative on their engagement in and leadership of protection analysis initiatives.
- Support linkages and strengthen engagement between local and national organizations and interagency initiatives leading analysis and strategic planning processes and promote pathways to further capacity sharing, peer exchange, support and activation of their expertise in protection analysis.
- Facilitate substantive interagency dialogue, anchored in local actors' perspectives, on how to integrate locally led protection analysis into the Humanitarian Reset and the rethinking of the humanitarian architecture.



2. Research Methodology & Key Findings

Background and Research Objectives

Protection risks impacting on the lives of millions are complex and need shared understanding and cooperation among everyone involved in humanitarian work – including a meaningful role for local actors and affected communities. Although global policies stress the importance of analyzing protection risks and humanitarian needs from the point of view of those most affected, the voices of crisis-affected people and their organizations are often left out when prioritizing, interpreting, and making decisions based on the analysis. In recent years, there have been efforts to improve how protection analysis is done and used within interagency spaces, including the HNRPs; however, there has been an evident gap in meaningful inclusion of local actors within this process. Similarly, the Humanitarian Planning Cycle Discussion highlights that delivering a fully inclusive and accountable process, demands both ‘meaningful, continuous engagement with crisis-affected communities in all their diversities to ensure the HNRP reflects people’s priorities, capacities and preferences’ and ‘engagement of NGOs (INGOs and L/NNGOs) throughout the process’ and at critical junctures¹. Yet there are structural, organizational and context-specific challenges requiring a specific focus and understanding.

To address this gap in learning, the Protection Analysis Local Actor Network (PALAN) convened by IRC, in collaboration with the Global Protection Cluster, Community led Protection Community of Practice, Disability Reference Group, CBM, DRC, ACF and other collaborating agencies have undertaken a structured global learning exercise with a diversity of contexts and types of ‘local’ actors to understand:

- What are the existing practices, enablers and barriers for local actors (including representative organizations) engaging in protection analysis?
- What is most needed to support more inclusive engagement and leadership by local and national organisations in protection analysis?

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, including:

- A global survey distributed through protection and coordination channels to local actors, receiving 113 responses from across regions
- A literature review of existing reports, webinars, and case studies on the topic
- Regional and expertise-specific consultations: in collaboration with the South Sudan Protection Cluster Partners, ProLAC in Latin America, online consultations with the Community-led Protection COP, and OPDs/disability-focused organizations led by CBM

IRC presented some of the main findings during the session; please find the survey synthesis report (English, French, Spanish, and Arabic), for more details. Research partners will be finalizing a learning and advocacy product in the coming weeks. Please contact katie.grant@rescue.org with any questions on the research or findings.

3. Panel Reflections and Key Themes



Theme 1: Making Community-Level Analysis the Backbone of Strategic Decision-Making

How can we ensure that community-level analysis is used as the backbone of higher-level analysis and decisions, and what is lost if we don't?

Jeanne Frangieh (HDA, Lebanon) argued for a fundamental shift in how community analysis is valued:

- Community insights must move from being treated as “input” to being treated as “infrastructure”—shaping the framing of problems from the outset
- Assessment tools must be designed with communities, not just about them, using local enumerators, participatory methods, and continuous feedback systems
- A formal chain connecting community data to coordination and decision-making spaces must be established; without it, community knowledge will always be sidelined by faster, standardized data
- Donors must signal that contextual relevance, trust-building, and responsiveness are performance markers

She identified three key losses when community-centered analysis is absent: accuracy (aggregated data misses intra-household vulnerability and power dynamics), legitimacy (eroding trust and increasing operational risk), and efficiency (designing solutions for the wrong problems).

Repent Woroh Odrande (AYA, South Sudan) emphasized experience from AYA:

- Bottom-up planning, informed by community assessment, is essential for relevant humanitarian and development programming in conflict contexts
- Data collection tools must be contextualized and translated into local languages
- Without grounded community analysis, programming risks being based on assumptions rather than reality
- Feedback mechanisms must be accountability-based across all levels: donor, national, and community

Medoun Bathily (Action Mopti, Mali) highlighted Action Mopti's community-centered approach:

- Empowering communities at every stage—from data collection to analysis to action planning—ensures ownership and buy-in
- Participatory and inclusive methods facilitate community appropriation of risk analysis and response
- Traditional and cultural protection mechanisms should be recognized and built upon

Theme 2: Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion in Protection Analysis

How do organizations representing systematically marginalized groups contribute to protection analysis, and how can this be better supported?

Mohammad Hamid (Ambassador's Association of Persons with Disabilities, Syria) highlighted the critical but often overlooked role of organizations representing persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups in identifying hidden risks and community-specific protection needs that broader



analysis misses. Therefore, many people with disabilities cannot access humanitarian services independently due to barriers and this has increased their isolation and dependence on others. As an example, aid distribution mechanisms have been designed without considering mobility or accessibility challenges. As a result, some persons with disabilities have had to rely on others to collect assistance on their behalf, which affects their independence and dignity and increases their exposure to additional risks.

