EMBRACING THE PROTECTION OUTCOME MINDSET: WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

A Results-Based Protection Briefing Paper

INTRODUCTION

More than ever, humanitarians are working in settings of active, and often protracted, armed conflict and other situations of violence. Amid growing concern for the decline of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL), human rights, international asylum, and other protective norms, civilians are subject to forced displacement, killing, rape, separation from their families, deliberate deprivation of life-sustaining resources and services, forced recruitment, and countless other forms of abuse. Despite this, the humanitarian community has yet to fully embrace concerted collective action to reduce affected people's exposure to these risks. Reducing the risk experienced by people in situations of armed conflict is both essential and possible, but will require some changes in mindset and ways of working.

The most foundationally important change in mindset needed is to recognize protection as the *outcome* we seek. In other words, protection—in the form of reduced risk—is the end state we want to bring about, not the activity of reacting to abuses. This should be our starting point, and from this flows the analytical framework, strategies to achieve results leading to outcomes, and skills for practical problem-solving. Humanitarian actors bring a wide array of skills and knowledge to humanitarian crises; however, some entrenched habits are undermining the potential to achieve protection outcomes. Our organizational and inter-agency cultures, the resources available, and how they are mobilized, play a significant role. Cultivating an outcome-oriented culture requires conscious effort to shift gears and adopt different methods.

InterAction[1] is working with members and other NGOs to increase the use of result-based methods for protection. Through this work, we have deepened our understanding of what it takes to make those shifts in practical terms and observed how a diversity of humanitarian actors has a role to play in reducing risk. Every humanitarian actor has relevant skills to contribute and a responsibility to do so. Many humanitarian actors working in humanitarian crises understand this implicitly and want to do more to realize this vision.

This paper shares InterAction's recent observations[2] putting [results-based protection into practice](#) and recommends areas for greater investment by humanitarian actors. Starting with what it means to recognize
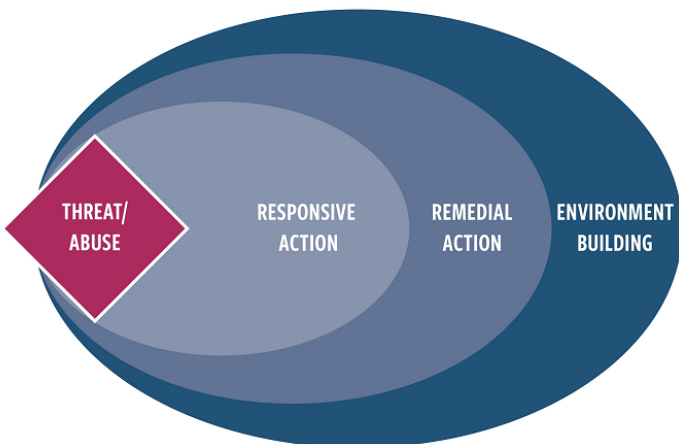
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[1] With financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
[2] Unless otherwise noted, all examples in the text come from InterAction's engagement with NGOs and other actors in various country contexts between 2015-2020.

protection as an outcome manifested as reduced risk, we look at the challenges to generate useful protection analysis for effective decision-making, and how to engage the necessary breadth of stakeholders. We then look at how to link the different levels involved in humanitarian response and opportunities to pursue protection outcomes through formal inter-agency humanitarian architecture. Finally, we explore opportunities for measuring risk reduction and take a particular look at the role that each of us plays in this endeavor.

PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE REDUCED RISK

Achieving protection outcomes means reducing risk for affected populations. "Risk" is people's exposure to all forms of violence (e.g., killing, beatings, torture, rape, etc.), coercion (e.g., forced population movements, child recruitment into armed groups, trafficking, forced or early marriage, etc.), and deliberate deprivation (e.g., destruction of property, denial of services, restrictions on freedom of movement, etc.).

In practice, however, there is still a common tendency for humanitarian actors to focus on delivering services and material assistance to the exclusion of other parts of a strategy to reduce risk. Furthermore, output-focused program design means that protection work often focuses more on activities than on the underlying logic and purpose of specific interventions. While remedial support to individuals persistently subjected to violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation is a crucial component of humanitarian action, it is only one modality and should be one part of a broader approach to achieving protection outcomes of reduced risk.

Responsive action: Action undertaken in the context of an emerging or an established pattern of abuse to prevent its recurrence, put a stop to it, and/or alleviate its immediate effects.

Remedial action: Action taken to restore people's dignity and ensure adequate living conditions subsequent to a pattern of abuse.

