



The UNHCR Tool for  
**Participatory  
Assessment**  
in Operations



## Note

This Tool is the product of collaborative efforts, resulting from consultations and contributions from UNHCR staff and partners in the field and at headquarters in Geneva; it was piloted in 14 countries and has been applied in 40 UNHCR field operations. UNHCR would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of this Tool.

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# Participatory Assessment in Operations

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## I. Introduction

Refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees must be at the centre of decision-making concerning their protection and well-being. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the protection problems they face, it is essential to consult them directly and to listen to them. Their right to participate in decisions on matters that affect their lives is enshrined in human rights instruments and UNHCR policy and guidelines, in particular the Agenda for Protection.<sup>1</sup> The participation from the outset of refugee women and men, young and old and from diverse backgrounds, in the definition of problems and the design of programmes for their benefit is crucial to serving, assisting, and protecting them and ensuring an effective operation.

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### What is participatory assessment?

Participatory assessment<sup>2</sup> is a process of building partnerships with refugee women and men of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue. Participatory assessment includes holding separate discussions with women, girls, boys, and men, including adolescents, in order to gather accurate information on the

specific protection risks they face and the underlying causes, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions.

Participatory assessment involves discussing with women, girls, boys, and men of concern and analysing jointly with them the protection risks that they face. It helps mobilize communities to take collective action to enhance their own protection and forms the basis for the implementation of a rights and community-based approach<sup>3</sup> (see Guiding Principles). Participatory assessment is one phase of a comprehensive situation analysis.

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## **What is situation analysis?**

Situation analysis in UNHCR comprises three closely interlinked phases:

- **Phase 1: Analysis of existing information**

All the available information on a particular situation concerning refugees, internally displaced persons, and/or returnees is gathered from a wide range of internal and external sources, including Country Reports, Annual Protection Reports, the proGres database (Project Profile), and Standards and Indicators Reports, as well as from political and legal documents and reports produced by other organizations/partners. The information collected should be reviewed from an age, gender, and diversity perspective to identify protection gaps in information, in services, in assistance or in advocacy.

- **Phase 2: Participatory assessment**

Structured discussions are organized with refugee women, girls, boys, and men of all ages and backgrounds, providing them with an opportunity to explain the protection risks

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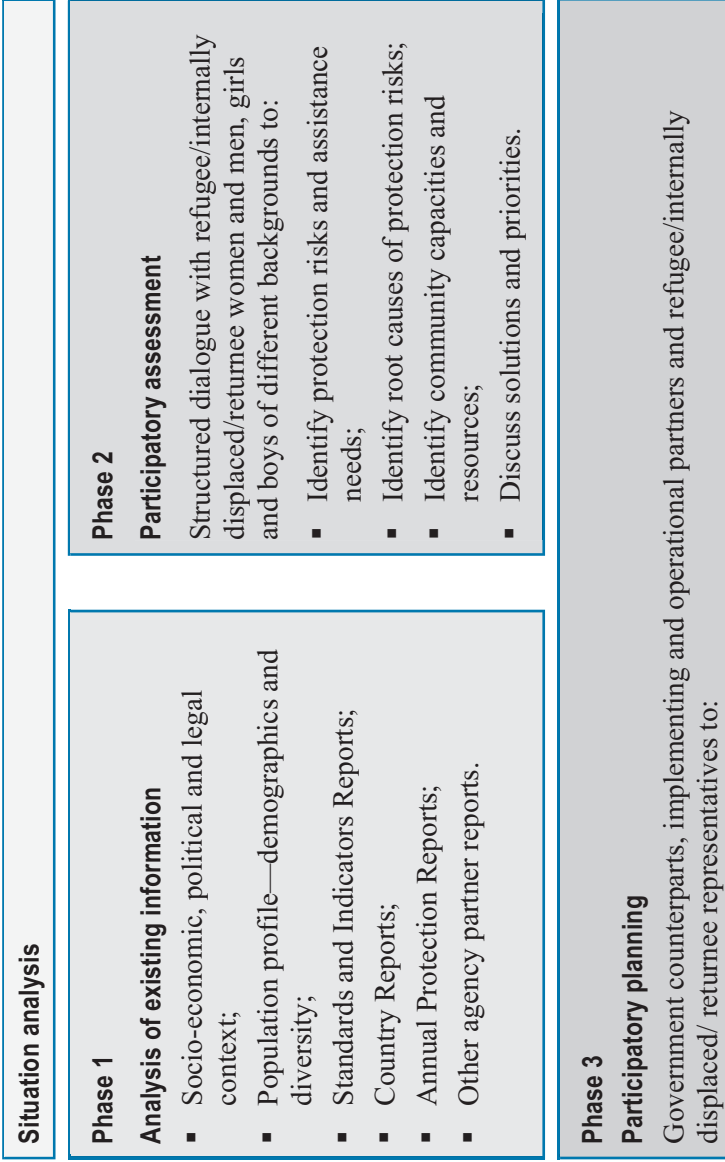
they face and to participate as partners in the design of programmatic responses to issues affecting their lives.

- **Phase 3: Participatory planning**

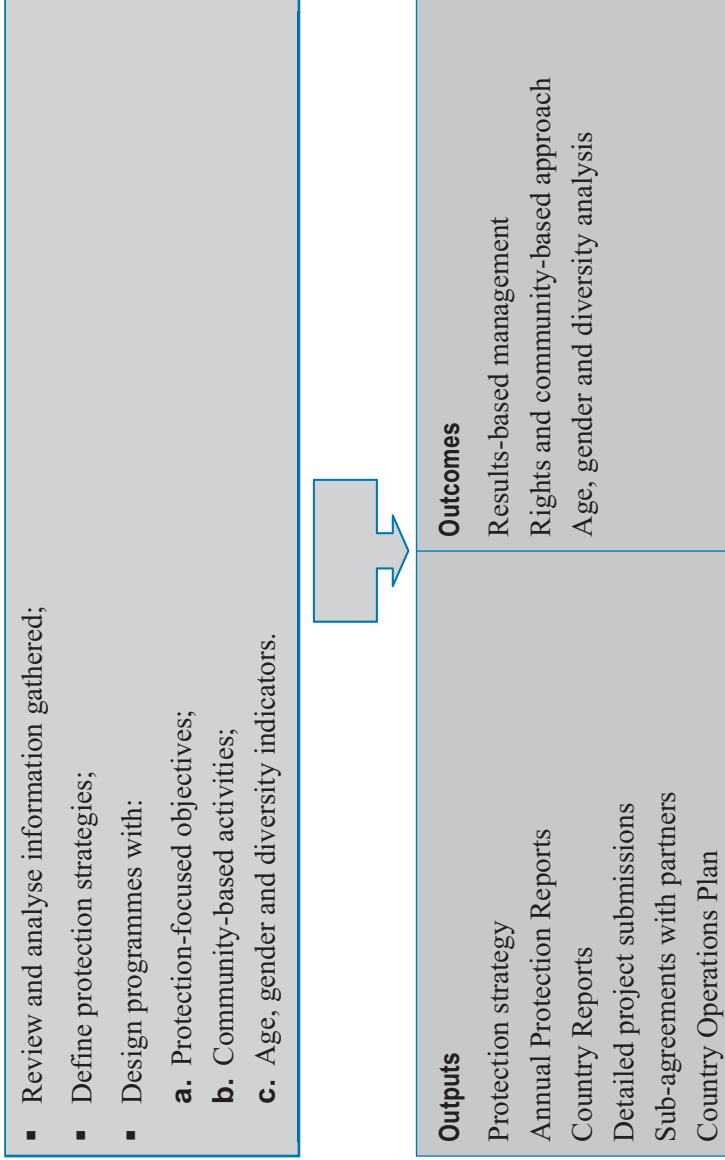
A planning meeting takes place to prepare the annual Country Operations Plan (COP) for submission to UNHCR headquarters. Participants include donors, host government authorities, implementing and operational partners, and refugees.<sup>4</sup> Together, they review and analyse the information available and develop the operational objectives at the country level.<sup>5</sup>







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Completing the three phases of a situation analysis leads to a more accurate determination of protection strategies and programming for UNHCR's operations in a specific country. The information collected and analysed through this comprehensive process will inform the content of key programme documents such as the Country Operations Plan (COP), Country Reports, Annual Protection Reports, detailed project submissions, and budgets.

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## **What is this Tool?**

This Tool outlines a series of steps to follow for conducting a participatory assessment with refugees or other persons of concern. If applied systematically, it will ensure that women and men of all ages and backgrounds are given the opportunity to identify and voice their own protection risks, priorities, and solutions, and thus participate meaningfully in the development of the annual COP. While some offices already hold regular consultations with different groups of refugees, this Tool provides additional guidance with the aim of promoting a more systematic approach to participatory assessment and of assisting in systematizing the findings for more effective incorporation into planning processes.

