Community Gathering for Engagement in Za'atari Refugee Camp: Findings from Meeting Minutes

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1.2 Community Gathering

Community gatherings are designed as a systematic approach to optimize refugees' capacities to collectively solve problems. These gatherings embody the three objectives of community engagement we envisioned:

1) In partnership with refugees, identify and map individuals and community capacities to optimize protection response;
2) Strengthen ties and exchange community assets among members to address concerns/problems and find solutions;
3) Develop tools and methodologies that can be used to improve community structures and strengths for sustainability.

Community gatherings, together with focus group discussions, are a way for service providers working with refugees to identify and map both concerns and capacities within the community. They bring stakeholders together in the same space to exchange information and explore solutions. With the facilitation of community mobilizers and visualization tools, refugees may potentially regard community gatherings as a main way to gain information, interact with organizations and neighbors, express their concerns, and seek opportunities.

Community engagement is an ongoing process, with community gatherings being the main platform for defining issues and focus groups being the platform for structuring those issues in preparation for further discussion and resolution. Figure

1 shows the process of issue formation. The main part of community gatherings is dedicated to communicating policies and receiving feedback.

Community gatherings are scheduled to take place every two weeks in every district in the camp. Women and men have separate gatherings. In the gathering, community mobilizers from IRD facilitate the discussions with concerned NGOs being present, as well as any refugees who wish to attend. At the end of every gathering, refugees themselves vote for the topic to be discussed at next gathering. Within the following week, four focus groups targeted on understanding the voted topic are organized to attract audiences from different parts of the same district. A deeper understanding of the voted issue, developed through focus groups, informs the decision by UNHCR and IRD on which NGOs need to be invited to attend the community gathering, as well as to facilitate the gathering.
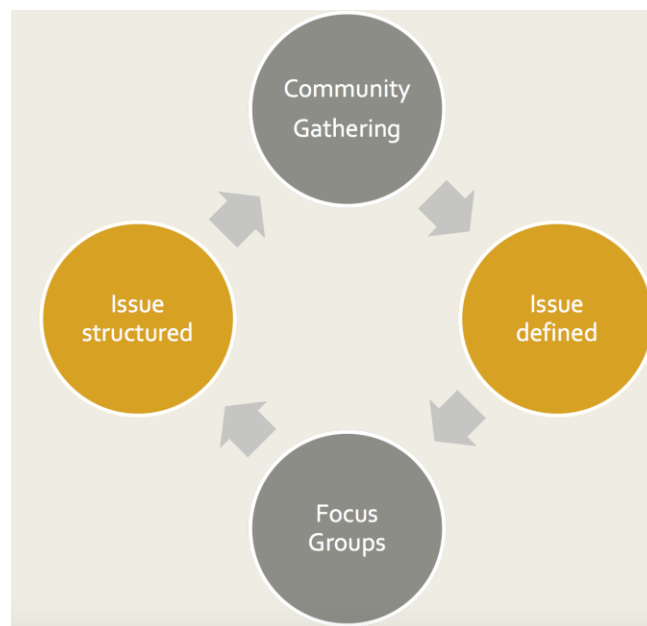

Figure 1 Issue Formation Process

During community gatherings there are a multitude of information flows, as seen in Figure 2. First, the gathering starts with camp staff and mobilizers providing explanations and justifications for the issue voted from last session. Second, refugees ask for clarification, if any, as well as provide more details of the issue they've encountered. Lots of times, refugees bring up their personal issues, which are directed to case management staff on site as these are not within the scope of community gathering. During these semi-structured interactions, refugees also learn information or stories from other refugees in attendance, the same for camp staff. As there are multiple service providers attending the gathering, it serves as an additional channel for service provides to become aware of each other's practices and policies. The gathering is facilitated by the use of a flip chart board.