Environment building: Fostering a social, cultural, institutional, and legal environment conducive to respect for rights of the individual, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the law.

Thinking of protection as an outcome, as opposed to an activity or material to be delivered, opens up options. Within the overarching humanitarian objective of saving lives and alleviating human suffering, the well-known "egg protection framework"[3] provides a way to think about the broader scope of program design for protection outcomes (see image on the left).

There has been substantial progress in recent years to embrace a more outcome-oriented perspective on protection. However, the 2018 Stock-Take of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection[4] found that "the humanitarian community has yet to come to terms with the practical implications of approaching protection as an outcome, not just a series of checklist activities."[5] In particular, there is more work to be done to consider appropriate, effective, and pro-active interventions to reduce and prevent the risks people experience in the first place while also extending services and assistance to those that have suffered abuses. A critical change in mindset is to recognize that protection outcomes should manifest in the reduction of specific risks, not simply a broad perception of safety and that to reduce risks, specific strategies are needed to change their dynamics.

RISK
Reduce prevalence
Reduce severity of impact

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THREAT
Reduce the threat

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VULNERABILITY
Reduce vulnerability related to the threat

CAPACITY
Increase capacities related to the threat

The risk equation allows us to break down each risk into its three inter-related components: (1) threats; (2) vulnerabilities people have in relation to these threats; and (3) capacities people and communities have in relation to these threats. Identifying ways to reduce vulnerability to specific threats, increase capacity relevant to specific threats, and reduce the threats themselves is the basis for a protection strategy.

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[3] *Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards*, pg. 21 (ICRC, May 2001)
[4] On 14-15 October 2018, the co-chairs of the Centrality of Protection Task Team, OCHA, and InterAction, supported the Global Protection Cluster to convene a workshop to take stock of the implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016) and the IASC Principals Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action (2013).
[5] *Outcome Report: Stock-Take on the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection*, pg. 2 (Global Protection Cluster, November 2018)

Breaking down risk into its three components is essential to enable practitioners across sectors and disciplines to identify which components are being addressed, which are not, and where their organization's skills and capacities may be needed. For example, while undertaking a series of exercises using the risk equation in Honduras, NGO staff identified that several programs working on issues of gang violence were primarily focused on enhancing community capacities and reducing vulnerabilities in order to reduce risk, particularly by providing education and livelihood opportunities. It became clear that what was missing were efforts aimed at changing the behavior of the gangs themselves to reduce the threat component. Similarly, in Nigeria, some NGOs expressed the belief that they could be doing more to change the behavior of security forces, but that organizational risk was high, and NGO staff did not necessarily have the right training and experience. These examples echo InterAction's observations globally, whereby the threat component of the risk equation is under-analyzed and neglected in strategies to reduce risk. This pattern persists whether the threat comes from a party to conflict, a member of law enforcement, a civilian, or any other actor.

Case Study: CIVIC's Use of Results Journals to Track Protection Outcomes

One NGO, Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), has developed a tool called a "Results Journal" that helps them measure results in an outcomes-oriented way. In Nigeria, Results Journals are used to track intermediate results from CIVIC's protection work, with a focus on how the behavior of armed actors changes as a result of civilians raising their protection concerns. Results Journals are used by frontline field staff who identify protection concerns and the result it has in the community through established Community Protection Committees. CIVIC works with the Committees to develop action plans to mitigate the identified protection concerns. The Results Journals also capture relevant stakeholders working on similar issues in the area and links the action plans to CIVIC's project objectives and indicators. Lastly, it captures CIVIC's contribution to mitigating the issue and tracks over time the follow-up action and results. By starting with risks identified by community members, CIVIC ensures that their interventions are guided by outcomes of reduced risk, and not by pre-determined activities. This tool fosters learning and enables CIVIC to be adaptive and respond to changes in risk patterns in real-time.

THEORIES OF CHANGE

Understanding the three different components of a specific risk, and how they interact with each other, allows us to identify causal pathways, or theories of change, to achieve risk reduction. Formalized theories of change are often written at the start of a project, but not necessarily used as an ongoing and adaptive guide to program strategy. This was a key finding in InterAction's recent research on the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in conflict settings, which found that many programs lacked a context-specific theory of change.[6] InterAction has also observed a reliance on global theories of change without a clear connection to the specific risks experienced by affected people and context-specific pathways to overcome these risks.