The overall goal of this Tool is to assist offices in strengthening partnerships with persons of concern, in gathering baseline data for age, gender, and diversity analysis and in developing the most appropriate protection strategies through:

- Analysing protection risks and incidents together with persons of concern;

- Involving refugees in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of services throughout the programme cycle;
- Being accountable to the populations that UNHCR serves.

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## **Who is this Tool for?**

While there are many different types of participatory assessments available, UNHCR has developed this Tool to adapt the methodology to support its operations. Thus, this Tool aims to support UNHCR Branch and Field Offices in conducting participatory assessments together with partners. It is vital that all functions and sectors contribute to participatory assessment with refugees, as protection risks should be discussed and considered holistically. Reviewing and analysing protection risks, priorities and solutions through participatory assessment requires an interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, UNHCR promotes the establishment of multifunctional teams to lead the Office through the process and to support age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming.

A multifunctional team is, at a minimum, composed of protection, programme, and community service staff. Ideally, it should include female and male staff, both national and international and of different levels. A successful multifunctional team approach requires the strong leadership and commitment of management, especially Heads of Office, and the active engagement of all members of the team. Offices should ensure that multifunctional teams include the wider circle of actors on the ground, such as partners, governmental counterparts, NGOs, other United Nations agencies, and donors, as appropriate.

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## **When can this Tool be used in the programming cycle?**

As stated in chapter 4 of the *UNHCR Manual*, a participatory assessment exercise undertaken with refugees is part of the annual programming cycle.<sup>6</sup> Ideally, an exercise should take place before the detailed project submissions are prepared for the coming year (i.e. September to November). Information gathered from different groups of refugees during the participatory assessment will also form the basis of the Annual Protection Report, the Country Report and the COP, hence informing the participatory planning workshop, the design of programmes and the planning process, as required by the results-based management (RBM) approach. RBM calls for planning according to results rather than resources. Its four components are: participatory assessment/analysis among key actors; core problem analysis; objective setting; and performance monitoring.

The *Tool for Participatory Assessment* should be used throughout the programming cycle to structure dialogue with refugees on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of services and protection assistance.<sup>7</sup> While the focus of the Tool is to link participatory assessment to the programming cycle, as in chapter 4 of the *UNHCR Manual*, it can and should be used to plan all aspects of repatriation, reintegration, and local settlement operations (see below).

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## **Participatory assessment in different contexts**

When conducting a participatory assessment in a non-camp setting involving urban refugees, internally displaced persons,

or returnees, the main challenges are identifying ways of establishing regular contact with people of concern, gathering reliable data, and building a complete picture of the protection risks. In such cases, just as in camps, the key to applying participatory assessment successfully is to identify the best methods of reaching members of the community, communicate information to them on meeting times and places, and plan with them. Methods may include working through existing community structures, such as religious groups, youth groups, health facilities, community-based organizations, and local NGOs. Through these groups access to the wider urban community can gradually be established.

In urban settings, people of concern are often scattered over a wide area, making it harder to reach and mobilize them. Multifunctional teams, possibly national staff members and local partners, begin by making contact with urban refugee women and men already known to them and find out more about informal meeting places and networks through which a wider participatory assessment can then be conducted.

Participatory assessment can be used for inter-agency cluster assessments in situations of displacement<sup>8</sup> as there are many similarities in internally displaced persons and refugee movements. Internally displaced persons move into camp-like settings, merge into urban areas or stay with host families. In certain contexts, where people of concern have opted to “merge” in with the local population because of security considerations, careful dialogue with leaders will be required to establish effective communication channels and to ensure an inclusive approach. The host community should also be brought into the process as their views and perspectives will impact on the situation, particularly in internally displaced and returnee settings.

Participatory assessment can equally be applied in situations of repatriation, reintegration, local integration, and local

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settlement.<sup>9</sup> It begins in the country of asylum before refugees return home. At this point, it is essential to discuss with them issues of protection, rights, and duties, including access to land, infrastructure, and services available upon return, and to organize “go and see” visits for women, men, and young people. Teams in the country of origin can obtain advance information on the returnee population from the *proGres* database (such as on unaccompanied and separated children or grandmother-headed households) and meet groups with specific needs to discuss their concerns and priorities before their return. Conducting participatory assessment with the returning population is a crucial component of returnee monitoring and paves the way for a community-based approach to reintegration. Early participatory assessment will also support women’s role in decision-making in peace negotiations and reconstruction efforts and provide ways for adolescent girls and boys to participate in building their future.



## II. Guiding Principles

Several principles guide the use of this Tool: age, gender, and diversity<sup>10</sup> mainstreaming, a rights-based and a community-based approach.

- **Age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming in UNHCR** is a strategy to promote gender equality and respect for human rights, particularly women's and children's rights, and to enhance the protection of all refugees, regardless of their ethnic, social or religious background. This strategy entails assessing the implications of protection risks and strategies and programme sector activities for women and men of different ages and backgrounds. Generally, women and minority groups have less social, economic and political power and are less well represented in formal leadership structures. Consequently, they may be overlooked in assessment and planning processes. It is important to understand existing power relations, e.g. how people, especially marginalized groups, can be excluded from access to and control over resources and decision-making within a community, which can lead to discrimination.

Because of their age, children, adolescents, and older people may also be marginalized. Corrective action is therefore required to ensure that the specific risks they face are taken into consideration. Proper participatory assessment involves women, children and older people, as well as people of diverse backgrounds, in order to focus on ways in which age and gender combine with other social, economic, physical, and political factors to marginalize and disadvantage certain sections of the population.

- **Community-based approach:** a community-based approach motivates women, girls, boys and men in the community to participate in a process which allows them to express their needs and to decide their own future with a view to their



empowerment. It requires recognition that they are active participants in decision-making. It also seeks to understand the community's concerns and priorities, mobilizing community members and engaging them in protection and programming. The focus is on helping refugees organize themselves to solve their own problems. The role of UNHCR is to support the building, rebuilding and strengthening of communities' capacities to respond to protection risks and to make decisions over access to and use of resources. Participatory assessment is carried out in the spirit of shared responsibility for enhancing protection of all members of the community and is an essential component of community-based work.

- **Rights-based approach:** human rights principles guide all phases of the programming process in all sectors, including assessment and analysis, programme planning, design (including setting goals, objectives, and strategies), implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Participation in decision-making is a right. All programmes must contribute to the realization of human rights. Applying a rights-based approach entails:
  - Understanding the structural causes of the non-realization of rights and analysing who bears the obligation to uphold the specific rights;
  - Assessing the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, and of duty-bearers to uphold their obligations, and then develop strategies to build these capacities;
  - Monitoring and evaluating programmes according to human rights standards and principles;
  - Informing programming on the basis of recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms.<sup>11</sup>

A rights-based approach is also founded on the principle of participation and of working with communities to promote

change and respect for rights, both at the individual and at the community levels. Therefore, a rights-based approach and a community-based approach are complementary and view the community's concerns and priorities as the starting point for mobilizing its members and engaging them in protection and programming. Both approaches seek to mobilize women, girls, boys and men in the community to participate in a process in which they define the protection risks and incidents, analyse them, and decide on actions required to resolve the issues and realize their rights.

In the UNHCR context, a rights and community-based approach aims at mobilizing women, girls, boys and men as equal partners in protection and programming activities, with the ultimate aim of empowering the community as a whole, and the individuals within the community, to access and enjoy their rights.

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## **Ethics of participation**

The rights and well-being of refugees and other persons of concern who share their experiences must be safeguarded. Thus, when undertaking a participatory assessment, refugees and other persons of concern:<sup>12</sup>

- Do not have to participate in the assessment if they prefer not to;
- Should not be prompted to give information in public which embarrasses them, makes them feel uncomfortable or makes them relive traumatic experiences;
- Must be told the purpose and process of the assessment and be informed of its limitations, so that false expectations are not raised;

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- Should be aware of any potential risks or inconveniences associated with participation in the assessment (e.g. time away from family or job, reminders of traumatic experiences);
- Must be told of the potential benefits arising from the assessment. The information they give might help improve certain conditions for other refugees. However, they will not receive any direct financial or other personal gain from participating;
- Must be reassured that confidentiality of information sources will be respected. Refugees must not be exposed to protection risks because of their participation (e.g. victims/survivors of sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) becoming known to the community, boys recruited by armed elements being subjected to reprisals for discussing their difficulties, internally displaced persons suffering repercussions);
- Must be permitted to express themselves freely without interruption and without having the information they provide “challenged” negatively (e.g. if parents say they cannot afford to send their children to school, they should not be asked why they never sought assistance). Empathy should guide all interactions with persons of concern;
- Should be given the names of contact staff or implementing partners (IP) with whom they can follow up in case they have personal questions;
- Must be kept informed of how the information they provide is being used and of any follow-up actions taken; they should remain involved in the process throughout.

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## Why is participatory assessment important?

