



GPC GLOBAL PROTECTION FORUM 2021 THEMATIC EVENT

Engagement with Armed Actors: Exploring Modalities for Community-Led Negotiations for Protection and Access

Wednesday 27 October 2021, 16:00 – 17:30 CET

Rationale/purpose

For years protection has been viewed through state-centric and legalistic lenses. Protection is the foremost responsibility of the state. Strategies for protection typically focus on influencing or changing the behaviour of state or non-state actors towards the civilians they govern, with the civilians “role” typically seen as a beneficiary – one who benefits from the protection of or provided by another. Civilians are seen as passive “recipients” of protection with little or no agency. Knowing where armed actors are going to be present informs dialogue with them about current harms posed to communities, particularly to children, and what these armed actors can do to minimize risks of these harms. The dialogues involve elements of advocating for improved behaviour and respect for applicable protection and prevention of, for example, the grave violations against children in conflict.

In addition to this top-down, state-centric mode of protection work, we should also be conceiving of protection as an activity done *by* civilians, not *to* civilians. We should view it as a process or set of activities that supports civilians in strengthening their own agency in conflict, of ownership over one’s own safety, and ability to mitigate the risks they may face. Civilians engage in self-protection actions daily to keep themselves and their families safe while hostilities are ongoing.

With this rationale, advisers from Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children are exploring how their organisations and humanitarians generally can support communities (if and when they need it, and they explicitly ask for it) on community-led negotiations for access and protection. In particular, we are exploring how we can appropriately support communities’ capacities to negotiate and engage armed actors and other relevant duty bearers for communities’ own protection and access to services.

We are learning from what Save the Children and War Child Holland found from their development of an evidence-based community-led approach to child protection, applicable in all contexts. We are exploring what modalities are appropriate for engaging armed actors in order to support and guide field teams to consider ways of engaging with and supporting communities.

This event will cover engagement with state and non-state armed actors and other relevant counterparts in the community and at leadership levels as a form of prevention work (which can also inform or shape response. These preventive efforts can involve directly conducting or pursuing structured dialogues via key partners at points where the counterparts presence and influence intersects with the root causes of risks or specific threats and could help to reduce the longer-term impact of harm and violence on affected persons.



Expected Outcome

This thematic event will take place after a plenary discussion at the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's Annual Meeting. By bringing this discussion on modalities of engagement with armed actors as a form of prevention to the Global Protection Cluster members as well, our aim is to bring awareness of insights from this specialised protection work to discuss with our peers elsewhere the humanitarian community. We want to explore this area with other humanitarian experts as our project progresses and we begin identifying and developing lines of action.

We will both learn from and share informed recommendations for ourselves and other practitioners as part of this effort. We will seek to adapt, refine or otherwise add to existing tools for dialoguing with armed actors and explore potential for new guidance on enabling and supporting communities in their own negotiations for self-protection where possible and appropriate, building an approach that can be made as situation-specific and strongly community-owned as the situation permits.

Format/Content of the Event

- Bob Jones, Save the Children, Civil-Military and Access Coordination Unit
- Hannah Jordan, NRC, Regional Protection Advisor – Asia, Europe, Latin America
- Oliver Kaplan, PhD. Associate Professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, Colorado
- Carla Suarez, Banting Fellow, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Maira Alejandra Avendano Rincon, NRC, Colombia
- Marina Di Lauro, OXFAM, Yemen

Format - Four guiding questions to lead discussion of panellists:

1. What is the role of civilian agency in armed conflict? (Research focus)
2. How can humanitarians support community agency in access and protection? (examples)
3. How do humanitarians ensure that negotiations are community-led?
4. Are humanitarian principles a limiting factor for community-led negotiations?

Plenary

English, French and Spanish with simultaneous translation.

Speakers/Moderator/ technical donor partner

- Moderator: Kiran Kothari or Robert Jones (Save the Children)
- Resource people: Hannah Jordan – Norwegian Refugee Council, Oliver Kaplin – Josef Korbel School of International Studies, Hernando Enriquez – Norwegian Refugee Council, Area Manager, Local Partner South Sudan
- Donors: SIDA and BHA

Field Cluster/Operations

Save the Children and NRC are bringing together protection, child protection and access actors together to advance this work. By presenting this work at both the Alliance Annual meeting and the GPC Forum 2021 we will include collective recommendations from both sets of expert colleagues in our work going forward.



Local voices

NRC and Save the Children are currently conducting research with communities in at least three countries worldwide to better understand the role of humanitarian community-led negotiations for self-protection, how it could be conducted (either mainstreamed, as a specialised programme or both) and receive guidance for affected persons who are engaging with armed actors on a daily basis how we can do this work, aligning with Do No Harm and without transferring risk to conflict affected persons.

As work progresses, we are working to bring in local voices and organizations that we work with on the research to this thematic event. The specific organizations and individuals will be identified during the research, which will take place between August-October.

Pre-event questions /survey to be shared with participants

Closer to the event we will send out a pre-event questionnaire to help us tailor the event to the audience. We will send this to the GPC by the end of August.

To what extent do you think humanitarian should be leading negotiations with armed actors on the behalf of communities in restricted access and protection contexts?

a1: Humanitarians should not be interfering in community engagement with armed actors, it brings too much risk to both communities and humanitarians and can disrupt delicately balanced agreements with armed actors which are protecting communities

a2: Humanitarians should only be involved in engagement with armed actors at the express request of the affected community, even if this limits support to communities who already have access to services/can reach humanitarians with that request

a3: Humanitarians have a role in engaging armed actors on their own behalf whilst simultaneously and pro-actively supporting communities in proximity to armed actors

a4: Humanitarians should always be involved when communities are engaging armed actors, to support with global best practices and tools and to provide a buffer between communities and armed actors

Do you think affected populations have a role in negotiations for access to services with military authorities?

a1: Yes, children should be in the lead in negotiating with military authorities

a2: Yes, children have a role in framing the mandate for negotiations

a3: No, children should not be involved in negotiations with military authorities as this puts them at risk and breaches the principle of “do no harm”

Background Reading

Oliver Kaplan, Resisting War, Cambridge University Press:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/resisting-war/238A6E00FF35E6FF526D97C028A1297C>