

Results-Based Protection Webinar Series and On-Line Discussion Forum

Protection Strategies: What We Know So Far Supporting results-based approaches to protection

Summary and Analysis

I. Background and Objectives

The Results-Based Protection Program hosts an online platform (<https://protection.interaction.org>) that serve as a point of reference and site for discussion on results-based approaches to protection. As part of the online platform, discussion forums and webinars are used as a space to solicit the contributions of key stakeholders, including practitioners and specialized experts, to develop the key elements of results-based protection.

The objective of the *Protection Strategies* [webinar series](#)¹ and [discussion forum](#)² was to capture good practice examples of results-based protection strategies. The goal was to shift discussions from the challenges of protection strategies to a more forward-thinking dialogue and an elaboration of the differences in approaches, potential lessons, and proven methodologies that enhance protection strategies.

This consultation involved a desk review of currently developed Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) protection strategies and a series of in-depth interviews with individuals representing NGOs, NGO consortia, and ProCap officers. The consultations were complemented by a *Guest Speaker Series* involving practitioners with direct experience in the development of protection strategies in different crisis environments. The scope of the consultations focused on seven components of a protection strategy:

1. **Process** (e.g. ownership, coordination, stakeholder engagement, timeframes, methodology)
2. **Content** (e.g. how a strategy was articulated in terms of outcome-oriented direction, output or activity driven objectives, and/or a process-heavy focus)
3. **Coverage** (e.g. whether or not a strategy included both prevention and response objectives and how both policy and operations are considered within a strategy)
4. **Analysis** (e.g. whether a thorough understanding of threat, vulnerability, and capacity underpins the response)

¹ Webinar: Guest Speaker Series <https://protection.interaction.org/>

² Terms of Reference: <https://protection.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/TOR-Protection-Strategies-FINAL.pdf>

5. **Contribution** (e.g. how the roles of humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors are considered in the response; the role of affected population, and whether the contribution of different actors supports a more robust and effective protection strategy)
6. **Causal Logic** (e.g. whether and how a theory of change underpins the response strategy)
7. **Accountability** (e.g. the need for benchmarks and other tools that could serve to monitor various interventions contributing to the response; should protection strategies be a tool to hold actors accountable or should a protection strategy serve primarily as a roadmap for a collective vision)

Preliminary findings from the consultations were highlighted in both a [Preliminary Findings Brief](#)³ and [webinar](#)⁴ at the start of the discussion and Guest Speaker Series. These findings were based on the stakeholder interviews covering the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic, Lebanon, Nigeria, and South Sudan.

II. Summary and Analysis of the Recommendations Stemming from the Consultations

The consultation findings validated several key elements identified through the [Results-Based Protection Program](#)⁵. Although the discussion was rich and provided an opportunity to reflect on the method and quality of protection strategies, there is still a need to further unpack what it will take within a protection strategy to achieve results. Several factors are underscored below that may improve the strategic planning process.

1. **Agree what is meant by “protection” and “protection strategy” as a starting point to develop priorities and a collective vision for protective outcomes**

For the purposes of this consultation, we used the term “protection strategy” to mean “a combination of efforts, often involving multiple actors and sectors, to bring about a desired protection outcome. In our methodology and analysis we emphasized that a strategy is larger than a single project or program. It should inform, and be informed by, a comprehensive set of efforts working towards a common desired outcome.”

During the consultations, however, we encountered differing views on what a protection strategy is understood to be, ranging from an overarching goal to an action plan, from a list of activities to a roadmap, or even simply a set of guiding questions. These varied interpretations led to confusion among stakeholders involved in the development of protection strategies and an inability to effectively engage in strategic planning processes. This was highlighted as especially difficult among local organizations for whom barriers to participate are even higher. These conflicting views create frustration and a lack of ownership and uptake of the strategy.

³ Protection Strategy Preliminary Findings: What We Know So Far: Supporting results-based approaches to protection <https://protection.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Protection-Strategy-Preliminary-Findings.pdf>

⁴ This webinar was recorded and can be downloaded on the Results-Based Protection Program on-line platform at: <https://protection.interaction.org/> or <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/7093248944527591169>

⁵ See Key Elements of Results-Based Protection <https://protection.interaction.org/elements-of-rbp/>

The content of protection strategies reflects the same degree of confusion. Priorities identified within strategies were often poorly articulated. The content within a protection strategy varied ranging from simply listing processes needed to improve a response, to safe programming practices, from service delivery to monitoring human rights violations. Most strategies lacked any genuine articulation of a causal pathway or the contributions needed by multiple actors to achieve a common desired outcome. In fact, the articulation of desired protection outcomes was often missing.

