



COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Guiding principle 28:

2. Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of internally displaced persons in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration.

Introduction

The impact of the conflict in Syria is complex and wide ranging. It has caused forced displacement, sudden destitution, break-up of families and communities, as well as the collapse of social structures.

Unfortunately, too often, most responders to humanitarian crises do not consult communities or their representatives or they do but then develop and implement projects without further involvement by the community concerned. Providing truly community-based protection must involve affected groups in a community meaningfully and substantially in all aspects of programmes responding to their needs and strengthening their leading role as a driving force for change.



The link between communities and protection is mutually reinforcing. Working through community mechanisms enhances protection, and enhanced protection strengthens communities.

In the course of time, development and humanitarian organizations have increasingly realized that it is essential to understand communities in order to avoid harm and ensure that programmes do not inadvertently leave people and communities worse off. These organizations started to recognize the necessity of community participation and provide the community-based protection. This puts the capacities, rights and dignity of affected individuals at the center of programming, generates more effective protection outcomes, recognizes the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) resilience, capacities, skills and resources as well as builds on these to deliver solutions supporting the community's own goals.

Normally, communities and individuals develop mechanisms to respond to the protection issues they face. It is, therefore, essential for humanitarian organizations to identify these mechanisms and build on them to ensure that they are inclusive and that they incorporate human rights.

The international legal framework



The value of a community-based approach in enhancing the effectiveness of protection activities with IDPs has increased worldwide. Efforts in a number of countries to protect its individuals would only be effective with people from the communities driving the initiatives.

The fact that IDPs remain within the borders of the countries in which they are displaced means that there is great potential for sustainability and a firmer solutions orientation to community-driven initiatives.



The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, developed in 1998 with the encouragement of the Commission of Human Rights and the General Assembly Representative Deng, restate and compile the international human rights and humanitarian law relevant to the internal displacement and also attempt to clarify gaps in the these instruments. These Guiding Principles note that IDPs retain a broad range of rights including their right to participate equally in community affairs (guiding principle 22) and the right of their full participation in the planning and management of their return, resettlement or reintegration (guiding principle 28).

The Syrian context

Since the year 2012, humanitarian actors, i.e. United Nations (UN) agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) registered in Syria have been working with the Government of Syria on preparing on a yearly basis the Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP), later referred to as Strategic Response Plan, complementing the Syrian government led humanitarian response and other appeal frameworks in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182.

Given the magnitude of needs and the challenges faced by assistance and service providers to safely and regularly reach all affected populations, the SHARP 2014 highlights the necessity of encouraging and supporting community mobilization. This has proven to be an effective tool in strengthening community resilience, promoting solidarity and empowering affected populations to collectively identify and implement, in a participatory approach, solutions for their priority concerns. Examples mentioned in the SHARP include the support to community-based initiatives and small local organizations working directly with communities on protection and community services activities.

The SHARP also underlined the active participation of municipalities and local actors in sustaining local service delivery to foster stabilization and recovery in target areas and prevent additional cycles of displacement.



The Protection Sector Response

The Protection Sector has worked on identifying, understanding and meeting the various needs of the displaced populations. To do so, the Sector has launched four programmes following the community-based approach which are the Community Centers, Outreach Volunteers, Community-Based Initiatives and Empowerment of Local Organizations in order to better outreach, work closely with, and empower these populations.



Community Centers

The establishment of the community Centers promotes social mobilization as they offer a space for interaction and socialization among displaced and local communities in the process of integrity. They also ensure better access and outreach to vulnerable populations, while providing them with social and protection services, supporting their psychosocial well-being, giving insight into their needs and protection concerns and linking them with service providers and specialists.

The activities of the Community Centers are designed in line with the Age Gender Diversity Mainstreaming approach (AGDM), with special attention given to persons with specific needs. Some services provided within the Community Centers are information, counseling, educational support, psycho-social support (PSS), awareness raising, livelihood, support to Persons with Specific Needs and assessment activities, while others are outside these centers such as courses in the private sector, PSS clinical therapy, outdoor social and PSS activities, community empowerment and participation and needs assessment.

So far, the Sector supported 17 community centers operating in seven governorates which provided services and conducted activities to more than 2,791,700 beneficiaries in 2014.

Community-Based Initiatives

With the ongoing displacement, new social dynamics have developed and spontaneous community initiatives based on the Syrian tradition of solidarity have emerged. The Sector supports community-based initiatives and advocates for solutions coming from the IDP and affected communities where beneficiaries themselves are responsible for designing and implementing direct impact initiatives within an agreed timeframe.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 200 community-based initiatives have been supported such as basic rehabilitation and improvements, manufacturing emergency lights for prevention of SGBV, emergency rehabilitation of water sanitation facilities, sewing mattresses sheets and pillows for IDPs, cleaning campaigns and improving rooms used as teaching classes for children. Moreover, initiatives outside collective shelters have included self-managed kindergartens, sewing schools uniforms for IDP children, community garbage management systems, clean-up campaigns, collective food conservation initiatives, home schooling, recreational activities for children and many other initiatives.