An in-depth participatory assessment with refugee communities, as early as possible after their displacement, is important for the following reasons; **participatory assessment:**

- **Minimizes the risk of exclusion of certain groups** during the design and delivery of goods and services. For example, the inadequate placement of health posts and water points, the inappropriate location of and procedure for food distributions, and the unavailability of transportation may place undue hardship on some groups of refugees. Participatory assessment will contribute to a better understanding of which groups of refugees cannot fully access or benefit from available goods and services;
- **Recognizes the power relations** among groups (political, social, economic, gender, etc.) with control over resources and those without. Access to services and goods may be controlled and used by some groups of refugees or humanitarian workers as a means of wielding power over others. Participatory assessment provides an insight into the gender, age, race, caste, ethnic, or tribal dynamics that can lead to such abuses and exploitation within and between communities<sup>13</sup> so that preventive measures can be adopted;
- **Promotes greater respect for the rights of refugee women and gender equality.** Women have the opportunity to express their views and concerns, thus increasing the potential for them to realize their rights;
- **Promotes participation by children, particularly adolescents,** and promotes their recognition as individuals with rights. Children have channels to express their concerns and to realize their rights;

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- **Leads to improved accuracy of baseline data.** Planning and programming will be based on more accurate information—as it will have been provided directly by the people of concern—and on a better understanding of the underlying issues, including inequalities and power relations between women and men or among diverse groups, which may affect resource allocation. Furthermore, communities that have been involved directly will feel greater ownership over the process and the resulting programmes;
- **Improves relations between UNHCR and partners in UNHCR's operations.** UNHCR staff, refugees and implementing partners, together with other NGOs, United Nations agencies, governmental counterparts and host communities participate in a process in which they build shared understanding, ownership and responsibility for achieving common operational goals for the benefit of the people of concern;
- **Allows for a more holistic, comprehensive understanding and response.** The information gathered using different methods of enquiry with different groups reflects a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints. Links can be made across sectors, for example, between the non-provision of textbooks and school drop-out rates or between the absence of livelihoods, exposure to sexual exploitation, and unwanted teenage pregnancy.



### III. Steps for conducting participatory assessment

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#### Overview

As outlined below, this Tool is composed of ten steps to assist the multifunctional team in preparing, conducting and following up on a participatory assessment in preparation for the participatory planning workshop with persons of concern, implementing partners and other key actors.<sup>14</sup>

Step 1: Reviewing existing information

Step 2: Mapping diversity

Step 3: Methods of enquiry

Step 4: Selecting themes

Step 5: Facilitating discussions

Step 6: Systematizing the information gathered

Step 7: Follow-up actions

Step 8: Comprehensive analysis and prioritization

Step 9: Recording meetings

Step 10: Participatory planning workshop



## Step 1: Reviewing existing information

### 1

**B**efore launching a participatory assessment with refugees in a specific situation, it is important for multifunctional teams to compile all the relevant information and existing documentation on the refugee and host populations and to organize themselves. Teams should look over and discuss previous assessments and analyses, as well as any documents and reports concerning the local social, economic, political, legal, physical and security environment. Teams should also review all relevant UNHCR reports, such as Standards and Indicators Reports, Annual Protection Reports, Country Reports, and reports on SGBV, education, health, food-basket monitoring, and income-generating projects.

While reviewing the documentation, teams should keep in mind the following factors that may lead to significant inequalities between persons of concern and place some at risk:<sup>15</sup>

- Inequalities between women and men (the different roles assigned by society to women and men can lead to exclusion from decision-making opportunities and place women and girls in particular at a disadvantage in the family and community);
- Age (in certain societies, young and older people can be considered as having little to contribute and can be overlooked);
- Ethnicity (in relation to more dominant groups or in relation to host communities);

- Socio-economic group (poorest, middle-income, highest-income);
- Religion (especially where different from other groups or the host population);
- Family composition/type/size of household (e.g. extended, single-headed, child-headed, all-male);
- Stage in the refugee cycle (new arrivals vs. earlier arrivals, urban vs. camp-based setting);
- Health status (pregnant or lactating women, malnutrition, poor health, chronic illness, etc.);
- Disabilities (possibly leading to exclusion from training, income-generating opportunities or food distributions, etc.);
- Educational level (literacy, skills, including language skills, non-school attendance);
- Non-participation in organized activities/associations/organizations;
- Land/shelter/housing availability, access to land, plot sizes, location of key infrastructure, natural resources, local markets, services, known zones of conflict or violence, etc.;
- Cuts/reductions in services owing to limited budgets (on whom—women, girls, boys or men—they impact, the reasons these areas were selected for cuts);
- Other differences between refugee and local host populations.

Teams must consider what effects these factors can have on the protection of individuals and groups of concern. Structural inequalities combined with other conditions (such as poor health, disabilities, illiteracy and fear) may affect a person's capacity to access and claim her/his rights to basic services and assistance. Taking these points into account while reviewing the existing documentation will help to better identify gaps and key issues for discussion.





## Step 2: Mapping diversity

### 2

Participatory assessment must seek to include as many diverse groups as possible from refugee, internally displaced and returnee populations, in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the protection risks they face.

To define whom to target in the participatory assessment, teams should map out the population of concern and identify the various social groups. Communities should be broken down according to age, sex, ethnicity, caste/clan, religion, legal status (asylum-seeker, refugee, stateless persons, etc.), socio-economic status, level of education, whether urban or rural, power relations, power-structures (including political affiliations, if applicable) and any other social distinction, in order to gain a representative sample. This process assists in identifying which groups may have been overlooked or might not have participated as yet.

If installed, the proGres database should be consulted for a statistical breakdown of the population (e.g. children according to age groups and ethnic background) and to identify people with specific needs (e.g. grandparents in charge of small children, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children). In urban contexts, proGres will provide information on where people are located. Mapping locations, access to services, employment, accommodation and security can highlight protection risks. When available, the Geographic Information System will also help to visualize the location of

different groups and their respective access to available resources and services.

Engaging the community in mapping exercises on services is a useful participatory method for identifying risks jointly and sharing information. Teams can sit with groups of people of concern to ask them to draw a map of the community, highlighting where certain people live (older persons, school-aged children, etc.) and where services are located (schools, hospitals, water points, etc.).

Multifunctional teams should plan to meet and discuss with:

- Subgroups of women and men separately;
- Subgroups of younger children, adolescents, young adults, and older adults separately.

<b>Subgroups by age and sex</b>		
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Children</b>	10-13	10-13
<b>Adolescents</b>	14-17	14-17
<b>Adults</b>	18-40	18-40
<b>People over 40</b>	40 plus	40 plus

These age categories are provided as a guide; they may need to be adapted according to local culture and custom. Where refugee populations are divided into distinct groups, e.g. different ethnic or religious groups that live apart from each other, teams will need to meet groups of women, girls, boys, and men from each social or ethnic group. Good mapping will

help teams to determine how many diverse groups of people by age and sex they will need to meet in order to ensure a representative sampling of the population.

Teams should also plan to meet:

- **Groups and individuals with specific needs** (e.g. people with particular disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children);
- **Other key groups that have been identified as at risk** (e.g. single-parent households, a specific ethnic minority group, young girls and boys without any occupation, women and men without income-generating activities, grandparents with young children) or **groups on which limited information is available**.

2

Multifunctional teams should discuss how they will organize the participatory assessment exercise and inform the different structures in the community about the exercise. Teams should inform the refugee leadership, such as formal refugee councils, committees and associations (women's associations, SGBV committees, youth groups, peer educators, etc.) about the exercise and its purpose; however, experience shows that refugee leaders do not necessarily represent the real interests of the community or may not take into account the interests of some members of the community. While it is important to enlist their support and cooperation, as direct consultation with various groups of concern should not be seen to bypass or challenge the credibility of existing leadership structures, multifunctional teams should ensure that they reach all different types of groups of persons of concern, and thus not only those who associate closely with leadership structures.

In order to facilitate coverage and to meet as many distinct subgroups as possible, larger multifunctional teams can split into smaller teams of two people each and, following the mapping exercise, determine which team will meet which groups in the community.



### Step 3: Methods of enquiry

3

Protection risks faced by groups of women, girls, boys, and men of different ages and backgrounds can be complex and are often not very visible. Using the appropriate method of enquiry in a given situation is therefore crucial to identifying and understanding the underlying protection risks and the power different groups exercise over each other, including between women and men, which can lead to protection risks.

Enquiry for participatory assessment involves a process of listening, information gathering, and interactive analysis. Three methods of information gathering and analysis are outlined below:<sup>16</sup>

- Participatory observation and spot checks;
- Semi-structured discussions (or household discussions);
- Focus group discussions.

**Different methods are appropriate in different contexts.** Focus groups are useful to explore group responses to a topic of common concern but inappropriate for sensitive topics such as personal accounts of SGBV.<sup>17</sup> Semi-structured discussions, or discussions at an individual or household level, are appropriate for obtaining more personal, detailed information and analysing problems that will not easily emerge in a group discussion; participatory observation and spot checks will provide complementary information to more in-depth

discussions and help visualize particular problems, e.g. to do with food distributions. If, during participatory observation, semi-structured, or focus group discussions with people of concern, sensitive issues emerge, or if team members feel that they need to find out more information about certain individual situations, they should discuss those subjects separately in a one-to-one setting with those individuals afterwards.