As noted in the “Independent Whole of System Review on Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action” report⁶, the humanitarian community continues to struggle with the lack of a clear conceptual and operational definition for protection. This gap, coupled with a basic misunderstanding of the differences between a strategy and an action plan, impede the very foundation necessary to achieve protection outcomes. This is compounded by confusion about the relationship among strategies at various levels, e.g. HCT protection strategy, protection cluster strategy, and organizational protection strategy.

Recommendations within the Whole of System Review report give impetus to clarify protection in practice. This should provide clarity on some level, but this consultation on protection strategies also found there is a need to deliberately articulate the nuances between what a protection strategy and an action plan should entail, and together set out the methodological process required to achieve both.

A **protection strategy** must start by defining the desired outcome or overarching goal you want to achieve. The “what” of the problem you are seeking to address should then be complemented by a description of “how” you intend to get there. This should include articulating the pathway or causal logic to achieve it, clearly defined corresponding objectives and indicators, and the complementary roles of the actors contributing to the desired outcome. It moves you from where you are now to where you want to be.

Based on a robust and continuous protection analysis, the **strategic plan** should explain why and how these desired protection outcomes and corresponding objectives are prioritized within the strategy. Informed by the causal logic exercise, it should set out the necessary pathways, measurable milestones, and the sequencing of action required to achieve the desired protection outcome. The strategy should also articulate the contributions required by different actors to achieve a protection outcome. Finally, a more detailed **action plan** listing specific activities, timelines, resources and funding requirements, and context-specific indicators should be developed to initiate the response.

As basic as this may sound, if the humanitarian community can start by simplifying the terminology and expected outputs of the strategic planning process for protection, this should provide clarity and management of expectations of all partners and actors in the process. This requires effective leadership, communication and coordination from the earliest stages of the response.

- 2. The quality of the methodological approach used to develop a protection strategy has significant bearing on whether or not protection outcomes can be measured and ultimately achieved.** The following components were identified as fundamental for strategic planning for protection:

⁶ Norah Niland, Riccardo Polastro, Antonio Donini, Amra Lee (2015) *Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action*

- *A culture of inclusivity*

Engagement with multiple actors through genuine consultations was emphasized throughout the consultation to support full ownership and uptake of a protection strategy. Engagement needs to go beyond those who typically attend protection cluster coordination meetings to include a diverse set of actors including civil society, national partner organizations, and the affected population.

Early engagement with all actors was deemed essential as was identifying context-specific methods for engagement with different actors. *How* actors are engaged is just as critical as *who* participates. Local civil society actors may not know or understand the humanitarian system of clusters, and role of the HCTs, and language and professional cultural practices may be different.

One interview highlighted that with often rushed processes to develop protection strategies and processes that exacerbate heated power struggles, local communities are often left out – “when they come to the table they are already at a loss”. Embedded in the process should be steps to build the capacity of local actors in order to ensure that they understand the language, purpose, and process they are being asked to engage in. This also means humanitarians need to adapt processes that can accommodate local actors.

Within an organizational strategy development process, one interviewee expressed the importance of engaging a wide range of staff including leadership, field staff, program managers to build a sense of ownership and buy-in of the strategy.

These investments ensure consultations are meaningful and avoid tokenistic and/or patronizing approaches. Building trust among all actors was identified as the basis for engagement. This requires a transparent and two-way dialogue among all actors.

- *Build from the ground up and identify community-based protection as the starting point for the response*

Strategy development has been seen as a top-down process, limiting involvement and a sense of ownership at the field level and those implementing programs. This results in a document that sits on the shelf and is referred to only when donors or inter-agency accountability mechanisms require a review. As much as protection needs strong leadership to ensure that it is central to humanitarian response, the strategic planning process must be driven from the ground up. This requires empowered staff capacity and competency, particularly in analytical and decision-making skills, in order to enable them to problem-solve. It also means consistent engagement with affected populations, as far as possible and where it is safe to do so, to develop relationships of trust.

A [webinar guest speaker](#) noted that top-down approaches have resulted in a strategy that was removed from the reality of what was happening on the ground and was not a useful tool for implementing partners. She underscored that there is an opportunity for operational agencies to use their daily engagement and trusted relationships with communities to ensure that the strategy is grounded in the perspective of the affected populations.

