Results-Based Protection[i]

Webinar and On-Line Discussion Forum

Communicating with Communities
Analyzing the role of information and the flow of communication with affected populations to address protection outcomes

Summary and Analysis

I.   Background and Objectives

The InterAction Results-Based Protection Program hosts an online platform (http://protection.interaction.org) that serves as a point of reference and site for discussion on results-based approaches to protection[1]. As part of the online platform, discussion forums are used as a space to solicit the contributions of key stakeholders, including practitioners and specialized experts, to develop the key elements of results-based protection. Following the conclusion of each discussion, InterAction and the Learning and Steering Group will evaluate and analyze the conversation to incorporate learning into the Program and determine elements for further exploration.

The objective of the "Communicating with Communities" webinar and discussion forum was to capture good practice demonstrating how the flow of information to and from affected people can support protection outcomes. The webinar and discussion forum included practical examples as well as a discussion of differences in approaches, challenges faced, lessons learned, and proven methodologies from recent humanitarian responses. From this we hope to articulate important results-oriented components throughout the humanitarian program cycle.

Key Questions
- How are the information needs of affected populations identified and assessed? How are the different information needs of different people or population sub-groups accounted for?
- How does a population's access to information (or lack thereof) affect their exposure or vulnerability to threats? How does meeting a populations' information needs enhance their capacity to act in order to reduce their vulnerability and exposure to threats?
- What are some ways that enhanced access to information has enabled affected populations to take action on the risks they face? What kind of support might be needed to enable them to take these actions?
- Are there internal or external constraints that create challenges and/or hinder information flow and communication strategies?

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[1] Results-Based Protection refers to "results" as the measureable components of an intervention that contribute to and include the outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive or negative). Perspectives vary greatly. NGOs, UN agencies, and other actors may understand results in a very different way. For examples, see FINAL Consultation Results and Consultation Findings from the first phase of the Results-Based Protection Program.

II.   Summary and Analysis of the Discussion

The discussion underscored the importance of the role of information and the flow of communication with affected populations to help bring about protection outcomes, however not all of the examples and points raised during the discussion necessarily support a results-based approach to protection. This summary focuses only on the aspects of communication and information flow that have a bearing on a results-based approach to protection.

1.   Communicating with Communities within a Problem-Solving Approach

A key characteristic of results-based protection is the use of a problem-solving approach to programming. As underscored in the Results-Based Protection on-line discussion "Designing for Results" held in December 2014, a problem-solving approach in part helps to identify the contributions of multiple actors and methods necessary to address a protection issue. To do this, the affected population is the starting point in identifying and determining how to respond to a protection issue. A strong emphasis on effectively communicating with communities within a problem-solving approach helps to create a foundation that supports overall protective results.

To support protection outcomes, communicating with communities requires a strategy that takes into account how the flow of information between individuals within an affected population and humanitarians will be achieved. This strategy must take into account the perspectives of the affected population and how information is accessed, controlled, shared, and used. This requires a better understanding of the gatekeepers of information—the individuals who have access to information and determine how information is used and conveyed. For example, community leaders or heads of households may limit what information is shared with other members of the community. Analyzing the information flow within a community should look at cultural barriers that may influence how information is communicated. It should also identify formal and informal opportunities where information can be safely received and reacted upon by diverse subsets of the affected population.

Although these are not the only components of problem-solving that should be explored within a communication with communities' strategy to support protection outcomes, the following were discussed within the webinar and on-line forum:

Access

Meaningful participation of affected populations at the earliest stages of a response helps humanitarian actors ensure that communities' information needs are met, enhancing their capacity to act and reduce their own exposure to risks. Achieving protection outcomes requires that information is useful. Information needs to be relevant, of high quality, from a trusted source, and accessible to different groups within the affected population. When affected populations are fully informed, the result contributes to protective outcomes.