Multifunctional teams should draw up beforehand a schedule outlining which method they will employ as well as who will discuss with which subgroup of people of concern and which theme (see Annex 7 for an example). The number of meetings will vary depending on the method used and the time and number of team members available. Generally, offices should plan participatory assessment over a two to three week period. Focus group discussions should involve no more than 10 people at a time per discussion. When semi-structured discussions are held, one to five people should be involved (see below).

**Using different methods at different times** will allow teams to obtain various perspectives on the protection risks, to cross-check their understanding of them and to gather complementary information. For example, they might organize a focus group to get women's perspectives on a specific protection risk, then talk to one or two women individually later to obtain more details, and then walk through the camp or urban area stopping here and there to ask a few questions to check how widespread the problem is. Comparing results from individuals and groups who represent the diversity of the community, using different methods ('triangulation'), is an important means of checking the reliability of the information gathered during the assessment<sup>18</sup> and of validating the team's understanding of the problem.

## Method 1: Participatory observation and spot checks

Participatory observation is a way of looking at the situation or behaviour of people so as to compare it with what people report. It also presents a good opportunity to ask questions to persons of concern about how they use certain services, such as health, water, sanitation, etc. and how they live their lives. It is a useful means of obtaining a better picture of the protection situation, particularly of aspects that are difficult for participants to verbalize. Observation can also help to put into context information provided by refugees. For example, refugees may have access to latrines, but a visit to them may reveal that they are unusable or dangerous for children.

Participatory observation may uncover structural problems in the accessibility of services (e.g. food distributions, health and police posts, behaviour of security guards controlling refugee access to UNHCR and implementing partner offices) or interpersonal behaviour/group dynamics within the community. For example, observation of a water-distribution point revealed that male community members kept order among the women and children collecting water by using a whip.

Observation sites can include playgrounds, classrooms, firewood collection areas, markets, transportation services in the case of repatriations, entrances to UNHCR offices, and queues for non-food items to check conditions and arrangements for older persons, pregnant women, etc. Observations can also be carried out at locations where partners deliver services, especially in urban areas, e.g. HIV counselling centres, childcare centres, schools.

Spot checks and informal chats at distribution points or at any of the above sites may give a better idea of what individuals think about their situation (daily workload and challenges) and how they are organized. Combined with participatory observation, spot checks provide an opportunity to review the

different roles assigned to women, girls, boys, and men in activities such as:

- Access to water distribution (who carries water and at what times);
- Food distribution (who scoops, who collects, who carries, who monitors, and at what times);
- Markets (who buys and who sells, who is overloaded with domestic chores);
- Firewood collection (who cuts, who collects and who carries);
- Latrines (size, usability by children, distance from homes);
- Schools (who attends, who does not, ratio of female/male teachers);
- Committees (what types, who participates, who speaks, who remains silent);
- Freedom of movement (who moves about, who does not);
- Health and community centres (who uses, who does not);
- Documentation and assistance provided for at UNHCR/IP offices (who is informed, who collects).

3

As staff often do not have access to observing people of concern at certain hours (early morning, at night) or in certain venues, it is important to seek innovative ways to observe or receive reliable descriptions of various aspects of people's lives.

## **Method 2: Semi-structured discussions**

Semi-structured discussions are conducted with a small number of people in an informal and conversational way by using open-ended questions. They can be conducted with individuals, families, households, or groups of people known

to each other and with similar concerns (e.g. a small group of boys who are subject to forced military recruitment).

Semi-structured discussions help provide detailed data—often confidential—about specific topics (e.g. physical or domestic violence, exploitation, gender relations, forced recruitment). In the process, teams may be able to clarify misinformation, identify gaps in communication channels, and discuss how to ensure access for all to information services, as well as to analyse specific risks and violations of rights in greater detail. Household discussions also present opportunities to visit refugees with disabilities or other house-bound refugees in their homes.

### **Method 3: Focus group discussions**

**3**

A focus group is a group discussion which enables analysis and understanding of a selected topic on the basis of the common characteristics of the group (gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.). Meeting with groups of refugees together, under the guidance of a facilitator, is useful not only for gathering numerous views simultaneously, but also for observing the interchanges between and among different participants. Like semi-structured discussions, focus groups, when conducted properly, can provide important qualitative information and an initial analysis of the protection risks faced by women, girls, boys, and men in the community, as well as the capacities and resources that exist within the community to enhance protection.

It is important to conduct focus groups separately with women and men of all ages, starting from age 10 and up, because women, girls, boys and men of different ages and backgrounds experience both similar and different protection risks and can access and benefit from services and resources differently. Separate focus group discussions may also provide insights into cultural practices, traditional protection mechanisms and



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other issues which may be affecting community members adversely and/or may offer opportunities to resolve longstanding problems by seeking guidance from the community on who can best address them.

Focus group discussions should be structured around a few key questions that can be adequately covered in the time period allotted (see Annex 3). A facilitator needs to remember that there is no right answer to a given question and that the discussion and disagreements among participants are as valuable and informative as the answers of particular individuals.

3





## Step 4: Selecting themes

On the basis of the documentation review undertaken in Step 1 and of the protection issues identified, teams can determine which themes to discuss with refugees. Such themes might include livelihoods, education, community participation, health, security, violence<sup>19</sup> or other issues that may have emerged as priorities in a particular operation<sup>20</sup>. Each of these themes is impacted by power relations and can lead to exclusion of certain groups.

Themes provide a framework for discussions; the themes listed are overarching and relate to many aspects of people's lives. When raised, they open up many other closely linked issues. For example, discussions with grandmother heads of household might initially focus on education for their grandchildren but then turn to their access to food, firewood and a livelihood and their need to generate an income to avoid exposing their grandchildren to child labour and exploitation. Follow-up participatory assessment exercises may focus on only one or two themes in particular, depending on the protection risks and incidents that emerge during the annual participatory assessment exercise.

Participatory assessment provides an important opportunity to obtain the views of persons of concern on the data being gathered through the Standards and Indicators Reports. Once themes have been selected, multifunctional teams should gather related data from the Standards and Indicators Reports, which will have been reviewed during Step 1. When facilitating

discussions and undertaking observation, the data should be kept in mind and, if appropriate, cross-checked with the people of concern. In addition, many protection risks are related to the need of people of concern to generate a livelihood in a context where resources are scarce; gathering information about the economic context, sources of livelihood, and survival strategies enhances understanding of their protection risks.

Teams may use the questions provided in Annex 3 to guide them in their discussions with refugees. Asking these questions will help to elicit information on protection risks, the refugees' capacities to cope with them, and their proposed solutions. Understanding what coping mechanisms people already have will enable teams to ensure that these mechanisms do not lead to additional risks and to develop solutions together with people of concern.

4





## Step 5: Facilitating discussions

Before initiating discussions with refugees and other persons of concern, teams should review the **systematization form** outlined in Step 6. The form will help teams ensure that the information gathered is well structured and organized.

### Focus group discussions

#### Preparation:

- Organize separate meetings each one comprising up to ten girls, ten adolescent girls, ten women aged 18 to 40, ten women over 40, ten boys, ten adolescent boys, ten men aged 18-40 and ten men over 40 from the different ethnic groups. The selection of participants will depend on the review carried out under Step 1 and the mapping exercise conducted under Step 2. In meetings involving women, at least one facilitator should be female (in some cultures, only women can meet with women and men with men). Women and girls usually feel more comfortable speaking among other women, and men and boys may also feel more comfortable talking to men;
- UNHCR staff or implementing partners should inform participants a few days in advance so that they can prepare for a meeting, but some spontaneous meetings should also be held to ensure people who may not be in regular contact are included. This is relatively easy in a camp setting,

where spontaneous groups, such as unemployed youths, can be brought together;

- Ensure that only two members of the multifunctional team are present for a group no bigger than 10 women, girls, boys or men: ideally, one to act as a facilitator and one as a note-taker, along with an interpreter, if needed. Interpreters/translators need to be thoroughly briefed and trained together with the teams ahead of time; multifunctional teams should explain to interpreters the importance of translating sentence by sentence and **not summarizing what people of concern have to say**. Teams should help interpreters by asking only one short question at a time and by reminding them about confidentiality of the discussions;
- Organize a meeting space in a safe and comfortable environment. Make every effort to ensure that non-participants (e.g. male leaders or curious bystanders) are not present or within hearing distance, particularly as this can give rise to subsequent protection risks;
- Inform community leaders of the purpose of the meeting;
- To create a friendly environment, it is best to hold the meeting sitting in a circle, with the facilitator at the same level as the refugees;
- Where appropriate, use visual materials, such as drawings, maps, charts, pictures and photos, which can greatly enhance the discussion;
- Allow approximately two hours per focus group.