Adis Victor (ASI, South Sudan) outlined key barriers and opportunities:

- OPDs and representative organizations are too often consulted only at implementation stage, when their ability to influence design is minimal
- Funding and capacity mismatches leave these organizations able only to advocate at a 'voice level', without resources to manage information systems
- In sensitive contexts (e.g., Jonglei, Upper Nile), sharing risk information carries real dangers of retaliation from state and non-state actors
- Application of the Protection Analytical Framework (adapted for frontline actors by PALAN members in 2023) has been successful in surfacing hidden risks, including specific minority clan vulnerabilities and intersectional risks facing women, girls, and persons with disabilities
- Community-based coordination models and formal mandates (e.g., 35% women group representation in South Sudan) can increase pressure for inclusion
- Legal frameworks such as the CRPD and specific guidelines (e.g., the IASC Disability Guidelines) provide enabling levers for OPD participation

Theme 3: Moving from Tokenism to Genuine Locally-Led Action

In the context of the humanitarian reset, how can we ensure locally-led action is structurally embedded, not tokenistic?

Jeanne Frangieh (Lebanon) proposed four concrete structural shifts:

- Shift from consultation to co-decision: community engagement must go beyond feedback collection
- Align financing with rhetoric: multi-year flexible funding must flow directly to local and national actors, covering core costs and institutional development, not just project delivery
- Build accountability downward: transparent feedback loops, public reporting to affected populations, and performance indicators measuring responsiveness, not only outputs
- Change incentives and culture: leadership must reward partnership, accompaniment, and power-sharing
- "Locally-led action will not be an add-on or a theme. It will become the operating principle of how we design, decide, and deliver a humanitarian response. This is the difference between inclusion as a statement, and inclusion as a system."

Repent Woroh Odrande (South Sudan) added:

- Local NGOs, community leaders, women groups, and youth groups must hold formal seats in coordination platforms (e.g., cluster leadership)
- Direct multi-year funding to national NGOs is essential to reduce dependence on international intermediaries



- Continuous consultation and accountability mechanisms, driven locally, must replace one-off assessments

Carmen Vivas Franco (Venezuela) identified two core barriers:

- Bias and pre-existing underestimation of local organizations by some international actors, creating invisibility even where local capacity and expertise exist
- Resource deficit for analysis governance: funding structures do not consistently budget for the technical work of data analysis by local actors

She outlined quick wins from involving local actors earlier:

- Reduced friction costs for international organizations arriving in unfamiliar contexts (local actors compress the learning curve)
- Greater precision in diagnostics: local organizations have deep, current, contextual knowledge enabling realistic impact indicators from day one
- Strengthened data ecosystem: local actors provide more diverse primary data sources, reducing confirmation bias and data dilution

Carmen also noted the importance of physical presence (not just online) in coordination spaces, and the need for resources to support representation from border and provincial organizations.

Medoun Bathily (Mali) reflected on Action Mopti's feminist approach (implemented with Oxfam):

- Community involvement from identification through feedback stages ensures sustainability
- Capacity building must be long-term, not one-off, allowing communities to continue without project support
- Financial, human, and time resources for community leadership must be evaluated and sustained throughout the project lifecycle

Mohammad Hamid reflected the need to inject resources to support:

- Focused and tailored capacity strengthening of representative organizations (like OPDs) to conduct protection analysis, as well as tapping OPDs as strategic partners
- Resource reasonable accommodations, such as transportation and access tools, to ensure effective participation
- Resource the development of data collection and analysis systems at the local level
- Resource the leadership roles of local organizations to ensure their continued involvement
- Resource improved access to buildings and services, and ensure that humanitarian aid design takes into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities

Adis Victor offered the following additions in terms of capacity-sharing approaches:

- From "Building" to "Sharing and Tapping" The 2026 approach rejects the "top-down" training model. Instead, it focuses on mutual expertise exchange.
- Tapping OPD Expertise: Rather than international NGOs (INGOs) teaching disability inclusion, OPDs should be funded to train the clusters. They are the experts on navigating local barriers and should be the ones auditing the "accessibility" of humanitarian response plans.
- AGD Risk Analysis Empowerment: Local actors often have the best "gut feeling" for risks. Capacity sharing should focus on formalizing this through Joint Protection Analysis. This involves:



- Mentorship/Accompanying: INGO staff working *under* the direction of local leaders during field assessments.
- Analysis Clinics: Monthly sessions where local and international actors sit together to look at raw data through an Age, Gender, and Disability (AGD) lens, ensuring local cultural distinctions are not lost in the "translation" to a report.