Communities are not homogenous, however, and access to information is not guaranteed. A lack of information, or access to it, can be disempowering, limiting opportunities for informed decision making, collaborating to solve problems, negotiating with other actors, and taking practical measures to reduce risks. Being uninformed can also leave affected populations vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda. Access to information, therefore, can decrease exposure to protection risks by empowering communities to be their own agents for change, including by enabling them to assess their own threat environments and engaging with other parties to find their own solutions.

Access to information that is specific, accurate and from a trusted source is particularly important for displaced populations or in situations of armed conflict where information needs are fluid and usual communication mechanisms and patterns of information flow have been disrupted. Oftentimes information that is communicated to affected populations is general and not specific to addressing identified risk factors. This information may be good and useful but not protective in terms of reducing risk. An important consideration therefore is that all actors, in an ever-changing context, should be explicit as to the level of reliability and accuracy of information they use or share.[2]

> ### Democratic Republic of Congo:
> ### Building Trust to Increase Access to Information
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> In areas of MONUSCO offensives, one example illustrated how improving a community's access to information helped individuals better understand their threat environment and make informed decisions that could decrease their vulnerability to risk. INGO-led initiatives to establish community-based committees provided a safe and trusted structure where information could be shared. In this context, this proved to be an invaluable platform not only to share information but develop community relationships—an important aspect in terms of building trust and transparency around how information was shared and delivered. When the situation changed and communities dispersed, the committee members were able to establish an informal network between each other to continue information exchange. Communication shifted in terms of the method used, but information sharing continued because of the flexible approach and community-driven network. Given the trust that had developed through the community committees, information shared was more reliable and accessible.

Information flow

A robust protection analysis is a key element of a results-based approach to protection. Protection analysis should include an examination of how communication flows within a community and between a community and other stakeholders, including humanitarian actors, peacekeeping missions, government authorities, parties to conflict. Given the diversity among an affected population in terms of individuals' levels of vulnerability, capacity, and the threats they face, it is essential that methods used are context-specific and driven by the community to ensure information flow is quality, accurate, relevant and specific to their needs, from a trusted source, and disseminated appropriately.

> ### South Sudan: Tea and Information
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> In South Sudan, humanitarians recognized the limitations of formal feedback mechanisms, such as the establishment of women and/or child helpdesks that focused mainly on legal issues in support of case management. It was noted that these formal structures were rarely used to seek assistance or advice except under extreme circumstances. In response to this, additional informal meeting spaces were established to address issues and concerns from a variety of individuals within the affected population. Informal approaches included arranging meeting spaces accompanied by tea to create a more welcoming and casual atmosphere where community members could discuss a variety of issues. This allowed different members of the affected population to raise concerns, both big and small.

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[2] ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work, 2nd Edition* (pp.89), Geneva.

Perspectives of the affected population

Articulating the different perspectives by the affected population of a protection issue helps to inform programming. While some members of a community may voice concern about certain aspects of a response, others may see something entirely different. The discussion forum did not elaborate fully on how or why this is essential to achieve protection outcomes, however some examples were provided to further the dialogue.

In an example from Eastern DRC, an organization integrated multiple methods of communication to raise awareness about adolescent sexual and reproductive health. One method used sought to engage adolescents and their communities in facilitated discussions on children's rights, sexuality, family planning, and risks of early motherhood and unprotected sex through a youth-driven art project. Adolescent males and females participated in the design of a mural

> ### Sierra Leone: The Ground Truth Program
>
> The Ground Truth program is an initiative to collect information about the Ebola response from affected populations in a way that facilitates opportunities to influence senior decision-making. By collecting real-time evidence through surveys of community and aid worker perceptions of the performance of the response, the program is able to provide an indication of the effectiveness of the response, willingness to follow protocols for slowing the spread of the disease, and potential gaps in program design and implementation. The questions are designed around a set of key perception indicators to guide action to improve operations. A key benefit of this approach is that it provides regular opportunities for collecting evidence of community perceptions that can then be used to adapt and change programming to better address protection issues.

that depicted key messages that communities would understand. The mural triggered a community dialogue. The organization that facilitated the discussion realized that the approach revealed openness by the youth to discuss sensitive issues. This shifted how the organization communicated resulting in improved information flow and dialogue which informed programming.