A theory of change should not only be context-specific but approached iteratively to adapt to ongoing protection analysis and contextual changes. For example, in 2015 in Lebanon[7], programming to address forced evictions of internally displaced persons (IDP) by property owners was initially focused on women and children. Further analysis, however, revealed that adolescent boys faced a higher risk of being forcibly evicted. Adolescent boys also often lacked a safety net and faced an additional risk of forced recruitment once evicted, thereby requiring a significant adjustment in activities to reduce these risks for them. To work iteratively and adaptively, NGOs and their donors should agree on building adaptability into project design, and design outputs and indicators accordingly in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

> "A focus on products may actually divert attention away from change: 'Now you have your toolbox, or now you have your report that tells you how to do this, so it feels safer. You don't actually have to change fundamentally what you're doing, or how you're operating'."
> - *Transforming Change*, pg. 15 (Knox Clarke, P., ALNAP, 2017)

ENGAGING WITH PARTIES TO CONFLICT

One of the most under-developed ways of working in the humanitarian toolkit involves strategies and opportunities intended to change the behavior of armed actors. Many humanitarian actors view changing the behavior of armed actors through relationship-building as outside of their responsibility or do not feel that they have the appropriate staff or skill set to do so. Moreover, most engagement with armed actors is

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[6] *White Paper: Scoping Exercise on the Prevention of GBV in Conflict*, pg. 3 (InterAction, November 2019)
[7] *Results-Based Protection: Field Consultation and In-Country Practitioners' Roundtable on Program Design in Lebanon*, pg. 9 (InterAction, March 2015)

carried out to gain access to affected people, and this can quickly become largely bureaucratic and transactional, focused on urgent yet discrete issues such as convoy movements or specific distributions. Many of those who are responsible for access negotiations are not comfortable or do not have the right skills or experience, to introduce protection concerns. On the other hand, many staff working on protection are not trained in relationship-building and negotiation. NGOs are very often unwilling to raise sensitive protection issues because they are worried that it will undermine their ability to gain access for assistance and service delivery or that it somehow means they are not remaining neutral.

A fundamental shift in thinking is required. When humanitarians undertake any type of dialogue with armed actors, including to establish conditions for humanitarian access, this engagement is fundamentally about how crisis-affected people are being treated. In other words, it is about their protection. A more holistic view of engagement with parties to conflict in terms of the purpose, desired results, approach, and necessary skill set for doing so while remaining neutral, impartial, and independent is long overdue. How we approach this dialogue can either undermine or enhance awareness of and respect for protective norms. Our approach can positively reinforce the obligations of the actors we are engaging with, or it can, in effect, convey a lack of concern for patterns of mistreatment and abuse. The International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) publication *The Roots of Restraint in War* (2018) comprehensively illustrates that "a detailed understanding of the inner workings of armed groups" is necessary to understand what drives armed actors to violence, or restraint, in their relationships with civilians in situations of armed conflict.[8] Understanding the attitudes, motivations, policies, and practices of armed actors provides a starting point for effective relationship-building with the intent to change behaviors through continuous dialogue, negotiation, training, persuasion, and other forms of influence, including calling on the roles of other stakeholders, including other States, able to constructively exercise leverage.[9]

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[8] *The Roots of Restraint in War*, pg.64 (ICRC, June 2018)
[9] See Chapter 6 of *The Roots of Restraint in War* for more detailed findings on implications and approaches to various types of armed actors.

Not every humanitarian actor needs to create this organizational capacity, but more NGOs should recognize their role to undertake and contribute to such dialogue—and indeed may already have staff with

> "...a preoccupation with services often means that the humanitarian approach in armed conflict settings ignores the relationship, for example, between increased mortality and morbidity and the military strategies and tactics employed by warring parties."
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> - _Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in Humanitarian Action_, pg. 23 (IASC, 2015)

the skills and experience to do so. In addition, this capacity should be more deliberately cultivated as a shared and collective capacity among NGOs and within the broader humanitarian system. Furthermore, research has shown that well-organized communities are able to effectively negotiate with armed actors to change their attitudes and behavior.[10] Supporting communities to organize for this purpose, where feasible and appropriate, should become part of humanitarian strategies where people are persistently abused and mistreated by armed actors.

PROTECTION ANALYSIS: WHAT AND WHY?