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### **Facilitating the discussion**

#### **a. Introduction**

- Start the meeting with a brief introduction that should include:

- ▣ Who you are;
- ▣ The purpose and objectives of the participatory assessment;
- ▣ Why people’s participation is important and an outline of the process;
- ▣ Respect for confidentiality and use of the information;
- ▣ What the assessment may or may not lead to in terms of outcome;
- ▣ How participants will receive feedback later (see Ethics of participation, page 13.)

For example, the assessment might not lead to additional resources but may lead to reallocating resources to particular issues. Multifunctional teams should discuss before beginning the assessment what key messages should be delivered in the introduction;

- Ask for permission to take notes. Explain that the written notes are for office use only and for recording key discussion points;
- Invite the group members to introduce each other. For example, ask every person to introduce her/himself by mentioning name, displacement details (e.g. where she/he is from—**if no security risks are involved in answering**—how long she/he has been displaced) and family situation;
- Establish ground rules, e.g. respect for different viewpoints, privacy of information shared in the meeting, there are no wrong answers, only one person to speak at a time, everyone has the right to speak without being interrupted, to be respected, and to be listened to;
- Introduce a culturally appropriate ice-breaker, if needed, especially if you are dealing with young people (see box on next page and Annex 2 on Communicating with children).

### **Communicating with children**

Children and youth should always be included in participatory assessments. Girls and boys have needs and abilities which are significantly different from those of adults and from each other. Communicating with children has some particular requirements which include the following:

- Being at ease with children, engaging with them in whatever style of communication suits the individual (e.g. by sitting on the ground, through play, going for a walk) and tolerating expressions of distress, aggression;
- Using simple language and concepts appropriate to the child's age, stage of development, and culture;
- Accepting that children who have had distressing experiences may find it extremely difficult to trust an unfamiliar adult. It may take time and patience before the child can feel sufficient trust to communicate openly;
- Understanding that children may view their situation in distinctly different ways from adults: children may fantasize, invent explanations for unfamiliar or frightening events, express themselves in symbolic ways, emphasize issues which may seem unimportant to adults and so on;
- Being sensitive to gender, culture, ethics, and the power relations between adults and the child;
- Encouraging the involvement of colleagues/ partner staff who are familiar with working with children in a participatory way.

**b. Theme discussion**

- Introduce the theme selected for the focus group discussions;
- Before raising protection risks, ask questions about the background of the individuals participating in the focus group or semi-structured discussion (such as what they do, how they earned an income before they fled, who they live with, where they live and how old they are);
- Ensure that everyone has a chance to speak on the theme, encourage everyone to expand on certain points and avoid moving quickly through a list of questions. It is important to be sensitive to cultural norms when conducting the sessions to ensure that no one feels rushed or excluded;
- Ask open questions, such as how, what, where, why as much as possible, especially to clarify or to check understanding. Do not judge people who speak; accept what they say;
- Avoid leading statements and questions; questions should guide the discussion rather than solicit direct answers from each of the participants;
- Avoid dominating the discussion; ask simple questions and only one question at a time;
- Steer the group towards analysing the causes of the risks, the skills they have at their disposal to resolve them, and the role of the community in developing solutions;
- Ensure that the protection risks discussed and analysed are linked to possible solutions that can be formulated in recommendations and follow-up activities;
- Ensure time for refugees to raise their own questions and concerns;
- Ask the participants which of the issues raised they consider to be the most pressing;



- See Annex 3 for sample questions to ask during theme discussions.

**c. Follow-up and next steps**

- If pressing protection problems emerge from the discussion, communicate them to appropriate staff and partners or take action as needed;
- Wrap up by thanking all the people who participated for their time and by explaining the next steps and follow-up action (see Ethics of participation, page 13).

**Semi-structured discussions**

Semi-structured discussions are conducted in the same way as focus group discussions, though with smaller numbers of people, usually individuals or groups of three to four, and for a shorter amount of time, usually an hour. They can be held at the household level, with families or with people who have shared similar experiences. Semi-structured discussions can take place with individuals to cover sensitive, confidential issues and with households or small groups to gather detailed information on specific themes and risks.

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## Step 6: Systematizing the information gathered

Teams should meet at the end of each day or session to review and discuss the data gathered during participatory observation/spot checks, semi-structured/household, and focus groups and to fill out a systematization form for each group and per discussion (see Annex 4 for a blank form and Annex 4a for a sample form). Information gathered from one subgroup about another should be recorded on forms for that specific subgroup. For example, if mothers say that their daughters do not go to school because they have chores to do, teams should record that information on a systematization form on girls. In addition, information gathered during spot checks and semi-structured discussions should also be recorded on systematization forms.

As the form is completed for each subgroup (age and sex), both the differences and the similarities will become evident and lead to better-targeted planning. Annex 3 contains sample questions to guide teams as to which types of questions to ask in order to gather information needed towards better planning.

The systematization form covers the following areas:

- 1. Protection risks/incidents:** protection risks are actual or potential threats to the safety, security and rights of persons of concern, as perceived and experienced by them. Protection risks may derive from fear of or consequences of violence, aggression, abuse, exploitation, discrimination or

deprivation that have been perpetrated against individuals or groups. Protection risks and incidents may arise from gaps in the availability or accessibility of assistance, goods, and services required to maintain life and a basic standard of well-being and/or from inequalities that prevent people from exercising or claiming their rights. For example, both girls and boys face the risk of child labour and military recruitment, but they may experience those risks differently. Girls may face the added risks of exposure to sexual exploitation and trafficking, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Multifunctional teams will also examine the circumstances and locations where protection risks and incidents occur; protection risks or incidents described by the refugees often occur in specific locations, areas or institutions, or at points of service delivery. The frequency should also be recorded.

- 2. Causes of protection risks/incidents:** ‘causes’ refer to the real reason behind a protection risk, although there is often not one but several reasons that may be difficult to pinpoint. Identifying the causes helps ensure that actions taken to address the risk will be effective and not superficial. For example, back-to-school programmes for teenage mothers are valuable and deal with the risk of them not accessing education, but the programmes alone will not lead to a reduction in rates of teenage pregnancies. Understanding the underlying causes requires looking at why girls become pregnant at an early age, finding out what the young men think about the problem and examining how the community may respond.
- 3. Capacities within the community:** ‘capacities’ refer to the existing strengths of individuals and social groups. Capacities are related to people’s possessions and skills, their social and organizational structures, networks, abilities,

knowledge, and institutions. Capacities are built over time and determine people's ability to cope with risks.

- 4. Solutions proposed by refugees to address risks:** teams should record solutions proposed by the refugee women, girls, boys and men themselves to respond to the risks identified within the local context. It should be clarified whether the community is willing to volunteer time, organize working groups or committees, and co-manage services or activities, in order to address the protection issues identified. Their solutions should also include proposals for action by UNHCR, partners and Governments or recommendations on changes in actual services (see also Ethics of participation, page 13).
- 5. Most important issues to address:** what are the most important issues as expressed by the subgroup (age and sex) that require attention?
- 6. Immediate follow-up action:** what actions are needed urgently in order to assist refugees with pressing protection incidents or problems? See Step 7, Follow-up actions.

Team members must extract from their discussion notes the information corresponding to the different columns of the systematization form described above. The information needs to be recorded for each subgroup (by age and sex) and organized by themes. The time and place of the discussion, meeting or focus group and the methods used should also be noted on the form.



## Step 7: Follow-up actions

**F**ollow-up to participatory assessment exercises is an essential step. First, it lets refugees know that they have been heard and that their views are being taken into account, even if funding is restricted. Second, following up keeps channels of communication between refugees and multifunctional teams open, keeping the exchange of information flowing (see Ethics of participation, page 13) and enabling trust to be built over time. Third, proper follow up enables teams to validate certain information.

Multifunctional teams should:

1. Take immediate action, where feasible, to address protection-related problems. Simple interventions (appropriate referrals, sharing information, attending to SGBV cases and those with specific needs, supporting a refugee initiative, discussing issues with implementing partners, promoting age, gender, and diversity awareness, etc.) can make a big difference in the overall protection situation. At the end of each day, multifunctional teams can list all urgent follow-up actions to be taken, noting those actions which may not require resources but perhaps imply procedural changes or information-sharing.
2. Think preventively and apply preventive measures, if there are indications that an individual or group is ‘at risk’.

3. Follow up on commitments and agreements made. A field assessment is an opportunity to begin a mobilization process among refugees and other agencies on the ground. Following up is also a way of giving feedback to the community on their concerns and of demonstrating commitment.
4. Provide feedback to the community. After completing the participatory assessment, multifunctional teams should agree on how to inform the refugees of the overall findings of the participatory assessment, resulting actions, short and long term and next steps as well as any limitations. They should brief community structures, such as women's associations, youth groups and leadership (women and men) structures, to ensure that the majority of refugees are informed.