Although few examples were given, it was noted throughout the on-line discussion that there is a need to explore different methods that could be used to better understand the perspectives of the affected population throughout the program cycle, not as a one-off exercise, in order to continually inform the programmatic response.

2. "Being Informed" is a Result that Supports Protective Outcomes

Throughout the discussion, participants noted how information can promote a sense of self-efficacy by enabling populations to assess their own threat environments and empower community-led solutions through collaboration, negotiation, and practical solutions. Examples highlighted different methods for communicating information, including radio, phone lines, and instant messaging (SMS). As we saw in the previous section, the methods used to convey information will vary from context to context. As it relates to protection outcomes, however, it is the specific content and the quality of the information that deserves attention. In order for information to be useful to inform decisions and reduce risk, the substance of information must be of quality and relative to the affected population. To ensure this standard requires engaging with affected populations, understanding their perspectives and priorities, and working together with different individuals and groups to inform how information is articulated.

An example provided from Northern Uganda illustrated how young girls who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army used informal networks while in captivity to convey messages to each other

about safe houses where they could safely drop and leave their children conceived in captivity. Nuns and others working and living at these locations were able to secretly share specific information such as 1) how to identify the location, 2) where to place the baby, and 3) what identifying information to include on the baby. Rather than simply broadcasting through the radio or simply saying they would protect the babies if left abandoned, the carefully conveyed message provided enough detail that reassured the girl and could support her in decision-making.

We have a tendency to prioritize specific activities (such as food distribution and water) as life-saving but fail to see the life-saving component in 'being informed'. Information can provide clarity, inform decision-making, and connect individuals to each other that can prevent further exposure to risk. The fact that communities trapped on Mt. Sinjar in Iraq requested mobile phone chargers alongside the provision of other basic needs, demonstrates that information and their connection with others outside of this situation was vital to their protection needs. Access to information was prioritized as a need by the affected population—but it was not any information, it was direct communication with family members and friends to ensure their safety, whereabouts, and provide an exchange of information that could keep them connected and linked to services and support.

Northern Uganda: Shaping Communication Messages by Engaging Former Child Soldiers

In northern Uganda, communications methods including focus groups, peer interviews, and workshops held with formerly abducted girls helped to identify an information gap for those still in captivity. Different messages that were conveyed through radio talk shows were reaching children abducted and captured within the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), however, the messages were not always useful or used in a way that could strategically support the escape of the children. Speaking with and engaging formerly abducted girl child soldiers in the solution, humanitarians learned what information was needed and how messages could be crafted in a manner that could alert and give secret messages to those still in captivity about ways to escape. Enabling former child soldiers to shape the message and the mode in which the information was conveyed strengthened the likelihood of achieving a protection outcome. This example illustrated several aspects of a results-based approach to protection including:

- As part of the analysis and understanding the contextual patterns of risk, the importance of creating a dialogue with survivors of a particular risk (child abduction) enabled detailed knowledge of what abducted children were experiencing and the dynamics associated with these experiences therefore informed the response on how to address these particular patterns of risks.

- Listening to survival stories and coping mechanisms enabled a better understanding of how to strengthen coping mechanisms to minimize risk, how to best communicate information, and allowed for strong survivor ownership over the design of the initiative. This helped to ensure the appropriateness for the specific risks that children were facing, and enabled them to take action to protect themselves.

- Engaging locally owned media sources that were used by the community and the children in the LRA (and building on existing communication channels accepted by the community) helped to strengthen the relationship with survivors and existing resources; and enhanced the possibility of continuity of the approach.

- Analyzing the protection risks and ethical considerations with the affected population/survivors as part of the design and implementation process and establishing a process that would ensure informed consent and protection standards were upheld was critical. If done consistently this enhances the initiative as being protective and more likely sustained.