The heart of effective strategies for meaningful protection outcomes is continuous and context-specific protection analysis. The humanitarian community has come to an understanding of the importance of protection analysis—at least on paper. Protection analysis is emphasized in the IASC's 2016 Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, the ICRC-led Professional Standards for Protection Work, and in a number of Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Protection Strategies. Participants at the 2018 Stock-Take of the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection agreed that a strong evidence base is important to "underpin analysis of risks, development of strategies, mobilization of relevant actors, prioritization of interventions, decision-making, application of principles, public advocacy and private dialogue."[11] What is less clear is what a useful protection analysis looks like and how, practically speaking, we should use it. At the field-level, senior and working-level, staff share concern over the

A number of initiatives are developing expertise for strengthening context and protection analysis. For example, Mercy Corps has hired dedicated Humanitarian Analysts to carry out detailed, ongoing contextual analysis in certain countries.

The International Rescue Committee and Danish Refugee Council have joined forces to develop a results-based toolkit for protection analysis for frontline field-staff.

Translators without Borders is examining detailed language needs that will enable NGOs to gather more nuanced and accurate information in relevant languages, and understand the implications of minority language demographics and literacy.

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[10] See Oliver Kaplan's research, including _Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves_ (June 2017)
[11] _Outcome Report: Stock-Take on the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection_, pg. 8 (Global Protection Cluster, November 2018)

continued lack of *effective* protection analysis, meaning the kind that they require to make decisions. InterAction has observed a few specific gaps across contexts.

IT DOES NOT START FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AFFECTED POPULATION

Protection analysis often does not start from the perspective of the affected population despite the fact that they are the ones who best understand the specific risks they face. Grounding analysis in affected people's perspectives requires enough trust for community members to share sensitive information about their safety and security with humanitarian staff. Frontline staff based in, and hired from, affected communities often have the necessary relationships and understanding to diagnose certain problems, but may need to be encouraged and empowered to carry out an ongoing analysis. Locally hired staff are a massive and often untapped resource for insight and understanding of local context, key actors, and community strategies for protection. For example, local actors or staff from the community can often see the early indications of outbreaks of violence, may act as trusted liaisons with armed actors, and may have existing networks of security information-sharing, knowledge of safe routes for displacement, etc.

Case Study: Context-Specific Protection Analysis in Rakhine, Myanmar

In 2017, human trafficking was one of the top three protection issues in the Humanitarian Response Plan for Rakhine, Myanmar. One NGO, Action Against Hunger (ACF), brought in a dedicated protection analyst to do a regional assessment of how human trafficking was manifested in the Myanmar context, particularly in the state of Rakhine, to determine how the agency would both adapt its programs and respond to this rising protection concern. This entailed methods for forecasting and community-based information gathering to help the organization identify its strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and needs. The dedicated analysis enabled ACF to rethink its strategy in the region and how it could build its capacity and adapt programming to integrate components necessary to prevent human trafficking.

INFORMATION COLLECTED IS GENERIC AND LACKS SPECIFICITY

The humanitarian system collects a lot of data relevant for protection, but it often consists of generic information and lacks sufficient specificity to diagnose the reasons that people are at risk and identify actions to address the threats that people face. Decision-makers, from frontline community organizers and

program managers to country directors and donors, need information on specific threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities in order to undertake context-specific problem-solving, and they need it continuously. This could mean, for example, information and analysis that helps target assistance activities to contribute to the reduction of a specific risk, or to target areas where an increase in community organizing capacities would be impactful. Rather than attempting to cover all issues all the time, risks which are the most severe and prevalent should be prioritized for analytical deep dives.

EXPECTED NEGATIVE REACTIONS FROM PARTIES TO CONFLICT LIMIT INFORMATION SHARING

In contexts where parties to conflict resist or respond negatively to concerns raised about protection issues, NGOs are less likely to want to share information freely, even amongst themselves or with donors. This may be due to fear of being shut down or targeted for attack by armed actors. NGOs may risk being labeled as an organization operating outside of what is tolerated by armed actors or fear putting their operations and staff in harm's way. Organizational risk is a real concern and needs to be managed carefully. In relationships, trust and confidence are critical elements. Using discretion, keeping conversations focused on practical solutions, and maintaining a non-accusatory tone in engagement with armed actors is essential for trust-building. Having secure protection information management systems within organizations and in inter-agency collaboration, with a shared respect for the privacy of people's personal information and confidentiality in information-sharing protocols, underpins confidence in information-sharing.

LACK OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE PRIORITIZATION OF PROTECTION RISKS

There is, oftentimes, a lack of prioritization of protection risks by individual organizations and collectively in coordination fora. The essential starting point for deepening analysis on critical issues and, subsequently, collective strategies is an agreement on priority risks. All too often, agencies start from the vulnerability they know they want to address; for example, individuals with a disability or children out of school. Humanitarians also risk steering prioritization exercises with affected populations towards the desired focus of their own organization's expertise. While understanding each organization's expertise and mandate is important, a collective understanding of risk prioritization for analysis should be driven by information from the affected population about the risks they face.

