



Community
Engagement
Forum



Tip-sheet for

Community-led Projects

in Displacement Settings

A guide offering insights on defining CLPs, case studies, considerations, challenges, and best practices for CCCM practitioners

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

<i>I.I Introduction</i>	3
<i>I.II Brief introduction to CLPs as a response modality</i>	3

II. ADDRESSING KEY CHALLENGES

<i>II.I Challenges that can be addressed through preconditions</i>	5
<i>II.II Practical solutions to address challenges during planning and implementation</i>	8

III. CLPS HANDOVER

<i>III.I Transfer of assets to the community</i>	12
<i>III.II. Measuring impact</i>	12
<i>III.III. Making CLPs sustainable</i>	13

IV. WAY FORWARD

V. USEFUL RESSOURCES

14

I. INTRODUCTION

I.I Introduction

Participation in decision-making about choices affecting their lives is a right of any individual experiencing displacement, and one of the main areas of community engagement (CE) that helps achieve accountability to the affected population in displacement responses. Community-led projects (CLPs) can be an effective modality for facilitating meaningful participation of the affected population, and to handing over the ownership of project decisions and assets to the community. CLPs can have a number of beneficial outputs such as community empowerment, self-reliance and when implemented through the CCCM Area Based Approach, they can lead towards community cohesion. Such initiatives are at the core of localisation efforts. This tip-sheet is addressed primarily to CCCM practitioners, however it can be utilised by others equally.

This document draws on the experiences and examples shared by practitioners during a series of workshops organised by the Community Engagement Forum together with the CCCM Global Cluster's Participation in Displacement Working Group between May - July 2023. The aim of the workshops was to develop a common understanding of how to define CLPs, provide case studies of CLPs from different contexts, and to unpack the considerations, challenges and best practices from practitioners who have planned, implemented and handed over CLPs as a sustainable approach within displacement contexts[1].

I.II Brief introduction to CLPs as a response modality

The CLP process is an approach where the objective is to support communities to identify needs, develop their own project design, roll out implementation and manage a project benefiting their community, based on their priorities. CLPs are a useful modality to utilise in situations when working with the community has reached a certain level[2] of engagement and its solidification is feasible, a localised response is warranted (including reduced access).

[1] The recording of the first part of the first workshop (before the group discussions) can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/stQZztZo7wc>

The recording of the online session where the CLP Guidance developed by the CCCM Cluster in Yemen were introduced can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/IEUFapW5oQk?feature=shared>

More resources can be found at the end of this document.

[2] Where there might be a low level of existing participation, certain steps need to be in place before an agency can start collaborating with the community on a CLP, specifically established community representation groups trained on their role and responsibilities. In the Community Governance Structure chapter in the NRC toolbox, which includes training and coaching tools for the community members, you can find tools for preparing the community to better lead the CLP process. If there is no pre-existing community representation group to work with, there are specific tools for introducing the idea of a representation structure and for selecting representation structure members. Whether the community structure is newly established or not, if they do not already have agreed with the community members their responsibilities there are also tools for developing the representatives' terms of references and a code of conduct.

Prior to starting the identification and prioritisation of community needs, key project criteria should be agreed upon by the key stakeholders (e.g. humanitarian agency staff, community representatives, local authorities, etc.). As an initial step, organisations planning to roll out CLPs should consider a few key preconditions necessary to be able to adequately support the community through the process:

- Available dedicated resources: financial and project dedicated trained staff.
- Previous systematic engagement with the community structures: representative community structures could be a leadership committee, a women’s group, a youth group, focal points, a sectoral committee such as a WASH or health committee etc.
- Pre-engagement with all stakeholders: this could take the form of a workshop which includes the local authorities, the displaced and affected/host community, as relevant to the case.
- Risk evaluation including housing, land and property criteria, in case of structural CLP.