3. Additional Key Points

Underscoring the [key elements of results-based protection](#) several additional points came out of the on-line discussion to support effective communications with affected populations:

A. Coordination

In a humanitarian response, actors from all sectors interact and communicate with affected populations. In addition, a results-based approach to protection often requires an integrated or multi-sectoral approach to address a protection issue. For this to succeed, information flow across sectors is essential.

Several points were raised during the discussion about how to manage instances where protection issues are identified by non-protection actors. Participants asked how to ensure information is passed along to the appropriate cluster and who is responsible for a follow up response back to the community. Although this was not further elaborated within this discussion, a results-based approach to protection necessitates articulating the role and expected contribution by all actors towards a protection outcome. This, in turn, requires effective coordination involving multiple sectors.

Questions were also raised about how humanitarian actors can better compare information across sectors and how to best situate methods of communicating with communities with other feedback and accountability mechanisms. These questions underscore the need for better coordinated information and knowledge management across sectors, and in particular, to inform protection programming. In one recent example, an inter-agency call center currently being set up in Iraq should provide a space for affected populations to access information as well as issues to be referred to the appropriate cluster.

B. Senior Leadership Support, Institutional Structures, Processes, Dedicated Resources, and Capacity

If communicating with communities is an essential element of a problem-solving approach to achieve protection outcomes, the processes and capacity must be in place to support meaningful engagement. Several participants highlighted the need to have institutional structures and policies in place as well as senior leadership support to prioritize a genuine two-way communication flow with affected populations. Without the direction from senior staff within an organization it is difficult to prioritize effective communication.   Facilitating meaningful dialogue with communities requires leadership to invest in the capacity of staff, dedicated resources for communicating with communities, and develop internal processes that ensure information coming from community discussions is able to impact on programmatic decisions.

A few participants shared examples how this investment supported stronger results. In one example from Typhoon Haiyan, an NGO dedicated staff to address accountability issues following a rapid assessment that identified information and communications needs. Another NGO piloted an effort to share photos and communications materials with communities themselves with the objective of gaining feedback from communities on how their situation was being portrayed to the outside world. The goal was to incentivize staff to ensure photos were appropriate. These types of communication efforts require staff and resources to be routinely incorporated into a humanitarian response.

In addition, a disconnect between field level and head offices was noted as an issue that limited opportunities for adapting program design based on feedback from communities. A question was also raised regarding how to institutionalize lessons learned about the engagement of affected populations and how programs were adapted following this engagement without making it overly process heavy.

C. Professional Standards for Protection

Ethical issues and protection standards must be upheld when engaging with affected populations. A few examples within the discussion pointed to the use of the ICRC Professional Standards for Protection[3] as the resource to support communication and information flow with affected populations. In particular, the standards that focus on managing confidential information and informed consent,[4] including the skills and competencies required to manage an ongoing dialogue with affected populations[5], are essential to avoid negative consequences.

Adherence to protection standards[6] is critical to 1) undertake an analysis of information needs 2) analyze communication flows to clarify the intent and purpose of engagement, and 3) develop a strategy that articulates the role information should play in reducing risk.

III.   Recommended resources

A full recording of the Communicating with Communities webinar is available at:
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/1864785278955608066

A few participants provided additional resources, tools, and articles to help further explore aspects of program design. These included:

- **CDAC Network Tools & Checklists**
  http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/tools-and-checklists

  These resources collected by the CDAC Network include tools, checklists and guidelines designed to support humanitarian responders in communicating more effectively with disaster affected communities. The infoasaid 'diagnostic tools' are included here, along with other tools developed by the CDAC Network Members and partners. Tools to support with assessing information and communication needs, developing communication strategies, community profiling and monitoring and evaluation can be found here, as well as guidelines on effective use of specific media channels.

- **Radyo Abante: A Collaborative Commitment to CwC & Accountability**
  http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20141124141227-fmv61

  This case study, which was written as part of the CDAC Network Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review, describes how a humanitarian radio station was set up and used during the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

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[3] ICRC (2013), Chapter 6: Managing Sensitive Protection Information. In *Professional Standards for Protection Work, 2nd Edition* (pp.76-101), Geneva.