The HCT in Iraq has protection as a standing item on its agenda, for which the National Protection Cluster produces documents highlighting critical protection incidents, priority protection issues, and recommendations. This is widely understood as a useful way for field-level actors to bring messages to humanitarian leadership. Past topics have included:

- Voluntary return in safety and dignity
- Principled engagement framework when humanitarian principles are at risk
- Access to safety for persons at checkpoints or transit facilities

Ensuring analysis makes it to the appropriate decision-makers remains a fundamental challenge. ACAPS, an agency specializing in humanitarian analysis aimed at improving humanitarian decision-making, uses an Analysis Canvas as a guide to an overall process for humanitarian analysis. In this guide, the first step is to determine who will use the analysis, how, when, and for what? This process includes asking questions about understanding your audience, their decision and decision-making process, identifying end-users' values, experience and skills, and, crucially, putting yourself in [the user's] shoes.[12] Relevant decision-makers range from the HCT and other senior-level staff, to program managers, to clusters and working groups, and to frontline field-staff making day-to-day programming decisions. Each of these individuals and bodies needs to be clear about what analysis they need and how to request it.

WIDENING THE NET: MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES

We must broaden the understanding of expertise relevant and necessary for reducing risk. The multi-faceted nature of risks that people experience in armed conflict and other situations of violence means that reducing risk will frequently require contributions from other sectors and disciplines. Humanitarian actors still fall prey to the pitfall identified in the IASC's *Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2015) that noted: "protection [has] acquired a cult-like status associated with a particular type of expertise that is not perceived to be within the purview of regular humanitarians."[13]

Ways non-Protection Actors can Contribute to Protection Outcomes:

- Sharing analysis of food security data that illuminates destruction of civilian assets (e.g. farmland, tools, etc.) in order to strengthen the evidence base for engaging military actors
- Targeting modalities and locations of food and NFI distribution in order to reduce exposure to
- Using existing civilian-military coordination mechanisms to address and influence the behavior of military actors towards civilians
- Providing alternative livelihood opportunities for families of children associated with armed actors and support demobilization of child soldiers
- Monitoring trends in admittance to clinics and hospitals as early warning indicators for increase in conflict or violence

The 2018 Stock-Take of the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection, two years after the adoption of the IASC's 2016 Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, found that further shifts away from "institutional mandate sovereignty" were still needed, "so that any actor can approach protection without organizations or individuals being threatened or proprietary about how issues are discussed."[14] The message to all humanitarians should be that it does not require years of training on protection to understand risk and that a variety of expertise is required to contribute to protection strategies. All humanitarian actors should operate with a high level of awareness of how their unique expertise contributes to the reduction of risk. In turn, protection actors must also recognize that a comprehensive reduction of risk cannot be achieved by protection specialists alone.

Protection strategies need to prioritize the most severe and prevalent risks people face and identify actions by different actors to target the different components of risk. This might mean designing food assistance programming in a way that reduces the incidence of survival sex by certain parts of a community or negotiating with armed groups to expand people's freedom of movement to undertake livelihood activities. Peacebuilding organizations may have a unique insight into how stigma acts as a basis for deliberate deprivation and how to overcome it. Any of these examples would likely entail two or three specialist organizations working together to cultivate the necessary relationships, jointly design programs, continuously monitor the risk they seek to change, and ultimately achieve the desired results.

To develop strategies that are genuinely multi-disciplinary will require a shift away from sectorally-siloed programming. Other trends in the humanitarian community are moving in this direction. For example, area-based approaches, emerging largely from urban humanitarian response, seeks to meet community needs holistically. In addition to recognizing the inter-relatedness of needs in a community, neighborhood, or city, area-based approaches work to actively engage "numerous, diverse stakeholder groups present in the target area, including local government, civil society, international humanitarian and development actors, the private sector and the affected community."[15] This kind of approach can help us move past an over-emphasis on sectorally-focused work towards the mobilization of diverse contributions to reduce risk.

