tool 34 Opportunities and Challenges of Engaging with Communities to Monitor and Respond to Grave Violations

Factsheet

International and national NGOs usually implement activities in close collaboration with community members, often organized in the form of formal or semi-formal structures (community-based organizations, committees, etc.). Engagement with communities creates several opportunities to improve monitoring and response to grave violations:

- Communities are essential sources of information.

- They can facilitate referrals and the provision of assistance to victims.

- Influential community members can be instrumental in local advocacy efforts.

- In some areas, a confidence-based relationship with local communities is essential for the security and protection of NGO staff.

- They are key actors in any effort to build an overall protective environment for children for prevention and reintegration purposes.

In turn, lack of engagement with communities may make it impossible to monitor and respond to grave violations, in particular in difficult to reach areas or closed communities. Confidence-building is crucial in these cases.

NGOs participating in the MRM have worked with communities in various ways, depending on the context and on the modality of their engagement in the mechanism. Collaboration can range from relying on communities for alerts on incidents of grave violations to empowering communities to document cases and engage in follow-up and local advocacy. While each context is different, the following table outlines some typical challenges and possible mitigating strategies:

Challenge	Possible mitigating strategies	Illustrative case studies
Potential bias: communities may be polarized along ethnic, national, cultural, religious or political dividing lines. In certain contexts, communities may also actively support a party to the conflict. This affects their objectivity and neutrality when alerting or helping to document violations.	• Involving external actors trained and able to identify potential biases and cross-check information. • Training community monitors on rigorous documentation methodology. • Diversifying outreach to communities in order to achieve an overall balance at the country or regional level.	• Case study 'Monitoring grave violations through child protection networks in the Gaza Strip'. • Case Study 'Community-led monitoring in Southeastern Myanmar'.
Resistance to 'outsiders' and detrimental community practices/positions: international presence and internationally-agreed upon standards are not always accepted by local communities, due to existing cultural and social norms and traditions (e.g., girls' right to education, who is considered a child). Communities may also adopt coping mechanisms that create risks for children (e.g., encouraging youth to join an armed group, involving children in self-defense groups).	• Permanent or frequent field presence in order to build confidence progressively. • Empowering communities in the protection of children. • Using participatory methods to sensitize communities.	• Case study 'Community engagement in prevention of recruitment and protection of children at risk in Colombia'.

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Challenge	Possible mitigating strategies	Illustrative case studies
Potential unreliability due to voluntary engage-ment: individuals who are active in community structures often do so on a voluntary basis. Inevitably, their engagement may waiver due to demotivation, competing family or community responsibilities, or security risks.	• Plan regular training/awareness-raising to address high turn-over of community volunteers. • Devise non-financial strategies to acknowledge and encourage community efforts. • Devise emergency protection strategies. • Manage community expectations.	• Case study 'Village Child Protection Committees in Eastern DRC'. • Case study 'Emergency fund for referrals in Eastern DRC'. • Case study 'Monitoring grave violations through child protection networks in the Gaza Strip'.
Frustration among the community as a whole: communities may perceive available response as inadequate, slow or insufficient. In certain contexts, the six grave violations may cover only a limited portion of conflict-related child protection issues identified by communities. If monitoring is limited in its scope, it may lose relevance for communities and create frustration.	• Empower communities to make the link between monitoring activities and referral pathways or response programs. • Link monitoring of grave violations to wider child rights monitoring outside the framework of the MRM. This can widen the scope of issues monitored and addressed through community structures, which in turn ensures efforts stay relevant for communities.	• Case study 'Monitoring grave violations through child protection networks in the Gaza Strip'

related tools

🔗 **tool 36** – Case study 'Monitoring grave violations through child protection networks in the Gaza Strip'

🔗 **tool 37** – Case study 'Community-led monitoring in Southeastern Myanmar'

🔗 **tool 38** – Case study 'Village Child Protection Committees in Eastern DRC'

🔗 **tool 53** – Case study 'Emergency fund for referrals in Eastern DRC'

🔗 **tool 16** – Factsheet 'NGO participation in the MRM: potential challenges and limitations'

🔗 **tool 35** – Do's and don'ts 'Providing feedback and managing victims/community expectations in relation to the MRM'

🔗 **tool 57** – Case study 'Community engagement in prevention of recruitment and protection of children at risk in Colombia'

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