[4] "36. Protection actors must only collect information on abuses and violations when necessary for the design or implementation of protection activities. It may not be used for other purposes without additional consent." ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work, 2nd Edition* (pp. 84), Geneva.

[5] "37. Systematic information collection, particularly when involving direct contact with individuals affected by abuses and violations, must only be carried out by organizations with the capacity, skills, information management systems and necessary protocols in place." ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work, 2nd Edition* (pp. 84), Geneva.

[6] "41. Protection actors must determine the scope, level of precision and depth of detail of the information collection process, in relation to the intended use of the information collected." ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work, 2nd Edition* (pp. 87-88), Geneva.

It describes how humanitarian and media development agencies collaborated with local media actors to set up the station, and how it contributed to the accountability and effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

- **Typhoon Hagupit: Partnership and Preparedness in CwC Response**
http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20150122154458-a6cnf/

Following Typhoon Hagupit, information needs assessments resulted in a collaboration between PECOJON, First Response Radio-FEBC and IOM to set up an emergency radio station in Taft, Eastern Samar, which was cut off from communication and information.

- **Understanding the Information and Communication Needs of IDPs in Northern Iraq**
http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20140916161820-7frn1

This report follows a rapid assessment of information and communication needs carried out in northern Iraq in August 2014. Its findings reveal that displaced Iraqis often have only limited access to conflicting and broken information regarding the provision of and access to basic services. According to the report, the priority information needs among displaced people are threefold: more information about their places of origin and family members who were left behind; better information on aid services, criteria and procedures for registering for assistance and information about the future including the possibility of resettlement and asylum.

- **ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work**
https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc-002-0999.pdf

The Professional Standards for Protection Work (2nd edition) reflect shared thinking and common agreement among humanitarian and human rights agencies (UN, NGOs and Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement). The standards were adopted through an ICRC-led consultation process. They constitute a set of minimum standards for humanitarian and human rights agencies, and ICRC would maintain that the standard of protection that an agency provides should not fall below those set out in this document.