Outreach Volunteers

With the prolongation of the crisis in Syria, around 105 areas in the country have become out of reach for international organizations not to mention the difficulty to access other areas for security reasons. Thus, a network of Outreach Volunteers was established by the sector composed of more than 300 male and female individuals of different age groups covering nine governorates in Syria.

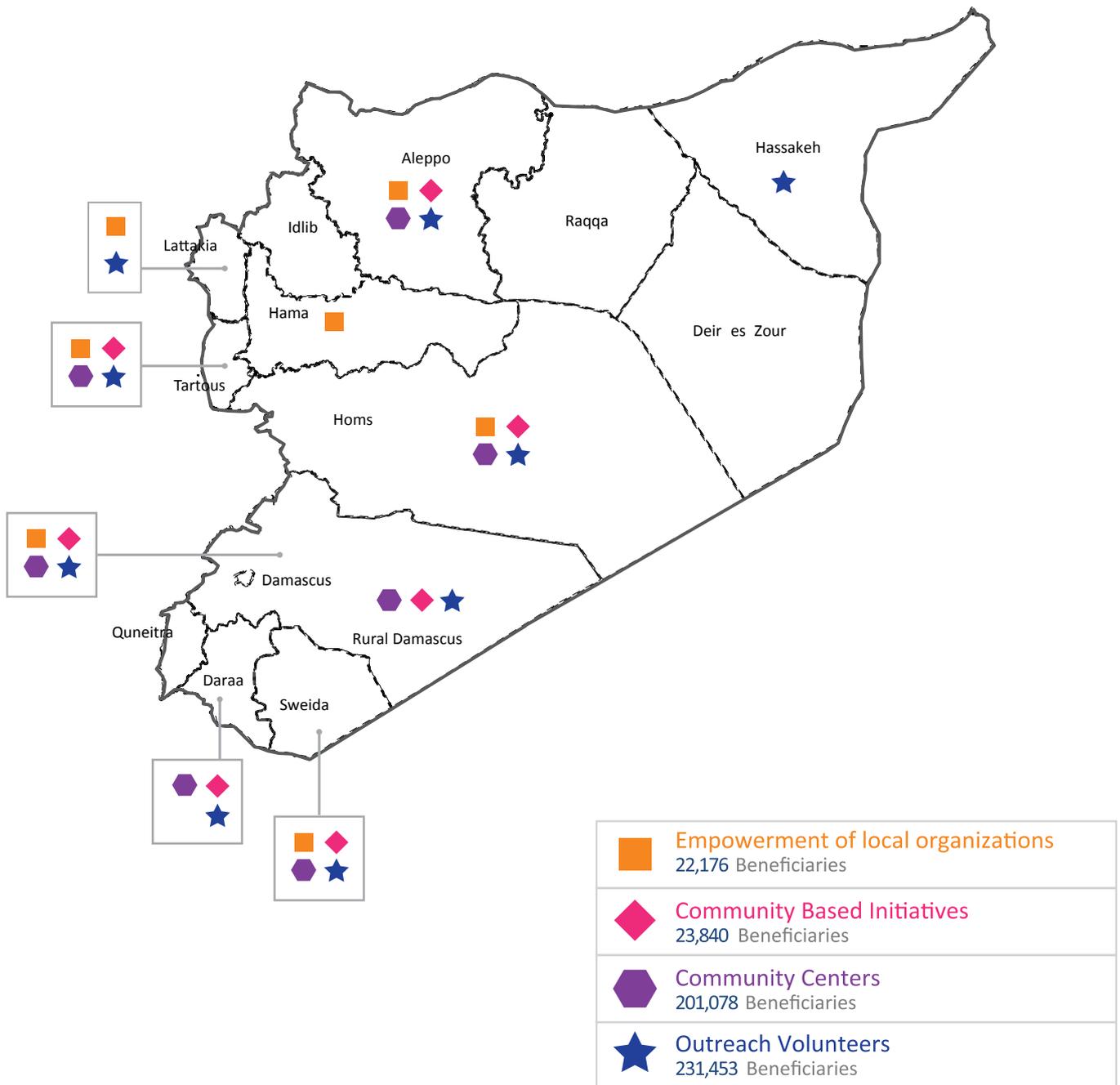
The outreach volunteers exceeded their traditional role in reaching the IDP population, communicating with them and engaging the host community. They become an important tool for ensuring the participation of IDPs, identifying their vulnerabilities, advocating for their right to have access to humanitarian services, exploring the local capacities and providing them with the proper support including care giving to persons with specific needs, information dissemination and awareness, as well as specialized services such as medical and Psycho-Social Support (PSS). They also represent an effective implementation tool in shelters and many hot areas that are inaccessible by the Sector.

Empowerment of local organizations

The Protection Sector works on empowering local organizations and strengthening the participation of local communities to respond to the humanitarian needs given the difficulty in reaching some areas in Syria. The Sector provides grants to local NGOs for the implementation of Quick Impact Projects in the field of protection, assistance of persons with specific needs, psychosocial support, education and women empowerment.

Since the start of the programme in 2013, a total of 19 capacity building grants for implementation of quick impact projects have been granted in Tartous, Lattakia, Homs, Damascus and Aleppo.

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