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[14] *Outcome Report: Stock-Take on the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection*, pg. 4 (Global Protection Cluster, November 2018)
[15] *Area-Based Approaches in Urban Settings: Compendium of Case Studies*, pg. 9 (Urban Settlements Working Group, May 2019)

In addition, rather than get caught up in the jargon of "the nexus," we should identify context-specific opportunities for development, peacebuilding, and human rights actors to use their expertise to reduce risk in practical and context-specific ways. As is true for all protection strategies, to collaborate effectively across sectors and disciplines, we must be informed primarily, as far as safely possible, by the perspective of the affected population and their understanding of the risks they face.

In Honduras, where local strategies and coordination is critical given the unique dynamics of gangs present in different communities, efforts may be needed by a range of actors including the church, development actors, peace builders, and humanitarian actors to come together in order to provide a level of safety and security.

These collaborations are not necessarily formal partnerships, but are motivated by a sense of common purpose to help people facing violence and other abuses. Joining forces through informal coordination mechanisms helps to identify collective methods of support and action.

WORKING WITHIN THE SYSTEM

The "humanitarian architecture," has become a sprawling structure of Clusters, Working Groups, Task Teams, and Advisory Groups, woven through with Lead Agencies, dedicated Coordinators, and frequent meetings. In many ways, the formalization of this system is responsible for the significant progress in humanitarian effectiveness over the past decade. It can, however, also bind us rigidly to certain ways of working. We must ask ourselves: do our structures and customary ways of working help us achieve protection outcomes?

We know that identifying, analyzing, and addressing protection risks requires flexibility and adaptability, including to challenge our assumptions and to adjust as we go. In addition to the Protection Cluster or Working Group, and its four sub-clusters, there is a growing number of thematic coordination bodies that relate to protection outcomes. For example, in one context, there may be simultaneous conversations affecting protection outcomes in a Returns Task Force, an Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group, a Communication with Communities (CwC) Task Force, an Access Working Group, and an Advocacy Working Group. Relatedly, the sheer number of actors coordinating within the system is also growing. The Protection Cluster in Iraq has 102 partners reporting into their

As a way to improve multidisciplinary strategies for protection, the Protection Cluster in Colombia intentionally invited both development and peacebuilding actors into the cluster as regular members.

This allowed for a diverse perspective within the group to analyze key issues and contributed to fostering joint initiatives to address protection concerns. In addition, donors in Colombia began monthly dialogues between the Humanitarian Donor Group and the Development Donor Group to build trust and collaboration and encourage funding multidisciplinary responses to achieve protection outcomes.

dashboard, inclusive of partners in the sub-clusters.[16] While consultation with a full set of partners is crucial for many cluster functions, when protection strategies need to be developed in particular locations, with reference to specific types of risk or areas of expertise, or actions need to be taken quickly, size and rigid decision-making channels can limit both speed and flexibility.

Trust in each other is an important factor for effective coordination to achieve protection outcomes. A key set of recommendations from a 2016 ALNAP meeting on improving humanitarian coordination includes: "increase[e] mutual trust among agencies, to allow for a non-directive, voluntary coordination systems that work effectively."[17] In Nigeria, InterAction made the same observation, where mutual trust between protection actors is among the most cited prerequisite among NGO staff for successful collaboration.

A 2016 ALNAP study found that clusters are understood to be very successful at sharing information, disseminating best practice, and supporting discussions around gaps to avoid duplication in a response.[18] These are extremely important functions in any humanitarian response. However, there is a commonly observed tendency among humanitarians to assume that it is someone else's job to initiate joint analysis and that all problems must go through a formal inter-agency channel like a cluster—which are often already dealing with a huge number of other pressing matters—before they can be discussed in a practical and collaborative way. Indeed, formal inter-agency architecture does not preclude this kind of NGO-led initiative. Practical problem-solving, in fact, often benefits from the experimentation of a few actors before it can be taken up more robustly in system-wide efforts.

The tension between an inclusive and transparent formal coordination system and innovative, flexible coordination is something that field-based staff grapples with on a regular basis. Field staff report feeling strongly the need to coordinate through the formal system. A quote from the 2018 Stock-Take of the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection captures the bind individuals and agencies are in: "Where relevant, individuals and agencies may initiate collective action without all activities having to come under the coordination of the formal architecture, whilst avoiding the risk of creating parallel structures and

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[16] According to the Iraq National Protection Cluster Dashboard, accessed March 18th, 2020. Data is as of June 2019.
[17] Knox Clark, P. and Campbell, L. *Improving Humanitarian Coordination: Themes and recommendations from the ALNAP meeting 'Working together to improve humanitarian coordination*, pg. 68 (ALNAP, July 2016)
[18] Knox Clark, P. and Campbell, L. *Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters*, pg. 22 (ALNAP, 2015)

duplicating action that reinforces collective responsibility and accountability."[19] That's quite a tightrope for people to walk. One way to reduce the pressure on individuals and agencies is to encourage broad and diverse approaches to collaboration, as necessary, to tackle pressing issues.

