



Community of Practice on Community-Based and Community-Led Protection¹

Terms of References

February – December 2026

Context and Current Gaps

Protection in humanitarian action has typically been viewed through state-centric lens. For a long time, many strategies for protection focused on influencing or changing the behaviour of state or non-state actors towards the individuals they govern. These persons were traditionally treated as recipients of external protection action and were thus seen as beneficiaries. But they are not just passive recipients of protection but have agency and capacity to strengthen their protection and increasingly protection actors have been placing more importance on the participation and leadership of communities in protection work.

In humanitarian crises, including armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural/human-made disasters, affected individuals and communities engage in self-protection actions to keep themselves, their families and their communities safer. This can involve engaging with state and non-state armed actors, who may be both source of risks and, at times, providers of protection, resulting in both positive and negative outcomes.

Within the current humanitarian system, there is limited technical guidance and visibility of community-led or community-based protection work, not only at the global level but also within the way protection action is coordinated and implemented at the country level. Community-led protection is rarely prioritised in operational protection HRPs and in common humanitarian pooled fund allocation strategies, even though numerous national organizations, CBOs and civil society, as well as some international organizations already focus on this core aspect of protection work, including child protection and protection from gender-based violence (GBV). Researchers, academics, and practitioners from a wide range of fields, including humanitarian access, civil-military coordination, peacebuilding, accountability to affected people (AAP), and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), also engage in elements of community-led protection. This includes work on conflict resolution, community-led negotiations and dialogues with armed actors, as well as initiatives that strengthen existing community mechanisms to prevent and respond to protection risks. However, despite these efforts, there are currently no common guidelines or standards on how to best support community-led protection, nor commonly used tools to guide practice. Likewise, there is no central platform for sharing information, experiences, and learning, disseminating best practices, and identifying common challenges and solutions around working on supporting community-led protection across humanitarian crises.

The humanitarian coordination system – and specifically, the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) – offers an opportunity to highlight the critical leadership role of national organizations, CBOs and civil society play in advancing community-based/community-led protection programmes, while recognizing the role of governments, local authorities and international actors as enablers of these efforts. Community-based/community-led protection programmes strengthen the capacity of affected communities to lead and sustain local protection initiatives, ensuring that responses are not only more localized but also more sustainable. Moving beyond the traditionally top-down, state-centric mode of protection work,

¹ Community-Based Protection is a term used by many protection actors to refer to programming approaches that aim to support and strengthen communities' protection strategies and outcomes. Their goal is that communities can self-organize and employ self-protection community strategies. It is a continuous process that engages communities as analysts, implementers, and evaluators in their protection. Some protection actors use the term Community-Led Protection to highlight Community-Based Protection approaches in which protection initiatives fully originate and are implemented by communities with some support from external protection actors that play a facilitator role.

this approach recognises and promotes that protection work is carried out *by affected populations*, and not only *for them*. There is an opportunity to create a space for sharing practice and learning, strengthening networks and providing a platform for strengthening synergies between protection and peace action.

1. Purpose

The Community of Practice (CoP) on Community-Led Protection exists to foster inclusive learning, collective knowledge generation, and practice-based innovation to elevate community-led and community-based protection approach as a core aspect of all protection work and humanitarian action. Through a diverse network of local and international actors, including UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, and community-based leaders, the CoP supports mutual capacity building, evidence-sharing, co-creation of tools, and strategic advocacy. This CoP will serve both as a platform for collective reflection and as a mechanism for amplifying the knowledge and leadership of local protection actors. It seeks to support coordinated engagement with multiple stakeholders for sustained community engagement in protection and humanitarian action, facilitating direct contributions from community-based practitioners and enabling cross-contextual collaboration.

- Create a trusted and inclusive space for dialogue, exchange, and reflection on community-led protection.
- Facilitate cross-context learning and elevate lived experiences, especially from local actors and affected communities.
- Document and disseminate practices, lessons, and tools grounded in community leadership and agency.
- Support peer-to-peer collaboration, mentorship, and problem-solving across members.
- Advocate collectively for systems and funding mechanisms that center community-led protection.

2. Key Areas of Work & Expected Deliverable

The CoP will focus on strengthening practice and learning around community-led protection, especially in humanitarian crisis and conflict contexts. It will support mutual learning across different operational environments, including on strengthening M&E for community protection, promote evidence generation and dissemination, and explore how external actors can support rather than undermine local protection strategies.

The CoP will evolve based on the interests and priorities of its members. Likely areas of activity include:

- Facilitating virtual gatherings for collective learning and practice exchange, including sessions led by local actors;
- Sharing tools, strategies, approaches and experiences across different operational contexts through an online platform;
- Supporting participatory research, case studies, and documentation of community-led protection initiatives to better capture outcomes and impact;
- Convening dialogues with donors and coordination bodies to improve recognition and support for local protection work;
- Exploring mechanisms for community-to-community mentoring, regional exchange visits, or collaborative action research;
- Developing a living toolkit or repository of practices, resources, and principles based on community inputs.
- In collaboration with the GPC, provide support and expertise on community-led protection to country protection clusters and their members

Rather than rigid deliverables, the CoP's outputs will emerge from the energy, collaboration, and innovation of its members. Products may include advocacy briefs, learning papers, audio stories, or participatory guidance—but only when they reflect shared interests and benefit from wide ownership.