More needs to be done to help humanitarians identify, understand, support, and build on community-led initiatives and coping mechanisms. In the final webinar reflection on protection strategies, Louise Aubin, Global Protection Cluster Coordinator, stated, “we need to be humble about the contributions

we as humanitarians make and how we add value,” citing the need to recognize and better analyze community solutions as part of protection strategies.⁷

- *Invest in and undertake a context-specific protection analysis*

Robust, context-specific and disaggregated protection analysis, based on the experience of the affected population as the starting point, is critical. This entails thorough understanding of the threats and of the behavior, motivations, and practices of actors driving the threats. It requires understanding of who is vulnerable *vis a vis* a specific threat and why, as well as what capacities people have to address the threat. It entails identifying coping mechanisms (both negative and positive) used by affected populations to build on community-driven solutions. A detailed disaggregation of the most severe and prevalent risk patterns is the essential basis for problem-solving. Without a detailed understanding of the specific context from the viewpoint of those affected, protection strategies and program design are based on generalizations and assumptions rather than measurable risk reduction.

- *Articulate how the desired protection outcome will be achieved.*

Drawing on the disaggregated analysis of threats, vulnerabilities and capacities, develop a context-specific causal logic to describe the pathway and milestones leading to the desired end state or outcome of reduced risk. The Results-Based Protection Program has found that a causal logic exercise, for example using a theory of change methodology, helps to stimulate thinking and questions that lead to better problem-solving. This helps describe the roles of various actors to contribute to the desired protection outcome as well as identify assumptions made about the intervention and its limitations. The exercise should also articulate the sequencing and timing of action taken to address the risk factors while recognizing that change is often long-term. Context-specific pathways to reduce risk help to identify measurable interim results or milestones of progress towards a protection outcome. It serves to enhance understanding about the complementary role of diverse actors towards a common outcome.

- *Methods and facilitation of the strategic planning process impact the quality, ownership, and uptake of the protection strategy*

The review found that the facilitation of the strategic planning process was just as important, and sometimes more, than the actual strategy itself. This demonstrates the broad recognition of the need for a strong, competent facilitator that can cultivate trusting relationships and facilitate inter-agency collaboration. An effective facilitator for protection strategies should be able to balance contributions from multiple actors, manage expectations, foster a transparent process, and help shape collective decision-making. Regardless of whether the individual is the protection cluster coordinator, ProCap officer, GBV or CP Rapid Response Teams (RRT), or other individual who takes on the role of facilitator, they should embody the necessary skills and experience needed to facilitate the process.

As important as the facilitation of a protection strategy planning process is the methodology used. Consultations highlighted an approach that moves beyond a ‘meeting’ and involves a sequence of steps designed through careful planning and attention to the cultural context and environment. Time and attention should be allocated to identify appropriate methods that can foster a process that generates collective thinking and vision. Structured workshops, participatory action methods, causal logic exercises, and other methods should be explored while keeping in mind that engaging different stakeholders may require different approaches.

⁷ Guest Speaker Webinar with Louise Aubin, Global Protection Cluster Coordinator, A reflection on the findings and moving beyond obstacles <https://protection.interaction.org/>

Recommendations that came from the consultations and webinars highlighted a need to monitor the leadership role in managing the protection strategy process to ensure emphasis is placed on quality of the process in addition to the output. There should be clear benchmarks and indicators that measure and highlight achievement of the method used for the strategic planning process.

- *Regularly monitor the causal logic behind the protection strategy to identify shifts in the situation that may require adjustments in the response.*

Monitoring of a strategy should go beyond measuring progress of the activities carried out to fulfill a protection strategy, but should enable continual assessment of whether the causal logic underpinning the strategy continues to be the most appropriate in an ever-changing crisis environment. Monitoring should enable an iterative process of reflection. It should challenge assumptions, review the current response, and inform adaptations in activities, timelines, sequencing, and contributing actors. Indicators that track the logic behind the response may serve as a means to monitor assumptions made and whether the response is realistic and achievable.

3. Disaggregation of risk supports a solutions-based approach.

A protection strategy must begin by identifying and articulating the actual risks and describing the causal logic behind the necessary action. Too often a protection strategy generalizes or assumes a number of protection risks but is unclear in the specifics that make up that risk.

For example, a strategy may indicate that children are at risk of forced recruitment into armed forces. A results-based approach to protection requires less sweeping statements and more nuanced disaggregation of the risk within the protection strategy. Therefore, the risk may be better described as *“boys between the ages of 7 and 12 of ## ethnic group, in ## area, are at risk of forced recruitment by ## non-state armed group. The risk is heightened during the hours of ## and when boys are traveling to and from school.”* A protection analysis which lends itself to a protection strategy should further detail the threat, the factors driving the threat, reasons why certain groups are vulnerable, the existing capacities or community-based protection mechanisms that reduce or aim to mitigate the threat. For example, *“The ## armed group uses trained “recruiters” out-of-uniform that target ## boys through offers of money and bribes. Schoolteachers have raised concern by initiating door-to-door campaigns. Caregivers have started a buddy-system to walk children to and from school and local watchdog groups have formed to alert families when the presence of out-of-uniform forces are in the community.”*

This more detailed disaggregation of the risk is more conducive to problem-solving and, along with a causal logic exercise, pushes actors to identify practical solutions in their given context rather than more generalized interventions.

