

Community Level Child Protection (CLCP) tip sheet

- ✓ **Communities have their own ways to protect children.**
- ✓ **Listen and Learn from the community about what they already do to protect children.**

Introduction

Traditionally, child protection actors have often established “community-based child protection committees/groups” in communities without first understanding how the community already protects children. Through reflection and learning from experiences with the Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms - CBCPM approach, it’s found that the sustainability of protection work in the community is weak, since community members have become highly dependent on external agencies. Several factors hold back the sustainability of community-based approaches. First, they are “agency led” as opposed to “community owned” and therefore not sustainable or often not culturally relevant; Second, many agencies go into a community with assumptions and try to offer ‘their solutions’; actors external to the community will set the meeting times and agenda and provide the CBCP groups with refreshments and other “support”. This is problematic as when agencies leave, or cannot access the communities, these committees/groups lack the incentive to mobilize themselves without the external support.

Community-level Approaches to Child Protection

A systematic literature review was conducted by the global Community-level CP Task Force (CCP TF) in 2019 and the initial findings stimulated reflection among humanitarian CP actors on what is meant by “community-level child protection” and whether there is a shared understanding across agencies. The review recognized there are different types of community engagement, from agency-driven community-based groups to community-led initiatives. In line with the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) – standard 17* and the newly developed Theory of Change for Community-Level Child Protection Programming from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action¹, the CP AoR in Myanmar aims to adopt an approach that is different from the traditional community-based work but to promote higher levels of community ownership in the protection of children,

Such approach focuses on

- empowering communities to take action to protect and safeguard their own children;
- bringing together diverse groups of community members, including children, to share their concerns about children's well-being and protection;
- Supporting community members to make collective decisions about the most pressing issues facing children in the community and take appropriate community actions based on the community's strengths and available resources;
- fostering community power to address children's concerns and ensuring that children in the community can obtain the necessary support and services to meet their protection need in a sustainable way.

The approach to achieve higher levels of community ownership faces a long journey to work together with community members, requiring ethical principles and strong foundations to facilitate this process, especially given the current challenges faced by Child Protection (CP) actors and organizations in Myanmar in accessing communities and providing consistent protection services and support. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ model. humanitarian actors should seek to understand existing community capacities that promote children’s rights, safety, development, well-being and participation.

¹ <https://alliancecpha.org/en/community-level-approaches>

Aims of tip sheet

This tip sheet aims to support organizations and child protection actors to take practical steps to achieve higher levels of community ownership in child protection. This document is developed in reference to the new Theory of Change². While not a comprehensive guide, it can help organizations and actors begin engaging with communities to facilitate a process that empowers them to protect their children on a daily basis. Communities naturally take the initiative to provide first-hand support in various situations, such as natural disasters and conflicts. They act by utilizing the available resources, network and capacities they have.

As an outsider or agency external to the community, our role in CLCP would be to facilitate trust-building, encourage self-reflection by asking critical questions about community practices, and connect the community to relevant resources and services outside their network, guiding them on how to access them.

Target audience: The target audience for this document is child protection actors, other actors working at community level, or staff involved in developing CLCP proposals in Myanmar.

Key principles: It is important that CLCP programming takes the following principles and practices into account:

- Work with humility
- Build trust, respect and relationship first
- Listen in an active, nonjudgmental manner
- Build on existing community resources and strengths
- Learn more fully about the context and community power dynamics on an ongoing basis
- Encourage an inclusive community process at all stages, including diverse perspectives from boys, girls, men, women, members of minority groups, etc.
- Ensure integrating gender equality and social inclusion approaches in all actions
- Enable collective agency and action - support communities to make the key decisions
- Use a patient, flexible, dialogue-oriented approach
- Build community capacities for mobilizing the community, making inclusive decisions, and taking effective action
- Enable children to be key actors in the community process
- Using child rights as a guide, support social change from within the community
- Be prepared to step outside of the traditional child protection response approaches

Key Steps to Achieve Higher Levels of Community Ownership in Child Protection:

Please keep in mind that community engagement is not a simple or linear process. The steps suggested below are for reference but you will need to adjust and adapt your approaches when things do not progress as planned. Some processes may take place simultaneously or you may need to repeat certain steps before moving on to the next one.

Listen to the community carefully and keep reflecting on your approaches is key to effective community engagement!

