



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Summary of Community Based Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Definitions and Terminology



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Introduction



Verbal communication is one of the core ways humanitarian workers work with children, families, community members, government officials, and others who protect children in humanitarian crises. However, humanitarian terminology is not always contextualized to the appropriate language and concepts of affected people. This review examines common terms related to community-based child protection (CBCP) and their evolving definitions. These definitions were collected through a systematic review of over 234 documents from both published and grey literature.

Community

The concept of community generally includes two aspects: a structural dimension and a functional dimension. The notion of structure refers to a defined geographical area. Function appears in the social and psychological ties amongst members. Thus, 'community' can also refer to groups of people who are physically separated but who are **connected** by other common characteristics, such as profession, interests, age, ethnic origin, or language. Communities frequently consist of multiple sub-groups that differ according to religion, socio-economic status, and ethnicity, and some sub-groups may wield much more power and influence than others.

Community Based



'Community-based' can refer to (a) a practice or institution or (b) an approach. The first describes an organisation **created and controlled by local people for their own benefit**. These can be traditional organisations or recently formed groups designed to help members meet basic needs and further common interests, such as self-help groups or village development committees.

In humanitarian action, a community-based approach is a **guiding principle**. It prioritises communities' meaningful and substantial engagement in all aspects of programmes that affect them and seeks to strengthen the community's leading role as an agent of change. It recognises the dignity, resilience, capacities, skills and resources of each member of the community; builds on these to deliver protection and solutions; and supports the community's own goals. Community-based programmes prioritise the involvement of community members at every stage, from assessment and diagnosis to monitoring and evaluation.

Community Based Child Protection (Mechanism, Group, Committee)

Most existing definitions of ‘community based child protection’ include a core element: **a network or group of individuals at community level who work in a coordinated manner to protect children from harm.** The form of that network can vary greatly between contexts. It can be formal or informal, initiated by local volunteers, or led by externally funded individuals or organisations. These groups operate at the grassroots or district level as opposed to a national or international level. Some examples of community based child protection mechanisms include child welfare committees, religious groups that support orphans and other vulnerable children, and traditional processes for responding to violations against children.

Community Driven

'Community driven' (or 'community-led') can be distinguished from 'community based' by a single word: **ownership**. In community driven action, the community itself has the sense that the problems identified are theirs and that they hold primary responsibility for addressing them. Community-led approaches are ones that are led not by outsiders but by community members themselves. Community-led approaches are grounded in the ability of ordinary people, even under difficult circumstances, to organise themselves, define their main problems or challenges, and collectively address those problems.

Formal Child Protection System



Most definitions of the ‘formal child protection system’ describe it as a **comprehensive and sustainable set** of structures, functions, mechanisms or processes to **prevent and respond to child protection concerns**. This includes laws, policies, regulations, and services. Many definitions assume that the government is ultimately responsible for supervision and regulation, though community and international individuals and organisations can be involved in implementation. Some definitions consider ‘more formal’ community based structures (such as chiefdoms) to be part of the formal system, while others do not.

Informal Child Protection System



In many ways, ‘informal child protection systems’ are defined similarly to **community driven** activities. They are child protection initiatives undertaken by families, communities and children themselves to

- (a) promote children’s well-being and protection and
- (b) mobilise community resources to strengthen families and to respond when children are mistreated.

Some elements of informal child protection systems (such as community leaders) may also be integrated into formal systems as stakeholders.

Family and Kinship Structures

Definitions of 'family and kinship structures' are largely **culturally determined**. Some limit 'family and kinship' to blood relatives or formal foster families. Others expand to include private arrangements whereby the child is regularly or indefinitely cared for in a family setting by relatives, friends (informal kinship care), or other individuals. These arrangements can be initiated by the child, his/her parents or another person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body. 'Family' can therefore refer to the extended family offering kinship care, child-headed households and formal and informal foster families unrelated to the child.

Child Welfare Workforce



The 'child welfare workforce' includes all categories of people who **work** in the public sector, private nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and faith-based organisations (FBOs) **on behalf of highly vulnerable children**. This includes frontline social workers and paraprofessionals (with and without qualifications); child protection officers; community para-social workers; teachers and trainers of social workers; child welfare supervisors; managers and program planners; and local and national advocates.