III. Achieving Results

Although consultations validated elements of results-based protection which have already been identified and could strengthen the quality of a protection strategy, will this result in the achievement of protection outcomes? The relationship of a protection strategy to program design and implementation needs to be further explored in order to assess the relevance of a protection strategy to measurably reduce risk. Some questions for further exploration include:

- 1. What should drive the prioritization of issues and the response? Does prioritization help with better results when it comes to measurable protection outcomes?**

The consultations brought forward good recommendations for improving prioritization, however little attention was given to the criteria or key considerations that should be used to prioritize once the full scope of risks faced by a vulnerable population have been identified.

Methods of prioritization can include: 1) a causal logic exercise, 2) sound and purposeful data collection and analysis, 3) ranking of what is reasonable and/or practical given the context, and 4) with the views of multiple actors, including the affected population.

However, what criteria should be used to determine the priorities addressed in a protection strategy?

The consultations highlighted that prioritization was done haphazardly with issues moving up in prioritization due to the availability of funding, an HC's own interest or agenda, agency mandate or operational models, government or donor policy, and media attention. Little attention has been given to systematizing the criteria for prioritization within a protection strategy. Criteria could involve, for example:

- The severity of the risk in terms of its impact on, and consequences for, people's lives
- How widespread or prevalent⁸ the risk is
- The views of the affected population regarding issues to be prioritized
- Violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) or human rights

Several additional questions to explore include:

- 2. How should a protection strategy address the comparative advantage for humanitarian actors alongside other potential actors to address a protection issue?**
- 3. A protection strategy should reflect an agreed vision for addressing a protection issue. Given the need for multiple actors to contribute to the achievement of a protection outcome, what is needed to bring about a common vision? Does the absence of a common vision among actors impact the potential to achieve measurable results? How can a causal logic exercise within strategic planning processes capture the different assumptions and theories of change by multiple actors?**
- 4. How are different actors, including donors, held accountable within the protection strategy?**

These questions and others will continue to be explored to unpack the role of protection strategies for results-based protection.

⁸ Prevalence is not only measured by counting incidents or the number of reports of a particular abuse. It can be measured by surveying people's perceptions of prevalence, in combination with other factors (e.g. if an armed group is known to rape, then their territorial expansion is an indication of increased prevalence of risk).