3. Ways of working

The CoP will operate as a peer-led, inclusive community. Regular meetings will be bi-monthly, with flexibility to adjust for time zones and member availability. Participation will be open and voluntary, with members encouraged to contribute according to their interest, expertise, and capacity.

Rather than focusing on products or technical outputs, the CoP will prioritize dialogue, collective sense-making, and sharing of lived experiences. It will convene thematic discussions and facilitate cross-regional exchange among members and share a readout and/or recording of the meeting with CoP members. If the CoP wishes to develop distinct products or is invited by the GPC to do so, a time-bound task team will be set up to accomplish that specific task.

To ensure meaningful participation, the CoP will provide multilingual interpretation during meetings, the ambition being to offer at least Spanish, French, Arabic and English, subject to availability of resources.

To enable direct written exchanges between members of the CoP, the co-leads will set up and maintain a mailing list which members can use to reach all other members for communications on related topics.

4. Membership

Membership is open to all actors engaged in community-led/community-based protection work at any level local, national, regional, or global. This expressly includes members of affected communities and community-based organisations active in protection work. Emphasis will be placed on equitable and meaningful participation. All international organizations joining the CoP are encouraged to support and amplify the engagement of their local partners.

Co-Leads

The CoP will be jointly coordinated by up to three co-lead organizations, beginning with CEDIER, NRC, and Oxfam. These agencies will provide light-touch coordination, including organizing meetings, supporting communication within the CoP and with external stakeholders, coordinating with the Global Protection Protection Cluster and maintaining mailing lists and documentation. The co-lead role will be open for rotation every 2 years and new co-leads will be selected by the Core Group.

Core Group

The core Group is composed of community members that are most enthusiastic about the CoP and are committed to its success. As such they are willing to volunteer to take on specific responsibilities.

Core group members are volunteers and should commit only to what they realistically have time for. Hence the following list provides an idea of responsibilities that a core group member can commit to: 1. Contribute to the design of the community 2. Be a sounding board for the development of the community and its initiatives and activities 3. Be committed and contribute to the achievement of goals and objectives jointly agreed upon 4. Participate in core group meetings and take notes or facilitate on a rotational base 5. Actively participate in CoP activities in person or virtual (webinars, online platform) 6. Role model desired behaviors that have been agreed upon during the design phase, such as sharing tools/resources, best practices and failures, answering questions from other members, providing feedback 7. Take on a specific responsibility such as communications, events, knowledge platform, filling knowledge gaps, etc. 8. Identify challenges community members are facing, propose solutions, and take the lead on the implementation Suggest and take the lead on specific initiatives 10. Help grow the community by recruiting new members 11. Contribute to strengthening the community by being a connector between members 12. If representing a region, an organizational structure, or a professional

category, be a connector between that group and the community by making sure that members from that group are: a. Informed about community's plans and activities b. Contributing to the community's development by expressing their needs and ideas c. Included and participate in community's activities and initiatives

6. Accountability & Communications

The CoP is accountable to its members. It will regularly reflect on its added value, inclusiveness, and direction, and make adjustments as needed. The CoP's accountability is first and foremost to the communities and practitioners it serves. Formal reporting will be limited and lightweight, focused on communicating learning and impact rather than compliance.

While the CoP aims to maintain a formal link to the GPC this link is still to be confirmed at the time of writing of the Terms of Reference. Co-Leading agencies are responsible for monitoring the functioning of the CoP and if the link with the is maintained also for regularly reporting back to the GPC Strategic Advisory Group and the GPC Coordinator on progress and achievements if the formal link with the GPC is indeed maintained (subject to confirmation by the GPC's Strategic Advisory Group still in the process of being formed)

7. Funding & Resources

Some of CoP work will be accomplished through donor support and in-kind contributions by CoP member organizations such as funding for interpretation services, publications, the use of CoP member Zoom accounts and similar.

8. Timeframe

This ToR will remain valid until December 2026, at which point it will be reviewed and updated in consultation with CoP members. The community is intended to be flexible and adaptive. Its structure, focus, and activities will continue to evolve based on emerging needs, new ideas, and the priorities of its members.

Please contact the CoP co-leads for any questions of clarifications:

- Armel Rusake Rutebeza, CEDIER, at armel.rusake@gmail.com
- Carolina Franceschini, NRC, at carolina.franceschini@nrc.no
- Melanie Kesmaecker-Wissing, Oxfam, at melanie.kesmaecker@oxfam.org