The CLPs should include a benchmark plan for transferring resources such as cash grants or assets to the community members for project implementation. The plan must also include the necessary coaching, technical and material support activities to be provided by the humanitarian agency during implementation. Training on all aspects of project design, implementation and management (including reporting) should be provided.

The projects should build on community-based solutions and action plans:

- The community themselves identifies the solutions to the prioritised problems.
- The projects rely on skills and additional resources existing within the community.
- The projects’ outputs can be material and/or non-material.
- The humanitarian agency should support when necessary, but ideally the community could have already initiated efforts or could continue to drive such projects without the agency’s support.

The CLP process can be divided into 3 main phases[3]: preparation, planning and implementation and monitoring, with the following key steps or activities included in the phases (useful tools for each phase can be found in the resources section at the end of this document):



Figure 1: Community-led Projects Process

[3] Diagram based on the diagram from Community Coordination Toolbox’ ‘Guide to establish CLPs’.

II. ADDRESSING KEY CHALLENGES

II.I Challenges that can be addressed through preconditions

Potential Challenges	How to address this through preconditions
The time allocated for the CLP is usually not enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure enough time is allocated to the project selection step[4]. This often requires going back to the community group involved several times in order to agree on a project and how to implement it. • Also make sure your agency's internal programme, logistics and admin departments are on board with the process and understand the need for as much flexibility as possible regarding different procedures.
Too many selection criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a project selection committee, including representatives from the displaced community, who should agree on the selection criteria. • Aim to limit as much as possible the criteria that are expressions of the implementing agency and donor requirements, while thoroughly explaining the reasons behind these, and focus the criteria to benefit the selection committee.
Access restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and access analysis of the relevant areas ahead of project selection time. • A certain level of access could be a condition for implementing CLPs with a certain community. In the case of not reaching this level or we risk losing access at a later point during the CLP process, it might be better to focus on other types of CE activities. • Ensure solid structures already exist and systematic engagement has been taking place enough to form a relationship. Reporting systems should have also been established such as sending pictures or videos, calls, simple things.
Staff capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure project staff are trained in participatory approaches, accountability to affected population (AAP), how to coach, mentor and support community structures, and in the CLP development process before starting the planning phase. • The staff should be from or familiar with the local context, aware of the community's cultural sensitivities and speak the local language(s).

[4] See sample timelines in [CLP case studies](#) for guidance. Keep in mind that the time needed to start the CLP process will be based on time invested already in building trust and capacity among the affected population.

Potential Challenges	How to address this through preconditions
Community's priorities may not fit the resources allocated for the CLP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the community is coached in how to identify CLPs based on capacities existing within the community, based on the joint identified needs. • Inform the community about the available resources (approximate funds available per project). Even if it is not possible to disclose the exact amount, providing a budget range can ensure transparency and avoid raising expectations and receiving proposals that are beyond the available CLP resources.
Trust (or the lack thereof)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to avoid planning a CLP in the first 3 - 6 months of your agency's presence in the community. For the community to trust the process they need to trust the staff and the agency involved, which needs time. • Ensure that the community comprehends the significance of the CLP and possesses a thorough grasp of the advantages associated with it. This understanding will build trust as well as empower them to take the lead in fostering its growth and safeguarding its sustainability. • Consider starting off transferring smaller amounts/ have the project broken into stages with funds disbursed once a certain component is completed (the possibility to do this may depend on the nature of the project).
Housing, land and property (HLP) issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure any HLP issues have been clarified before planning can start. If necessary, aim for an MoU between stakeholders involved related to the HLP situation.
Risk of the project specifically benefiting the selection committee and/or representation committee members rather than the larger community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with the community to identify project participants who need CLPs the most. (This should be one of the main selection criteria - that the project benefits the whole or an entire group of the community.) • It's advisable to focus on larger groups in these projects, fostering a shared ownership that encourages the long-term preservation of the initiative and safeguards it against theft or damage. • In the beginning of the projects, creating a gap matrix in collaboration with the community is essential. This matrix can help identify areas where service providers can address the gaps, coordinating with other sectors or clusters. In cases where certain gaps can't be filled by service providers, those become potential targets for CLPs. This could allow projects that would benefit smaller groups to be handled by service providers rather quickly. • Aiming for projects with a longer time horizon for CLPs is a strategic approach to ensure their sustainability. • Conducting community consultation with various groups after the selection committee has agreed upon a project to fund provides room for feedback and views that are different from the selection committee's.