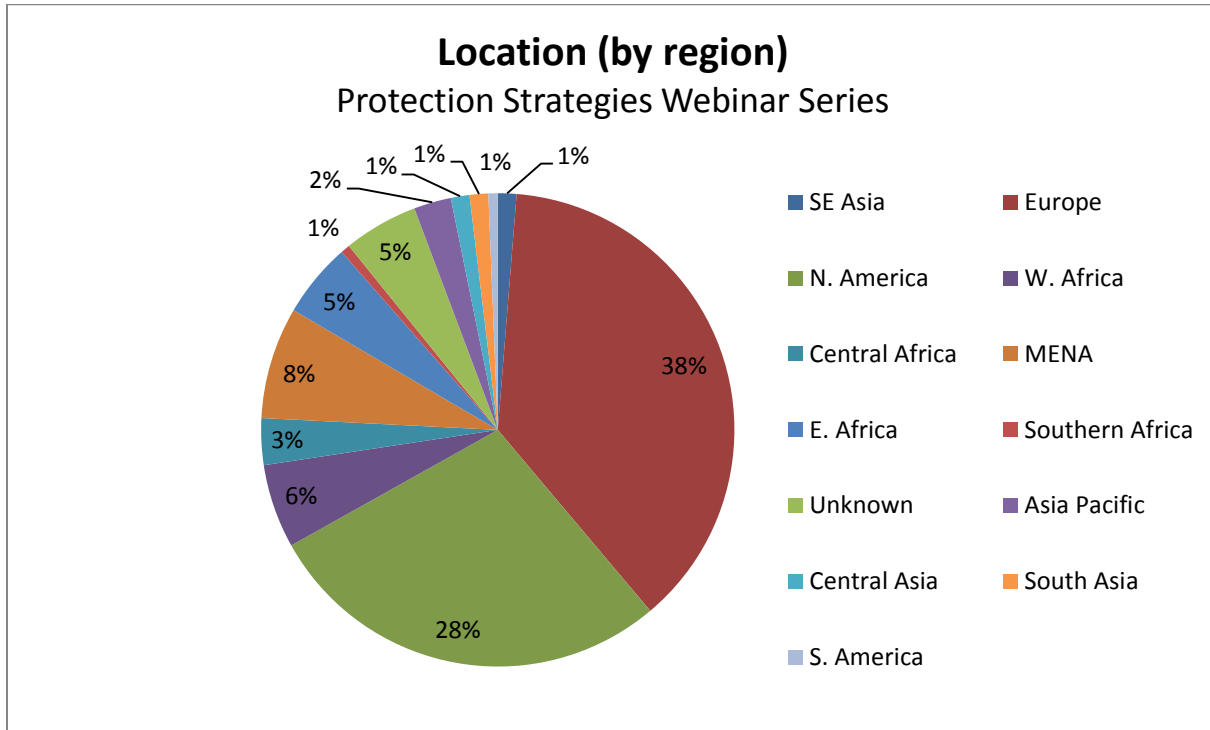
IV. Participants and Methodology

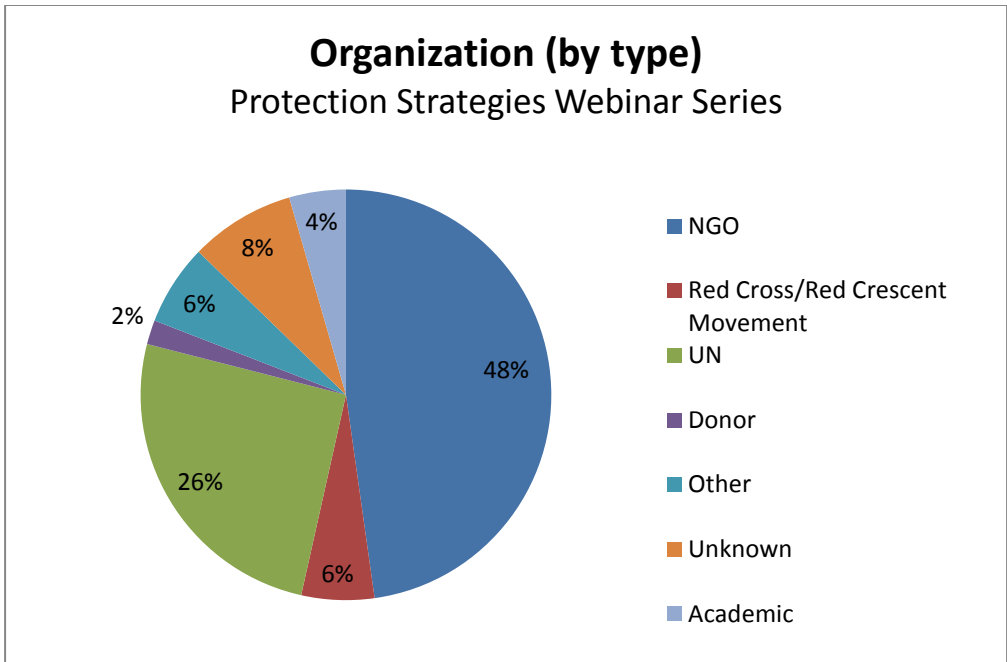
1. Participants

The [guest speaker webinar series](#) featured:

- **Building From the Ground Up: Lea Krivchenia** – Program Manager at Nonviolent Peaceforce, South Sudan
- **Protection Strategies through the lens of GBV: Kate Rougvie** – Former Gender-based Violence & Protection Sector Advisor / GBV Sub-Cluster Co-Coordinator, Central African Republic
- **Content Matters: Exploring the Substance within a Protection Strategy: Caroline Masbouni** – Protection coordinator/ GBV specialist, Danish Refugee Council, Lebanon
- **A Reflection on the Findings and Moving Beyond Obstacles: Louise Aubin** – Global Protection Cluster Coordinator

Webinar Series: 157 individuals attended the webinar series either by attending the sessions live or downloading the recordings.





2. Methodology

The aim of the webinar series and discussion was to build from a preliminary review of existing protection strategies and interviews with key stakeholders to capture examples of good practice that demonstrate key elements of a protection strategy that can support a results-based approach to protection. Through the analysis of the content of the webinar series and online discussion forum, the Results-Based Protection Program team was able to review opportunities and gaps and identify critical questions that continue to challenge the humanitarian community as it relates to protection strategies and results-based approaches to protection.

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