IV.   Participants and Methodology
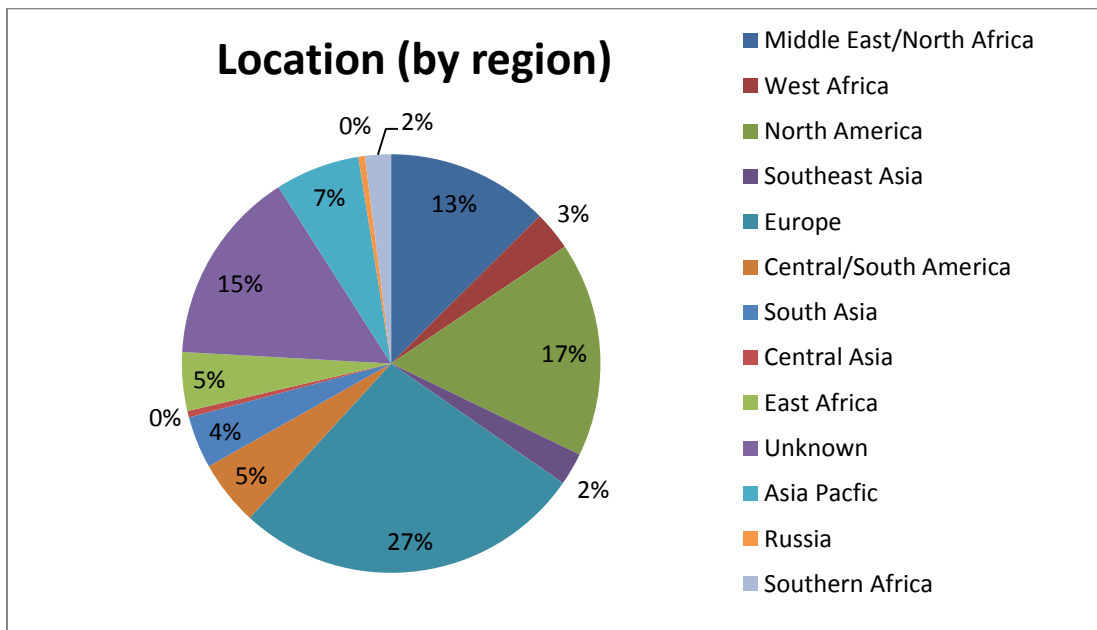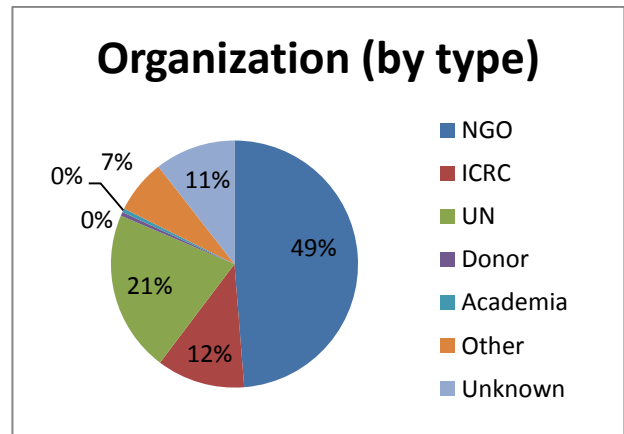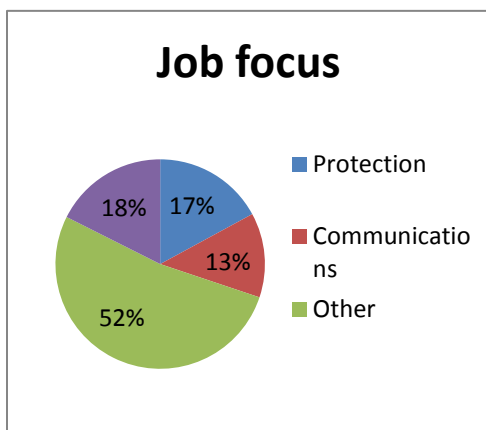
1. Participants

The webinar included a panel of experts:

- **Nicki Bailey** – CDAC Network, Research and Learning Officer – introduced Communicating with Communities (CwC) and its relevance for protection as well as some of the current challenges.

- **Dayna Brown** – The Listening Program, Director – discussed how to look at communication within communities and how humanitarians and other actors are listening and accountable to affected populations.

- **Stijn Aelbers – Internews, Ebola Projects Coordinator** – presented ways in which safe spaces can be established and maintained as well as provided examples where local media can be used.

- **Jenny McAvoy – InterAction, Director of Protection** – addressed the ethical issues and protection standards associated with engaging and communicating with affected populations.

- **Katie Drew – Save the Children, Humanitarian Evidence Effectiveness and Accountability Advisor** – introduced several ways in which organizations can work with children as well as some of the institutional challenges that organizations may face.

- **Alexandra Sicotte-Levesque – OCHA, Global Coordinator for CwC** – described how efforts to coordinate CwC and accountability efforts, particularly in the cases of recent natural disasters, have highlighted opportunities for interagency approaches to communicating with communities.

Participation was open to all individuals, particularly practitioners with considerable experience in protection programming, community engagement, media development and social mobilization.

Webinar: 199 individuals registered for the webinar and 118 participated coming from over 48 countries and a variety of organizational and vocational backgrounds.

Online discussion forum: The subsequent three-week online discussion forum had 91 participants registered from over 29 countries.