Potential Challenges	How to address this through preconditions
Lack of agencies and services in the area to address prioritised needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder mapping to be done before the project selection process, where the community group should be coached to identify projects based on community capacities, or existing external services available. • Conduct an influence analysis of the problems identified from the problem identification and prioritisation exercise regarding what influence the community members have and on what.
Short funding cycles and limitations of flexibility from the donors' side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having discussions with donors to explain the need • for a longer-term focus and flexibility in order to achieve sustainable CLPs • with a greater impact. It's important to balance donor expectations with • community realities and emphasise the need for donor flexibility to ensure • that the projects remain as community-led as possible without requiring • detailed project specifications from the proposal stage onwards.
Host community considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigate potential conflicts by carefully assessing and understanding the dynamics between the displaced and host communities. • Conflict sensitivity should be always considered in all the stages. Risk of creating tensions among community groups with the implementation of CLPs should be evaluated and addressed accordingly. • Invite or involve a percentage of the host community population in the CLP selection committee and/or CLP community group. • CLPs could be a useful approach when CCCM activities are implemented through area-based approaches when they involve all the population or an entire population group (e.g. all the women, all the youth), in the catchment area, regardless of status.

II.II Practical solutions to address challenges during planning and implementation

Challenge	What can we do to prevent/mitigate it?	What can we do if we encounter it?	What tools & guidance do we need?
Illiteracy in some groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop standard operating procedures integrating how the process and methodology can be adapted to include the illiterate groups. • Selective targeting vs. extra support to illiterate to follow process together with literate groups. • Prior information sharing on CLPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity building on adapting methodology and process. • Simplify the tools and materials and find alternative ways. This might involve utilising visual aids and graphics, implementing verbal communication strategies etc. unless the community itself selects a project that is based on literacy (then in this case focusing on capacity building for the community). 	<p>Tool: Learning and Resources Needs Assessment for committees: LRNA</p>
Who to involve in the project selection process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear SOPs from the beginning. • Clear budget and time frame. • Creation of a selection board/committee of stakeholders. Including all the population groups living in the area when working through an area-based approach, such as host community members and returnees if the area is subject to a returnee influx. • Project amount made public. Institutional secondary role, e.g. women observers, technical advisors. • Giving emphasis on the representation of vulnerable and/or marginalised groups where possible. • Share communication products and project plans. • Staff should proactively engage with colleagues from different sectors and protection areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share SOPs and timeline/work plan. • Involve civil society and local authorities. • Selection board/committee to take the lead. 	<p>Tool: SOP templates can be found in the CLP Guidance from Yemen (English) (Arabic)</p> <p>Gap: Selection committee TOR examples.</p> <p>Publicity page, Facebook etc.</p>

Challenge	What can we do to prevent/mitigate it?	What can we do if we encounter it?	What tools & guidance do we need?
Challenges caused by authorities / decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural awareness and respectful attitudes and communication will help strengthen trust and collaboration with communities. • Engage with them, open discussion, advocate on CLP benefits. • Make space / a role for the authorities. • Invite to join (the selection committee, the project support etc.), if appropriate. • Explain to other community members (not involved in the CLP group or the selection committee) what the CLP is, why it is important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face communication. • Pause and go back to start. • Be transparent with the community. • Clear communication and common solution with all stakeholders. • Be prepared to adapt a role for authority figures. • Debrief with teams to understand what went wrong. 	<p>Pre-agreed selection criteria. Tool: Selection criteria</p> <p>Stakeholder mapping including social stakeholders. Tool: Stakeholder mapping</p> <p>Tool: SOP for CLP template in the Yemen CLP guidelines (English) (Arabic).</p> <p>Gap: Training for authorities on CLPs.</p> <p>Training for CCCM teams / facilitators (essential) Tools: CCT tools</p>
Fluid displacement context/ people moving around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not possible or very difficult to implement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resource persons within the host and displaced community for information • sharing and development of tools. 	<p>Intentions surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social - Economic - Security - Access - HLP