5. Q&A and Additional Voice: Inclusion of persons with diverse SOGIESC in Protection Analysis

Questions received from the chat:

1. What concrete mechanisms ensure that LGBTIQ+ communities are meaningfully and safely included in protection analysis, rather than symbolically referenced?
 - Naya Rajab (SEEN, Middle East) highlighted that the protection analysis framework (PAF 2023) demonstrates it is possible to include communities—including queer communities—in understanding and managing their own protection risks. Real systemic change in protection requires the meaningful inclusion of all marginalized groups: LGBTIQ+ people, women's and feminist groups, and people with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of moving communities from passively responding to danger, to actively managing their own protection.
2. In contexts where funding and coordination structures are still largely controlled by international actors, what concrete shifts in decision-making power have you seen that genuinely place local actors in the driver's seat, beyond consultation?
 - Medoun: In the context of our areas of operation in Mali, through the Nexus approach—which emphasizes the complementarity between development (governance) and humanitarian projects—communities are better informed about the fundamental principles of governance (participation, engagement, and accountability). They understand that the driving force behind change is the consideration of their needs by decision-makers, and they are actively engaged in this process.

Added to this is the localization strategy, which places communities at the heart of projects and programs. Today, for a project to have a real impact, we as implementing actors have come to understand that it is essential to take into account the actual needs of beneficiary communities in a specific and targeted manner. This requires their involvement at every stage of the process (needs assessment, development of responses—including the exit strategy—implementation of actions, and monitoring and evaluation). This is our approach as a local NGO, with the support of our technical and financial partners (e.g., OXFAM).

3. How can locally-led protection analysis meaningfully influence funding priorities, especially when donors often require standardized frameworks and rapid reporting?
 - Medoun: First, a locally conducted analysis must necessarily involve local communities (beneficiaries) and be carried out in an inclusive and participatory manner based on actual needs (vulnerabilities); this approach allows for significant influence over funding priorities. Furthermore, flexibility enables



periodic updates of risk assessments, with a view to adapting actions to newly identified needs. The analysis helps identify protection risks, discuss with communities the causes, consequences, and traditional response mechanisms (both effective and outdated), the actions to be implemented (funding priorities), and, above all, the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

4. When local actors lead protection analysis, how do we ensure they are not exposed to increased political or security risks, particularly in sensitive protection contexts?
 - Medoun: In the current context of our operational areas, it is important—indeed, essential—to input data into the safe planning tool before each activity. The information collected will help determine how to carry out the activity, or whether to postpone or suspend it in consultation with the beneficiary communities.

5. How can local actors, including community media and organizations led by persons with disabilities, be systematically integrated into protection analysis processes rather than consulted only occasionally?
 - Medoun: Here, the need, relevance, and risks associated with their inclusion must first be assessed. The analysis must take all these inclusion issues into account and define the role and responsibilities of each stakeholder.

6. Summary of Key Recommendations

Across panelist contributions and the underlying research, the following recommendations emerged:

Area	Recommendation
Financing	Provide dedicated, multi-year, flexible funding directly to local and national actors covering core costs, institutional development, and analysis governance—not only project delivery. Fund reasonable accommodations in appeals as a non-negotiable budget line.
Capacity Sharing	Shift from one-off trainings to sustained, two-way capacity sharing through peer learning and communities of practice (e.g., PALAN, ProLAC models). Invest in mentoring based on stakeholder needs.
Inclusion of Representative Organizations and Marginalized Groups	Actively involve OPDs, women-led organizations, LGBTQI+ groups, and other representative organizations from process design through decision-making, not just data collection. Ensure data collection tools are aligned with IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.
Tools & Information Management Systems	Invest in locally-held information management systems and contextually appropriate data collection tools translated into local languages. Expand awareness and use of the PAF and its adapted version. Strengthen the data ecosystem to better integrate methods and data sources used by local actors.



<p>Process Design</p>	<p>Involve local actors from the outset of analysis process design. Ensure community-level insights formally inform national and subnational strategy and response, not just programming.</p>
<p>Power & Recognition, Governance & Accountability</p>	<p>International actors should shift from instrumentalizing local organizations for data collection, to creating pathways for local actors to lead analysis and own their data. Formalize local leadership roles in cluster and interagency coordination structures (including co-coordination functions and co-chairs of technical working groups responsible for analysis production). Build downward accountability mechanisms with transparent feedback loops to affected communities.</p>

7. Closing & Next Steps

The session was closed by moderator Sara Brodd, who summarized key takeaways including the critical need for resources (human, financial, and time), the necessity of moving from tokenistic participation to structural engagement, and the importance of embedding co-learning mechanisms from the onset of any humanitarian interagency governance model. GPC Coordinator Josep Herreros shared the GPC’s commitment to ensuring a meaningful role for local actors in protection analysis. It is a 2026 priority and a key driver of our ongoing consolidation, and they see this event as a starting point. The GPC will review the sector approach to protection risk analysis to better integrate community and local perspectives, in line with Reset commitments. The GPC expanded that they will engage with PALAN, the Protection Donor Group, protection partners, and OCHA to promote structural changes that enable meaningful local participation in analysis and planning, as well as supporting the finalization of this research to generate practical recommendations that inform advocacy and system-wide engagement. The session closed with video testimonials from PALAN network members.

Next steps announced:

- The full research report will be published and made available on the HNPW site
- Questions submitted via chat will be compiled and integrated into the outcome report
- Email contact for follow-up was shared in the session chat

This report was prepared based on the official webinar transcript.

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