## Step 8: Comprehensive analysis of the findings and prioritization

This step requires organizing and analysing the information gathered for each subgroup as noted on the systematization form, near the end of the participatory assessment exercise. While Step 6 consists of recording the information largely from the refugees' point of view, the analysis undertaken in Step 8 is carried out by the entire multifunctional team from a holistic perspective and is supported by triangulation methods, which involve comparing the data from different groups and diverse sources.

Team members will analyse the information provided in the different systematization forms and prioritize the most urgent protection risks raised and solutions proposed in order to produce an overall synthesis report by age and sex on priorities emanating from the participatory assessment (Prioritization Report, see Annex 5). So that neither gets lost in the process of producing an overall synthesis, multifunctional teams must capture priorities which reflect both refugees' priorities by age, gender and diversity and **UNHCR's priorities**, as UNHCR has the responsibility to uphold individual rights. Many times the priorities that people of concern themselves pinpoint coincide with upholding individual rights. When they do not, teams must ensure that UNHCR takes action to address rights violations or to act when rights are otherwise not being met (for example, violence, SGBV, unaccompanied and separated minors or older persons left unattended, early marriage, etc.). Part of

UNHCR's work entails mobilizing communities of persons of concern on certain issues to which they may not attach particular importance (see the *Manual for Applying a Community-based Approach in UNHCR Operations*).

There should be one form for each subgroup (age and sex) and teams must ensure that diversity issues are reflected under the subgroups.

### **1. Protection risks by subgroup (age and sex)**

All systematization forms need to be analysed by subgroup as identified during the mapping exercise and listed according to age and sex as per the table in Step 2.

- **Analyse protection risks:** teams will need to examine the risks identified by each subgroup from an age, gender, and diversity perspective. They must consider how women, girls, boys and men of different ages and backgrounds are affected differently by the violations of rights. Specific risks facing particular groups (e.g. socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities) also need to be examined. They will also look for trends, common problem areas and danger spots and agree on follow-up visits. Teams should also analyse the information gathered according to rights violated or rights not respected, even if people of concern did not identify those issues as pressing/important issues to follow up.

√ An in-depth analysis of protection risks and priorities will facilitate the prioritization of the most pressing protection risks for each subgroup (age and sex). Teams list these in the **second** column of the Participatory Assessment Prioritization Report form (see Step 9).



- **Review rights violated:** teams should identify immediate protection needs and which rights have been violated or otherwise not met. For example, an insufficient number of schools obstructs the right to education, and physical assault at a food-distribution site violates the right to physical integrity;

√ Multifunctional teams should list the rights violated in the **first** column of the Participatory Prioritization Report form.

- **Analyse causes:** teams should review the causes of protection risks as identified by the refugees, including which actors may be responsible, interpersonal behaviour and group dynamics, as well as programme gaps and inadequately designed sectoral activities. Teams should analyse trends in the refugees' answers to identify recurring causes for each subgroup (age and sex). It is also important to analyse which causes result in the systematic exclusion of certain groups from protection and assistance and, in particular, which ones are the result of age and gender inequalities or other forms of discrimination. Some causes may lie in traditional community practices or in institutional biases; refugees and multifunctional teams must be prepared to look at these causes to eliminate discrimination and associated protection risks.

√ In the **third** column of the Participatory Assessment Prioritization Form, teams should record the causes of the protection risks.

## **2. Capacities and solutions proposed by subgroups (age and sex)**

- **Analyse capacities:** teams must consider the capacities that refugee women and men of all ages have identified to see how they could be enhanced to address the protection risks and their causes. In some cases, the refugees may have the capacity to resolve the problem, but they may need mobilizing, capacity building or some additional resources, which may be particularly pertinent for girls, women, adolescents and other groups that are discriminated against, in order to ensure that they are able to participate. Partners already working with the refugees may have the expertise and resources to address the problems identified, by further involving the community;
- **Analyse solutions:** the solutions proposed by the persons of concern should be examined in light of how these suggestions could address the protection risks and causes they report. Where refugees can support themselves, limited community mobilization may be the only intervention needed. In some cases, refugees are already mobilized to address a protection risk but may need supplementary support from UNHCR, partners or other agencies on the ground to be effective. However, it is important to monitor closely to avoid exploitation, and rights violations, e.g. traditional justice systems, harmful traditional practices or exclusion. In other cases, there may be a problem in the delivery of assistance and services to particular groups. For example, the elderly and sick may be unable to make the trip to a health facility for treatment, or children may miss school to provide an income for the family. UNHCR, partners, and other agencies on the ground must determine with refugees the most appropriate solution to a given protection risk and how best to provide protection and support to the community. In either case, it is important not to substitute the community in the delivery

of solutions, as doing so weakens the capacities of community members. Conversely, UNHCR should not devolve its responsibility to the community, but take steps to empower its members properly.

√ Multifunctional team members will record capacities in the **fourth** column of the Prioritization Report form and in the **fifth** column record solutions proposed by refugee women, girls, boys, and men.

### **3. Protection objectives**

Multifunctional teams should begin to formulate protection objectives based on the protection risks/incidents highlighted, causes, rights violated (or otherwise not met) and capacities and solutions proposed by subgroups.

√ In the **sixth** column, under protection objectives, teams should record protection objectives formulated in preparation of the participatory planning workshop.

Step 8 will prepare multifunctional teams for the participatory planning workshop, during which all actors will examine the protection risks with a view to revising/ updating existing programme documents and/or developing the Country Operations Plan.

The information in the Prioritization Report in Annex 5 will be used as the baseline for developing operational strategies (protection and assistance) at the participatory planning workshop with partners and refugees. It should inform operational objectives and programme design for the year to come and will be finalized at the participatory planning meeting.



## Step 9: Recording meetings

Recording the numbers of people who participated in the assessment, their ages, sex and ethnicity, and other background details helps to validate the information received from the participants. This kind of record-keeping will also support planning tools and reports such as the Country Operations Plan and Annual Protection Report. The chart in Annex 6 and Annex 6a provides an example of how to record information on numbers of people met and the different types of discussions that took place.





## Step 10: Participatory planning workshop

The publication *Participatory Planning in UNHCR - A Practical Guide* assists offices in preparing, together with key actors, an annual participatory planning workshop to develop the Country Operations Plan. The guide underscores the importance of including all the main actors in the workshop. The participatory assessment process will help to identify and prepare different refugee groups for their participation in the workshop.

### Selecting participants among persons of concern

With the assistance of the multifunctional teams, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees should select a reasonable number of community members who represent all ages and backgrounds, reflect gender balance, and are genuinely able to participate. The participants should also receive support in preparing adequately for the workshop, to ensure meaningful participation and avoid token presence.

### Discussion of participatory assessment prioritization report

The information gathered, analysed and systematized during the participatory assessment process should be shared and discussed at the participatory planning workshop and form an integral part of the substance of the overall content discussion. The Operations Management Support Software, a key element to

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UNHCR's effort to institutionalize Results-Based Management, will capture the information from the participatory assessment prioritization report as the primary basis for formulating objectives for Country Operations Plans and project submissions.

Multifunctional teams face two challenges throughout the discussions on the Country Operations Plan: the first is to ensure that the participatory assessment findings are genuinely taken into consideration; the second is to ensure an adequate analysis from an age, gender and diversity perspective of the protection risks. Having a good understanding of power relations in the community and how groups are excluded will ensure that solutions do address risks through affirmative actions for all groups discriminated against, in particular women and children.

The Protection Strategies, Annual Protection Report, Country Reports and Country Operations Plans will be reviewed in light of the analysis of the protection risks gathered through participatory assessment. This analysis provides the basis for building age, gender and diversity perspectives into operational strategies and responses and undertaking targeted action to enable women, girls, boys and men to exercise their rights and to support gender equality.



## **IV. Conclusion**

The methodology presented in this Tool can be used for conducting general participatory assessments on a range of protection risks and supporting your daily monitoring activities. It can also serve as a basis for follow up and specialized assessments using tools designed for specific areas such as education, health, HIV, nutrition, etc.

When conducting participatory assessment exercises, multifunctional teams may be presented with a range of issues and some persons of concern, especially those who have been traditionally excluded or discriminated against, may have urgent problems which will need to be addressed immediately. To build trust, staff and partners will need to spend time working together with communities to address and prevent such problems. Over time, this process will enable all the actors to move beyond the more immediate problems to in-depth dialogue and analysis and the development of creative solutions. Participatory assessment is an important step in building partnerships with all the different groups in the community.



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**V. Annexes**





## **Annex 1: Potential protection risks, a non-exhaustive list**

### **General risks:**

- Gender discrimination;
- Age group;
- Stage in the refugee cycle (new arrivals, earlier arrivals);
- Socio-economic group (poorest, middle-income, highest-income);
- Ethnicity (in relation to other more dominant groups or in relation to host communities);
- Religion (where different from other groups or the host population);
- Type of household (extended family, single-headed, grandparent-headed, etc.);
- Location in camp/area (proximity to police posts, proximity to the periphery, danger points);
- Health status (malnutrition, poor health, chronic illness, disabilities, etc.);
- Educational level (literacy, skills, including language skills);
- Livelihood activities, access to and control over resources.