Potential Challenges	How to address this through preconditions	What can we do if we encounter it?	What tools & guidance do we need?
<p>Cultural barriers to the engagement of marginalised groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of the group in the committee. • Community meetings and awareness work with the leaders. • Training and working with the community at large (not just the CLP group and the selection committee). • Share CFM to record issues. • Separate groups/ processes and tailored engagement (e.g. female staff). • Separate projects for different demographic groups within the community. E.g., if for cultural reasons women are excluded from the leadership committee, or the women meet separately, there could be a CLP done just with them as it might be difficult to engage them otherwise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quota -specific # of projects for specific groups. • Stop the project if it causes harm. • Participatory approach to find the issues and solutions. 	<p>Case studies on good and bad practices. <u>Tool: Case study template</u> <u>Tool: Case studies</u></p> <p>TORs/checklist for committees and project selected. Tool: Guide to establish and support CLPs Tool: CLP Guidance from Yemen (<u>English</u>) (<u>Arabic</u>)</p> <p>Monitoring checklist. Tool: <u>CLP tracking tool</u></p> <p>Tool for identifying issues with the community members: <u>User Journey exercise</u></p> <p>Gap: Guidance for creating a safe space for interacting with the community.</p>

Potential Challenges	How to address this through preconditions	What can we do if we encounter it?	What tools & guidance do we need?
<p>Risk of tension and conflict around project selection, including with surrounding communities and host community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an initial risk assessment that considers dynamics within communities and between displaced and host communities beforehand, while consistently integrating conflict sensitivity across all stages. • In an area-based approach the risk of tensions could also be between areas: with areas not targeted but that present a similar level of needs, that could feel excluded from humanitarian assistance, including CLP. So we should also consider this in our initial risk assessment. • Develop and share clear selection criteria before the selection process starts. • Information sharing with the communities on process and plan. • Engagement of local authorities from the beginning, as key stakeholders in the affected area. • Stakeholder mapping to identify how to engage with different actors. • If the tension is with the host community (e.g. in an area-based approach), include host community members in the selection committee to also identify projects that could help underserved communities. • If the risk is that you will not be able to overcome these challenges, then you might have to not implement the CLP to avoid causing harm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quota – specific # of projects for specific groups. • Stop the project if it causes harm. • Participatory approach to find the issues and solutions. 	<p>CLP manual (criteria, process).</p> <p>Tool: Session plan on Problem Identification and Prioritisation & Committee Coaching Guidelines - as identifying the project in a participatory way with everyone involved can help reduce tensions.</p> <p>Tool: Guide to establish CLPs. Tool: CLP Guidance from Yemen (English) (Arabic)</p> <p>Examples of lessons learned. Tool: Case study template Tool: Case studies</p> <p>Tool: Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis exercise</p> <p>Risk Assessments: (link)</p>

III. HANDING OVER CLPS

III.I. Transfer of assets to the community

The CLP resources can be transferred to the community represented by community groups or by individuals from vulnerable groups identified by the community. E.g., in Afghanistan the community representatives selected a few women to be supported to set up and run women's shops in safe locations. In Nigeria, the community representatives selected a few vulnerable women to be supported to learn to knit caps, set up businesses, and continue to train other women in the same. Meanwhile, in Yemen over 100 latrines were constructed through cash for work with a community hosting IDPs.