In Nigeria, discussions with NGOs about the prerequisites for effective collective analysis found the following to be highest priority:
- Investment in trust between participants
- Include the perspective of international organizations as well as local civil society
- Clear objectives for how analysis will be used
- A balance between formal group identity and the ability to be flexible
- Ability to see results from decisions made with collective analysis

There are some examples of NGOs putting in place effective ways of working. For example, coordination through NGO fora is becoming more common and regularized. NGO fora enable NGOs the opportunity to use their unique roles within the broader system to collaborate across sectoral and disciplinary siloes. Programmatic consortia are also being seen as useful mechanisms for organizations to collaborate for particular outcomes, whether multi-sectoral or protection focused. In Nigeria, the International Rescue Committee, Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan International, and Translators without Borders have formed a protection consortium and are working to develop collaborative analysis and advocacy strategies. NGOs can and should additionally seek to shape broader inter-agency strategies by bringing detailed analysis, proposed strategies for risk reduction, and invitations for collaboration to inter-agency fora, including to the clusters, Inter-Sectoral Working Groups, and HCTs. While continuing to support quality coordination mechanisms, donors should also consider ways they can support other forms of collective action. In particular, donors should incentivize and support a culture of collaboration for practical problem-solving to reduce risk without always insisting that collaboration go through formal cluster coordination mechanisms.

MEASUREMENT

Measuring protection outcomes can be challenging, but it's not impossible. To begin, we should aim to measure changes in risk by measuring changes in the threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities that underlie the risk. These changes, called results, include changes in policy, behavior, attitudes, and practice, and

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[19] *Outcome Report: Stock-Take on the IASC Protection Policy and Centrality of Protection*, pg. 4 (Global Protection Cluster, November 2018)

should be considered under each element of risk. There are a variety of methods that, used in conjunction with one another, can help us to track risk over time:

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY-BASED METHODS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We should continue to invest in community-based methods to measure perceptions of safety, security, and dignity. These efforts must take into account context-specific manifestations of risk and safety, how they change over time, and how they might vary for different members of the community.[20] Communities are often attuned to very minute changes in their own security context. Strong community engagement can give us an understanding of ways that communities themselves understand their threat environment and changing risk patterns, both through their own reporting and through their behavior change.

DRAWING ON INCIDENT TRACKING

Incident tracking, where possible, can provide useful context and understanding of risk patterns and trends. There are often opportunities to use aggregate and anonymized information from case management programs or security analysis to inform our understanding of trends.

Case Study: Proxy Indicators in South Sudan

In an area with high levels of harassment and violence against civilians in South Sudan, Nonviolent Peaceforce began to track reported incidents. Beginning with individual reports, they gathered information from their regular weekly security meetings with communities and, with local community leaders, mapped the geographical areas with the highest risk, including agricultural land. Bringing that information together, they designed a strategy that targeted the times of day and locations with patrols aimed to deter violence, engaged the local peacekeeping troops to do similar patrols, and worked to influence the security forces through the civilian authorities. Over time, women in the community shared that they could see gains in their own security evidenced in the increased growth of crops in their collective farms starting from the time of the patrols. This became a proxy indicator to measure an increase in safety, based on the understanding from the women themselves that they were only able to do so when they felt safe at the farm location.

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[20] For extensive research into the concept of dignity, including a number of in-depth case studies, see ODI's work on Dignity in Displacement.

DEVELOPING AND USING PROXY INDICATORS

Proxy indicators are another way that agencies are exploring how to measure changes in risk patterns with a lack of robust data. Defined as indicators which "track measurable changes that are understood to represent the occurrence of a related, but unmeasurable change,"[21] proxy indicators are often used in early warning systems or where there are ethical or practical barriers to direct measurement. Effective proxy indicators rely on well-reasoned assumptions that link the desired result to the observable proxy.[22] For example, how late the shops in a town are open, land area cultivated, or how many children are walking along a road to school, can signal changing risk patterns. Solid context-specific analysis, including effective community engagement, is essential to ensure the assumptions made are accurate. It is also important to use diverse proxy indicators in order to have multiple perspectives on the risk.[23] A recent discussion at an InterAction workshop on evaluating GBV prevention agreed that proxy indicators could be useful, but cautioned against conflating potential proxy indicators with unintended consequences. An example was given of an intervention that aimed to reduce GBV by adding lights at latrines in an IDP camp. The result was that activity at night increased overall due to a general increase in the sense of security, but it is not clear if it reduced the incidence of GBV.[24]