Process	Key Considerations
Step 1 Get engage with community and building trust.	<p>Prioritizing understanding the community allows child protection actors to discover existing child protection practices and identify potential collaborative actions. This approach emphasizes building upon the strengths of community members, rather than creating new groups or structures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is NOT a one-off assessment but an ongoing dialogue with communities to gain trust and understanding.

² [Theory of Change for Community-level Child Protection Programming in Humanitarian Action | Alliance CHPA \(alliancecpha.org\)](http://alliancecpha.org)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not enter communities with pre-conceived assumptions. • Avoid going into a community with pre-defined project objectives and timeframe (it's not just about project implementation and reporting!) <p>Agencies are not there to provide solutions or offer services but to facilitate the process and dialogues</p> <p>Explore existing community practices for protecting children at home and within the community by asking these questions to boys, girls, women, men and marginalized groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you define the term 'child' in your content? - What are the typical roles assigned to boys and girls in your content? - What concerns might you have for children based on their age and gender? (Probing question – what kinds of risks/threats do you have?) - How do children help in the community? - What are some of the common harms or risks and concerns that children face in your community? What are the top 3 (or 5) priority harms or risks (ask for different age and gender groups)? - What kind of actions or responses do community members already take? - What do parents/caregivers usually do to support their children's development and wellbeing (especially for the younger age group – to understand the protective factors related to positive child development)? - Who/where can community members and children reach out for support or help when they need? - What resources and support systems are available within a community for children in need? - Who in your community usually takes on roles (such as counselling, looking after separated children, intervening if there is violence in the home, etc.) - How are decisions typically made within a community?
<p>Step 2a Consolidate and analyze the trends and findings and validate the information with community</p>	<p>Use the information gathered from the community to identify trends, existing practices and priorities of the different groups of the community.</p> <p>Validate the findings with the community members including children and other vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Use the information to guide the discussion and ongoing dialogues with the community. Any designs of proposals/programmes should be based on these conversations with the community and adjusted on an ongoing basis.</p>
<p>Step 2b Communicate your approach with the community and other service providers</p>	<p>In communities where there is high level of dependency or with other agencies using top-down approach, it is important to continue communicating your approach with the community members as well as the agencies operating in the area.</p> <p>If communities do not see or understand that your approach is different from the traditional CBCPC, it will be difficult to create a sense of ownership.</p>
<p>Step 3 Facilitate community action to address harm or risks.</p>	<p>Follow up question to draw community attention on collective actions but do not rush to complete the process. If it is not possible to include relevant actions/activities in the current project, the ideas can be included in any upcoming or future proposals.</p> <p>You may not ask the below questions directly if there is resistance or if community does not see their strengths and resources in the first place. Explore these areas by observation, bi-literal discussions, through existing activities or engagement ,etc.. There are many ways to understand the community.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can parents and community members work together to address these issues at home and within the community? - What resources and support are available to parents and community members who want to take initiative on these issues?
<p>Step 4 Facilitate and support community actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to risks against children within the community</p>	<p>Work with communities to identify actions they can take to ensure child protection, map what support is needed, considering available community resources, and fostering linkages with other humanitarian actors. etc.</p> <p>Keep in mind that agencies are not there to offer solutions to all problems. If communities struggle to identify possible actions to address major problems/root causes, try to start with small issues or work on strengthening protective factors.</p>
<p>Step 5 Reflect and adjust the plan</p>	<p>Learning and reflection with the community should be integrated throughout the process. This can be done through structured workshop, regular meetings or even ad-hoc discussions with community members (see below for more details).</p>

What are the Key Approaches to Promote Higher Levels of community Ownership ³

<p>Self-reflection by CP teams and staff</p>	<p>Reflect on the following: (i) Is my programming owned by the community or by our organization? Do the approaches I am using enable and strengthen the protective environment of the children? Do I learn about the communities or do I come directly to implement pre-designed activities? Do I listen to the communities carefully and deeply? What beliefs, values, perceptions, biases, understanding of the context, etc. do I bring to my community engagement? How these contribute to effective engagement? How much do I value and practice humility and respect in my individual interactions with community members, etc.? Self-reflection is an ongoing process.</p>
<p>Learning phase</p>	<p>Learning with and about the community and feeding back to communities. This sets the stage for the community level work. We will come to the communities to learn not to teach/train them how to protect children. Learning is a continuing process.</p>
<p>Community planning</p>	<p>Community identification and prioritization of harm/s to children exist and which could be addressed. Identify community solutions. CP teams facilitate the process of community members coming together and holding inclusive dialogue. CP teams support the communities to identify knowledge and capacity gaps as necessary.</p>
<p>Community action</p>	<p>Community takes steps to address harm to children with support from agency where requested. CP teams facilitate the process of community groups/networks/leaders and members to mobilize the communities to implement their planned actions.</p>
<p>Community M&E OR (Community reflection and learning)</p>	<p>The community monitors and evaluates the community action in the way they have decided upon. The CP teams may also undertake the same process and feed back to the community. CP teams support community members in defining simple indicators and regularly monitoring their activities.</p>