As part of the handover process the community groups or individuals need to be trained on relevant topics, e.g. project and budget management, mobilising further resources, maintenance etc. ideally some written form of understanding of roles and responsibilities could be established. While handing over the resources to the community, the follow-up mentoring, technical support and coaching responsibilities can be transferred to partners depending on need. E.g. to local authorities or specialised organisations.

These responsibilities should be specified as part of the handover plan, as should the criteria for transferring the assets (based on benchmarks such as deliverables, work completed, purchase of goods etc.). To manage expectations it's important to agree from the outset of the CLP on the time commitment needed from the community group and/or other members to participate in the project, the handover process, and to sustain the project after the handover[5]. From the CLP Guidelines from Yemen: *"For example, the community may need to allocate time and resources to attend meetings, trainings, or inspections related to the handover process. They may also need to take on responsibilities such as upkeep or repairing facilities, operating equipment, or liaising with authorities after the handover."*

III.II. Measuring impact

The typical humanitarian funding cycle presents a challenge for being able to go back to the site / project to measure and understand medium and longer term impact. Once the funding cycle is completed, the agency who had supported the CLP might no longer have access to the area or the community. It would be recommended that the CLPs are planned to be implemented with a certain number of months left in the overall programme timeline to facilitate impact assessments and gather learnings from the CLPs.

If it is possible to access the community post-implementation, it is important to consult with diverse stakeholders during the evaluation stage to understand the overall community perception of the implemented CLP.

For a fully participatory approach, it is critical to understand from the community what they see as impact for the community from the project. The Participatory Community Feedback tool from the Community Coordination Toolbox can help the community identify impact indicators that can be easily measured against, to make necessary project adaptations.

[5] The Agreement Template from the Community Coordination Toolbox can be useful.

III.III. Making CLPs sustainable

To ensure the sustainability of the CLP, the likelihood of the community continuing to carry out the project could be one of the selection criteria during the preparation phase. However, depending on the context, a CLP could also be a one-off, responding to a specific community need during that time and place.

Sustainability can also translate into the CLP's potential to be replicated and/or scaled up within a larger community by utilising the community members to train others. This concept involves knowledge sharing, skill development, and collaborative learning.

IV. WAY FORWARD

While a lot of good resources exist, there are still some gaps. To address these gaps the CE Forum will work to:

- Collect and share CLP case studies with examples from different agencies and contexts. The CE Forum has developed a 1-page template that can be used (and adapted based on needs).
- Invite NGOs, Civil Society Organisations, UN agencies and other agencies to participate in sharing experiences via the CE Forum platform and events.
- Develop guidance and tools and facilitate the sharing of experiences on measuring impact of CLPs.
- Further explore the challenges identified but not covered in previous discussions and workshops; namely maintaining the engagement of the committee members, and the risk of mishandling money and/or other resources.
- Together with the CCCM ABA working group, facilitate the discussion around CLPs as an area-based approach implementation modality.

V. USEFUL RESOURCES

- The [Community Engagement Forum](#) is a platform for sharing and requesting specific CLP tools and guidance developed by practitioners globally. Discussions can be facilitated on specific topics or questions related to CLPs.
- Norwegian Refugee Council's [Community Coordination Toolbox \(CCT\)](#) has a section on practical CLP tools, templates, case studies, training and guidance - some of them in Arabic and French in addition to English.
- The recordings of discussions and workshops that have happened online can be found here: [Community Engagement Forum - YouTube](#)
- The Yemen CCCM Cluster's CLP Guidance ([English](#) and [Arabic](#))
- CLP case studies are available in the [Community Engagement Forum's resource library](#), including examples of how different CLPs have been planned and implemented in different contexts, settings and locations by different agencies.

Contacts and Links

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CEF Group: <https://ceforum.groups.io/g/main>

CCCM Cluster: <https://www.cccmcluster.org>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/community-engagement-forum/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/communityengagementforum/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpykse793zY8H3YYf6eV8P3xqAiF2ZsuA>