### **Physical risks:**

- *Refoulement*;
- Arbitrary arrest/detention;
- Torture, abduction;
- Inadequate shelter, inadequate heat, clothing;
- Inadequate food and/or means of its preparation;
- Inadequate quantity and quality of water per person;

- Inadequate availability of firewood;
- Severe health risks and epidemics, inadequate access to medical services;
- Political violence;
- Physical violence, sexual and gender-based exploitation and violence;
- Forced military recruitment;
- Rape (in camp/prison, during flight, or in host country);
- Domestic violence, abuse, neglect;
- Early pregnancies;
- Natural disasters (fire, flood, earthquake, landslides, etc.);
- Trafficking.

**Social risks:**

- Lack of recognition as a person, absence of documentation (identity, birth, marriage papers, etc.);
- Lack of access to registration process;
- Social discrimination/exclusion;
- Sexual exploitation, risk of forced prostitution;
- Discriminatory practices on the basis of gender, age, religion, tribe, clan, political affiliation, etc.;
- Exposure to abuse and exploitation, particularly of children, youth, unaccompanied and separated children;
- Separation of girls and boys from their families;
- Lack of access to basic education;
- Disability;
- Forced interruption of education, exclusion, marginalization;
- Forced military recruitment.

**Economic risks:**

- No access to a means of livelihood (e.g. employment, piecework, agriculture);
- Single parents looking after young children unable to leave the home to find work outside;
- Lack of labour power—those who are incapable of work and not living with relatives are likely to suffer more than the rest of the population of concern;
- Exploitation of labour of persons of concern by local or other displaced employers, exploitation of child labour;
- Exploitation of labour by local officials, etc.

**Potential risks associated with cultural practices:**

- Female genital mutilation, early marriage, bride price, etc.;
- Traditional justice systems.

## **Annex 2: Communicating with children<sup>21</sup>**

It is common to assume that most children are too young to be aware of what is going on around them or too young to be adversely affected by dangerous or distressing experiences. However, children, like adults, must have channels to express themselves.<sup>22</sup> Communicating with girls and boys of all ages and of diverse backgrounds, for a variety of purposes, can be challenging and requires skills significantly different from those required for communicating with adults.

Ethical issues concerning informed consent and confidentiality for girls and boys arise and will vary according to cultural context, age, sex of the child, background, etc. The potential ethical challenges for each group/individual should be considered and discussed before, during and after undertaking the participatory assessment.

When talking with children, consider:

- Keeping a friendly and informal atmosphere so children feel at ease. One suggestion is for the team to say that they want to learn from what the children have to say. Team members may also want to share with the children some personal information about themselves (e.g. I have children at home, I have a dog/cat, I come from .../I speak ... at home), so that they are able to see them as “whole people”;
- Having some basic knowledge of how to work with children in the specific cultural context before engaging with them;
- Identifying in advance what challenges might occur and discussing how best to deal with them. Expert support, such as medical staff, should always be on hand should complex issues arise. Teams should also agree as a group upon basic guidelines when working with the children. This will make

it easier to solve problems if a discrepancy in the team's methodology occurs, as well as preventing disagreements;

- Being composed of both women and men when working with girls and boys, as some children prefer to speak with members of the same sex.

Teams should consider the following ethics when communicating with children:

- Coping with distress: seek expert advice if signs of stress emerge; follow-up support should be available, if required;
- Expectations: teams must be clear what kind of information they hope to obtain from the children;
- Informed consent: teams must obtain permission from parents before discussing with children. In addition, their participation is voluntary; children have the right to keep silent or withdraw from the process at any time;
- Confidentiality: children should be reminded during discussions of the confidentiality they owe to each other, and the team members owe to them;
- Acceptability: children's views and experiences should be accepted and never challenged;
- Power dynamics and the role of the adult team member: children may be anxious to give the "right answer" and to please the adult by saying what they think the adults want to hear. To counteract this tendency, teams should explain their role clearly, invite questions, give clear permission to children to say what they want or to decline to answer if they choose and value their contributions.

### **Annex 3: Themes and sample questions on protection risks**

#### **Livelihoods:**

- What skills do women and men have that will enable them to earn an income?
- How much time do women and men have to engage in income-generating activities?
- Who does what in the community and how much time does it take?
- Do women face problems of lack of access to markets, supplies, technology, credit, skills training and information, and lack of decision-making powers? Do men face similar problems?
- Who has access to various resources (e.g. who has jobs, access to markets, access to materials such as firewood)?
- Who decides how resources are used? Who decides to integrate locally and who decides to return?
- What is the impact of these problems on girls, boys, adolescents, women, men? Do children work? What types of work do children do?

#### **Education:**

- What do girls and boys do with their time?
- Who goes to school? Who does not get to go to school?
- What do girls who do not go to school do with their time? And boys?
- What do girls who do go to school do outside school? And boys?
- Are you afraid (are your children afraid) of going to school or of anything at school?

- Who stays at home? Who is in charge? What is the impact on the family?
- How are girls and boys looked after if they remain behind to attend school when the parents return home?

**Community participation:**

- Do women participate in committees? Why not or how often? Do children participate in committees?
- Do women have access to decision-making? Do they make decisions? What do women think about that? And men? What is the impact in the community?
- What would women and men like to do differently? How would you go about change?
- How do women and men participate in reconstruction of their home country or in decision-making when settling locally?

**Health / Food/Nutrition / Water / Shelter:**

- What types of health problems are most widespread in the community?
- Who takes care of people when they get sick?
- Who do people go to see when they are not well? What happens if they get sick at night or over the weekend? What types of health problems are covered? Which are not covered?
- Are there children in the community who do not get appropriate food? Other persons without proper/enough food? Are there malnourished children in the community? How are they treated? Can we visit them?
- How do pregnant and lactating women eat differently from other household members?



- How do you use water? How do you maintain personal/community hygiene?
- How could houses and neighbourhoods be maintained so as to avoid health risks? What is the layout/design of living arrangements? Town/camp?

**Security and safety:**

- What are the dangers that you experience in this environment?
- Do you feel that your physical safety and security are at risk? At what time? Why?
- What is the source of the danger? Who is involved?
- What do you worry about when you leave your home?
- What do you worry about for your children/husband/wife?
- Are you aware of any incidents/problems that have threatened your friends or neighbours?
- How can you put a stop to domestic violence?
- Does violence occur? What types of violence?
- What do men think about it? And women? Girls and boys? What do you think about it?
- What can be done about it?
- Where does the violence occur? (See Coping with risks and developing solutions and Prioritizing risks below.)

**Coping with risks and developing solutions:**

- How do you think the situation could be improved? How do you and your neighbours cope with these risks?
- What do you do to protect your children?
- What services or activities are available to you to help address these risks? How can they help?
- How in your culture/traditions were such problems dealt with/avoided before your displacement? How can that be applied now?
- Would you be willing to help in improving the situation? How do you think you could help?

**Prioritizing risks:**

- Of all the issues just discussed, which do you consider the most important/urgent?
- Who should be involved?
- What might the community do to address this concern?



### Annex 4: Systematization form

Group: \_\_\_\_\_ Subgroup: (Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age group: \_\_\_\_\_)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Protection risks/incidents	Causes	Capacities within the community

No. of people: \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitators: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Solutions proposed by subgroups</b>	<b>Most important issues to address</b> as expressed by persons of concern	<b>Urgent follow-up action</b>

## Annex 4a: Sample of systematization form

Group: **Jutes**      Subgroup: (Sex: **Girls**      Age group: **10-13**)

Date: **31 March 2005**      Theme: **Education**

Protection risks/incidents	Causes	Capacities within the community
<p>Lack of physical protection: some boys among local population shout insults at girls as they walk to school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Girls fear going to school</li> <li>▪ Fear for physical safety on way to school</li> <li>▪ Girls might drop out of school</li> <li>▪ Risk of rape or physical assault</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discrimination</li> <li>▪ Stigmatization for being a refugee</li> <li>▪ Lack of awareness among the local population</li> </ul>	<p>Capacity to build solidarity in community</p>
<p>Sexual exploitation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Girls cannot insist on use of condoms (increasing risk of rape/HIV)</li> <li>▪ Stigmatization within the community</li> <li>▪ Earn less than young men engaged in same activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fear of rejection or violence</li> <li>▪ Trauma</li> <li>▪ Girls sell themselves to earn an income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physically capable of doing different types of work</li> <li>▪ Certain degree of education</li> <li>▪ Capable of leading awareness campaigns and peer groups</li> </ul>
<p>Girls not in school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Girls leave school to earn an income</li> <li>▪ Girls drop out of school</li> <li>▪ Fewer opportunities to secure a proper future</li> <li>▪ Early pregnancy or marriage</li> <li>▪ Exposure to serious health risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No adequate provision of learning materials</li> <li>▪ No money for uniforms/shoes for student attending host community schools</li> <li>▪ Poverty and lack of income, lack of meaningful activities</li> </ul>	<p>Adults have the capacity to negotiate better working contracts</p>