³ Community_Level Approaches to Child Protection – Plan International Myanmar

Annex 1: Community-level Approach in the Contexts of Access Constraints in Myanmar

If you only have temporary access, work WITH communities to see how you can support their CLCP mechanisms. Note that if access has improved, the agency should follow the above steps to build relationship and understanding with the communities.

It is important to note that the goal of CLCP work is to build trust with the community so that they are motivated to take action to protect their children. It is **not** to “use” the community to do our work or to deliver our project activities. Communities have their own ways to protect children and it is our work to support them.

When there is a crisis and certain child protection concerns emerged, you may consider the following:

- Is there someone in the community that you know and trust to look after children temporarily if they are separated? (Try to identify those resource persons prior to any crises or when you have access to the community)
If so, do the children and caregivers know who that is?
In case of anything (conflict, monsoon, cyclone) requiring people to flee and children get separated, make sure everyone knows who in the community will temporarily look after lost children.
- Is there someone in the community that has a role of counsellor or able to offer psychological first aid when people are distressed? It may be a few different people
How can you support those people with some capacity building on PFA if they need it?
Does the community know who these people are?
- Find out who in the community will be best place to disseminate awareness raising child protection messages (such as monsoon, conflict, PSS, early marriage, etc.). It may be several people
Make sure they have all our CP messages that they can disseminate if access prevents agencies accessing the community
- Be transparent with communities about access constraints but ensure it is understood that our goal is to build trust and not asking them to do our work for us. Also, be clear about their level of contribution and if any support will be provided – avoid paying incentive but also manage your expectation on their time commitment.

Work with communities to identify the child protection concerns and who can do what in the community to mitigate the risks before a crisis or access blockade.

If communities are interested, you could support them to develop an action plan (template available)

Please do not hesitate to reach out to CP AoR should you require further discussion on CLCP approaches⁴

⁴ CLCP WG coordinator; Saw Thiha sawthiha.aung@savethechildren.org, CP AoR coordinators; Kyaw Min Oo kyaw.oo7@drc.ngo or Krissie krhayes@unicef.org

Annex 2: Glossary

Terms	Definition
Community	A group of people that recognizes itself or is recognized by outsiders as sharing common cultural, religious or other social features, backgrounds and interests, and that forms a collective identity with shared goals. A community may be geographically defined as a group of interacting people living in proximity in a particular location such as a village or urban neighborhood.
Community actors	Community actors - are members of the community including children, caregivers, family members, peers, neighbours, leaders, etc.
Child Protection actors	UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and Local CBOs/CSOs directly implementing or supporting CP interventions, including those providing protection-related services (as individual or group)
Community-based Approaches to Child Protection	Refers to programming that is physically undertaken in a community, but it does not necessarily imply active participation by community members or existing structures and capacities. In community-based CP programming, CP agencies tend to initiate, lead and fund activities and they form community-based CP groups or committees to set up community-based CP mechanisms to implement their projects/programs.
Community-level Approaches to Child Protection	<p>Aim to give communities decision making power by facilitating and supporting communities to identify and prioritize CP risks and plan and take actions. Community level approaches seek to strengthen existing community practices, initiatives, structures, processes, and networks instead of creating parallel structures. Using this approach, CP actors do not come to the communities to teach them how to protect their children, but they come to learn, engage and support the communities to identify and strengthen the existing activities and practices that support child protection.</p> <p>Vs</p> <p>Community-level approaches support community members to protect children and ensure their right to healthy development. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model. Humanitarian actors should seek to understand existing community capacities that promote children's rights, safety, development, well-being and participation. These include initiatives, structures, processes and networks that are led and organised by community members, including children. Community-level approaches require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thorough understanding of the context; • An understanding and prioritisation of the needs; and • An understanding of existing practices.