> "Quantifying a protection problem and measuring a project impact can be very difficult. ...In short, to know how well a programme was done (efficiency), how much has changed (impact), and how far these changes are due to the partner's own actions (attribution) can be extremely difficult to gauge. But it is important to try."
>
> - _Humanitarian Protection: DG ECHO's funding guidelines_, pg. 16 (ECHO, April 2009)

MEASURING AGAINST LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

Many protection outcomes require longer time horizons than can necessarily be accommodated by short-term grant cycles, either because the change required simply takes a long time (i.e., behavior change), or due to the dynamic nature of conflict environments. Many agencies maintain a presence in particular communities for years at a time, giving them the opportunity to achieve outcomes. However, it's important to be able to measure progress across project grants. Interim or progress indicators can measure decreases in risk components over shorter periods of time. While

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[21] Christoplos, I. and Dillon, N. with Bonino, F. _ALNAP Guide: Evaluation of Protection in Humanitarian Action_, pg. 40 (ALNAP, October 2018)

[22] Corlazzoli, V. and White, J. _Measuring the Un-Measurable: Solutions to Measurement Challenges in Fragile and Conflict-affected Environments_ (Search For Common Ground, March 2013)

[23] Ibid

[24] GBV PEF Advisory Committee Meeting Workshop Report, pg. 5 (InterAction, March 2020)

some donors are increasingly utilizing multi-year funding, we encourage those who are unable to lengthen their funding timelines to identify ways to measure progress against longer-term objectives even when it may not fit into pre-determined grant objectives.

In order to be adaptive in measuring results and protection outcomes, we must recognize that the kind of measurement commonly written into donor contracts and log frames is only one kind of measurement we should be doing. While it is not always feasible to understand the specific indicators of reduction in threat, increase in capacity, or reduction in vulnerability that might emerge in a two-year project, NGOs must enable their staff to develop interim indicators that can be tracked to guide a risk reduction strategy. Donors should expect and encourage approaches that entail the identification of new information and indicators that embrace iteration and adaptability to achieve protection outcomes.

CONCLUSION: WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

Humanitarian actors must be clear about the challenge before us. People trapped in conflict and other situations of violence face immense harm from direct and indirect actions of conflict parties, other armed actors, and governments. Armed conflict and other violence persist for many years. The enormity of the humanitarian endeavor, and the dedicated work of thousands of humanitarian personnel, is characterized by increasing professionalism and efficacy. However, much more needs to be done to fulfill the larger promise of humanitarian action and to reduce the risks that individuals and communities face.

Frontline staff must lead effective community engagement to maximize their relationships with affected people. They must be empowered to do more than collect pre-determined data, but be given the skills and tools to gather nuanced information, carry out context-specific analysis, and develop relationships with a variety of stakeholders for multi-disciplinary strategies.

Managers must set the tone for their field staff and make clear that risk reduction is their ultimate objective so that they feel free to suggest changes to pre-planned activities as situations evolve. Managers are critical conduits of information between frontline staff and senior leadership, and play essential roles to regularly monitor progress, build new relationships, and support timely programmatic changes. It is here where many

day-to-day programmatic decisions get made, meaning that management staff must have a clear vision of the pathways to risk reduction to continuously iterate organizational strategies.

In-country leadership should ensure that within their organization, there is a shared understanding of what a protection outcome is and what the organization's role is in achieving it. In-country leadership should also help their staff prioritize among all the demands they face, invest in risk reduction strategies that will have the greatest impact and are within organizational risk appetite, and ensure appropriate skillsets and relationships are cultivated to achieve the desired outcomes.

Donors should both offer and demand flexible and adaptable approaches to programming from their partners. How programs are working to achieve protection outcomes should be an explicit part of donors' conversations with their partners. Donors should see themselves as stakeholders in multi-disciplinary strategies to reduce risk, including identifying where they can provide resources or influence.

Embracing our responsibility for risk reduction requires first a shift in mindset and conscious adoption of different ways of working. There are a lot of moving pieces in this puzzle, and everyone has a part to play. The humanitarian community has come a long way in the past decade, and NGOs have played a significant role in that progress. To realize protection outcomes, NGOs should recognize that where they lead, the humanitarian community as a whole will follow.