No. of people: **10**

Facilitators: **Beatrice and Marcello**

Location: **City**

Country: **Burkina Faso**

<b>Solutions proposed by subgroups</b>	<b>Most important issues to address</b> as expressed by persons of concern	<b>Urgent follow-up action</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organize groups of children, girls and boys, to walk to school together accompanied by parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keeping girls in school</li> <li>▪ Ensuring physical protection through community accompanied walks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with community to help organize community walks to school</li> <li>▪ Ask other girls about safety issues</li> <li>▪ Talk with local community</li> <li>▪ Talk with teachers and parents</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sensitization</li> <li>▪ Discuss with actors/ strengthen peer groups</li> <li>▪ Raise youth awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reducing risk of rape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Document cases</li> <li>▪ Visit health centre</li> <li>▪ Visit families</li> <li>▪ Discuss with other girls</li> <li>▪ Discuss problem with boys and men</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refugee adults to liaise with host community leaders and negotiate labour contracts for refugee parents so girls can stay in school</li> <li>▪ Office to assist refugee women and men with training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reducing risk of early pregnancy and marriage</li> <li>▪ Exploring income-generating schemes for parents and children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Find out more about problem of school uniform</li> <li>▪ Talk with other girls about livelihoods and other obstacles to education</li> <li>▪ Ask teachers and parents what would help</li> </ul>

## Annex 5: Participatory assessment prioritization report

Group: \_\_\_\_\_ Subgroup: (Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age group: \_\_\_\_\_)

Situation (urban, camp or return): \_\_\_\_\_

1. Human right violated / unmet	2. Protection risks or incidents	3. Causes

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Capacities	5. Solutions proposed by subgroup	6. Protection objective



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**Annex 6: Recording meetings**

Enquiry method	Female, age, background	Male, age, background	Total persons met with
Participatory observation			
Semi-structured discussions			
Focus group discussions			

**Annex 6a: Sample of recording meetings**

Enquiry method	Female, age, background	Male, age, background	Total persons met with
<b>Observed</b>	At schools, water points, food-distribution points	Border crossings	
<b>Semi-structured discussions</b>	Refugee leaders: <b>7</b> Refugee teachers: <b>5</b> Parents association: <b>3</b> Refugee health workers: <b>3</b> Host community: <b>10</b>	Refugee leaders: <b>7</b> Refugee teachers: <b>5</b> Parents association: <b>3</b> Refugee health workers: <b>3</b> Host community: <b>10</b>	Refugee leaders: <b>14</b> Refugee teachers: <b>10</b> Parents association: <b>6</b> Refugee health workers: <b>6</b> Host community: <b>20</b>
<b>Focus group discussions</b>	Age groups: (10-13): <b>13</b> (14-17): <b>14</b> (18-39): <b>15</b> (40+): <b>15</b>	Age groups: (10-13): <b>13</b> (14-17): <b>14</b> (18-39): <b>15</b> (40+): <b>15</b>	Age groups: (10-13): <b>26</b> (14-17): <b>28</b> (18-39): <b>30</b> (40+): <b>30</b>
<b>Individual discussions</b>	Poorest households: <b>5</b> Ethnic minorities: <b>5</b> Host community: <b>5</b> Implementing partners: <b>5</b> Various Govt. reps: <b>5</b> Others: <b>5</b>	Poorest households: <b>5</b> Ethnic minorities: <b>5</b> Host community: <b>5</b> Impl. partners: <b>5</b> Various Govt. reps: <b>5</b> Others: <b>5</b>	Poorest households: <b>10</b> Ethnic minorities: <b>10</b> Host community: <b>10</b> Impl. partners: <b>10</b> Various Govt. reps: <b>10</b> Others: <b>10</b>

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**Annex 7: Sample meeting schedule**

Office XX	Team A	Team B	Team C
<b>Weeks prior</b>	Multifunctional team discusses mapping diversity, methods, themes, facilitating discussions, ways to inform people of concern, ways for urgent follow-up, splitting up into small teams and sets schedule.		
<b>Days prior</b>	Brief women's association, cooperatives on participatory assessment	Brief youth committees and school principals on participatory assessment	Brief women and men community leaders on participatory assessment
<b>Day 1</b>			
09h00-10h00	Observe schools	Observe community centre	Observe clinic
10h00-12h00	Focus group adolescent girls	Focus group adolescent girls	Focus group women (18-40)
12h00-13h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
14h00-16h00	Focus group adolescent boys	Focus group adolescent boys	Focus group men (18-40)
16h00-17h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
<b>Day #</b>			
09h00-10h00	Observation/spot check	Urgent follow-up	Home visit
10h00-12h00	Focus group men (over 40)	Focus group men (over 40)	Focus group men (over 40)
12h00-13h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
14h00-16h00	Focus group women (over 40)	Focus group women (over 40)	Focus group women (over 40)

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16h00-17h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
<b>Day #</b>			
09h00-10h00	Home visit handicapped	Observation/spot check	Urgent follow-up
10h00-12h00	Focus group girls (10-13)	Focus group girls (10-13)	
12h00-13h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
14h00-16h00	Focus group boys (10-13)	Focus group boys (10-13)	Focus group men (18-40)
16h00-17h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
<b>Day #</b>			
09h00-10h00	Home visit	Home visit	Observation
10h00-12h00	Focus group discussion		Focus group discussion
12h00-13h00	Systematization form	In office for other matters	Systematization form
14h00-16h00	Semi-structured discussion	Semi-structured discussion	Semi-structured discussion
16h00-17h00	Systematization form	Systematization form	Systematization form
<b>Day #</b>	<b>Follow-up actions (Informing community, Step 7)</b>		
<b>Day #</b>	<b>Prioritization form</b>		
	<b>Record meetings and participatory planning</b>		

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See *Agenda for Protection*, UNHCR, October 2003, Goal 3, Objective 4: Refugee communities empowered to meet their own protection needs; Goal 5, Objective 7: Achievement of self-reliance for refugees; Goal 6: Meeting protection needs of refugee women and children.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on participatory approaches, see also the *UNHCR Manual for Applying a Community-based Approach* (forthcoming), *Development Assistance for Refugee (DAR) Programmes, A Handbook for Planning and Implementing*, January 2005, Part III, Appendix II, and the *Handbook for Self-Reliance*, Tools 4 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> See “Reinforcing a Community Development Approach”, UNHCR, EC/51/SC/CRP.6, 15 February 2001. The Community Development Approach aims to: strengthen refugees’ initiative and partnership; reinforce dignity and self-esteem; and achieve a higher degree of self-reliance.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this Tool, the term ‘refugee’ should be read to include internally displaced, returnees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

<sup>5</sup> See *Participatory Planning in UNHCR - A Practical Guide*.

<sup>6</sup> See *UNHCR Manual*, chapter 4, Planning and Assessments.

<sup>7</sup> See *UNHCR Manual*, UNHCR, October 2002, chapter 4, section 1.4 on Operations Management System.

<sup>8</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) agreed to building a stronger humanitarian response capacity by working within an inter-agency collaborative approach under which a cluster leadership system would be developed to ensure accountability from operational agencies. See IASC Principals Meeting, Outcome Statement, 12 December 2005, United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/58/177 of 2004, and Secretary-General’s report, *In larger freedom*, 2005. The IASC itself was established in June 1992 in response to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance.

<sup>9</sup> See also *Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes, Handbook for Planning and Implementing*, Ibid., and *Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities*, UNHCR, May 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Mainstreaming diversity means including all backgrounds: ethnic, disability, religious, socio-economic, educational, nationality, etc.

<sup>11</sup> The Second Interagency Workshop on Implementing a Human Rights-based Approach in the Context of United Nations Reform, Stamford, USA, 5–7 May 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from *Gender-based Violence Tools Manual*, Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium, 2004 and Action for the Rights of Children (ARC), Situation Analysis, May 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See also *Framework for People-Oriented Planning*, UNHCR, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> See *Participatory Planning in UNHCR, A Practical Guide*.

<sup>15</sup> See Annex 2 for a fuller list of the main potential protection risks.

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see *Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes, Handbook for Planning and Implementing*, UNHCR, January 2005, Part III, Tools for Assessment, Planning, and Participatory Development.

<sup>17</sup> Individual cases of SGBV should not be discussed in a group, but community action to overcome and prevent SGBV can and should be discussed collectively.

<sup>18</sup> *Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal, A Manual for Catholic Relief Services Field Workers and Partners*, Catholic Relief Services, Baltimore, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> See Annex 3 for sample questions linked to these themes.

<sup>20</sup> In an internally displaced setting, inter-agency assessment teams could choose themes based on analyses of the context and protection risks of groups of concern.

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from ARC, October 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Child participation is strongly emphasized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and several of its articles are relevant in the context of communicating with children: Article 12, for example, emphasizes the right of the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, to express those views in all matters affecting him or her.

## Participatory Assessment in Operations

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