Job focus

Organization Type

Location (by region)
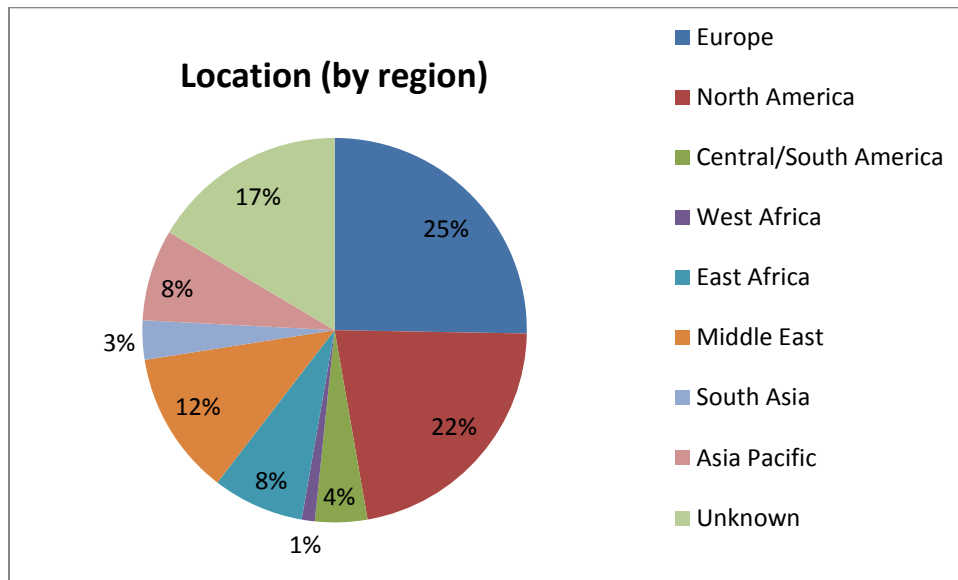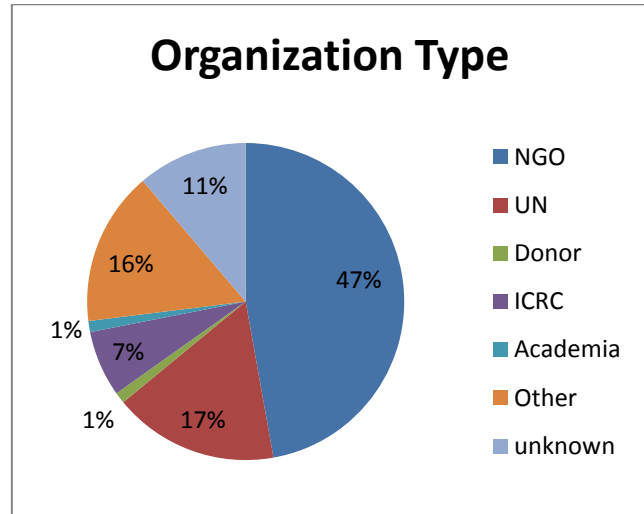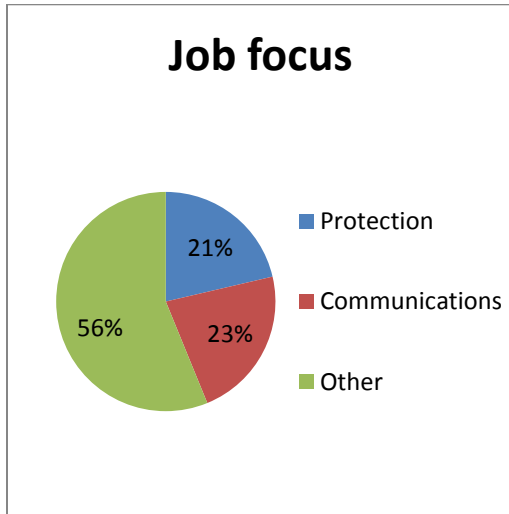
2. Methodology

The aim of the discussion was to capture examples of good practice that demonstrate how information can be used as a tool to address protection issues. Analysis of the discussion involved coding and classifying information in thematic areas arising from discussion points and examples provided by the participants. Through the analysis of these details, the Results-Based Protection Program team was able to determine linkages between communicating with communities and Results-Based Protection.

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[i] The Results-Based Protection Program is funded by ECHO and USAID/OFDA