Visualizations and feedback are only presented through physical boards, with no electronic means (e.g. projector, slides)
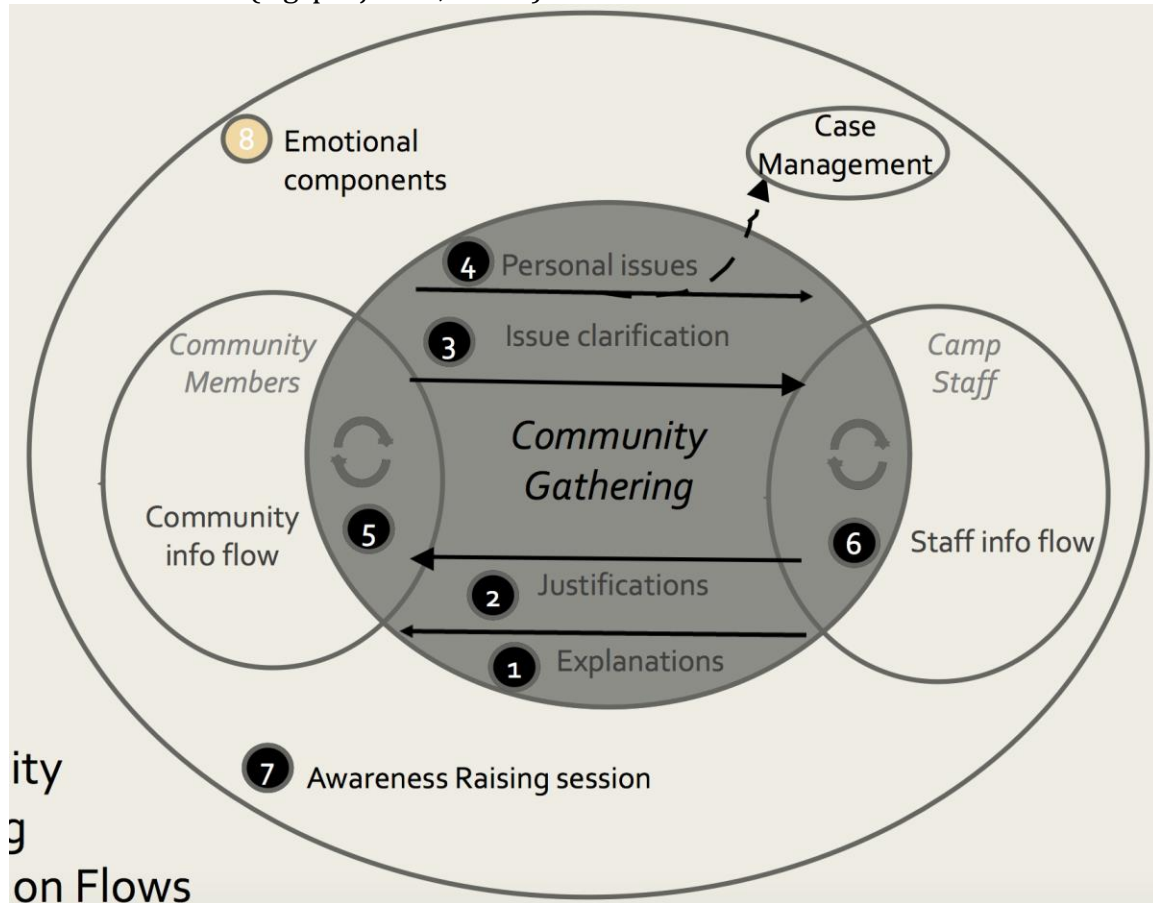

Figure 2 Community Gathering Information Flows

1.2 Meeting Minutes and Information Flow

One key vehicle for information flow in this community engagement process is meeting minutes. Figure 3 shows the information flow embodied in the gathering's minutes, generated both from focus group discussions and community gathering.

Gathering minutes are generated first through focus group discussions on voted topic (1). Then, after it is typed into computer by community mobilizers and transferred to base camp (2),IRD in basecamp issues invitations for concerned and interested NGOs to attend (3). Next, minutes are generated during the community gathering when minutes are filled with more details of the voted topic and NGOs' responses from community gathering, the minute is again stored in IRD office in base camp. Four, after final checking with focal points, IRD sends the updated minute to concerned NGOs for further clarification, planning and action.
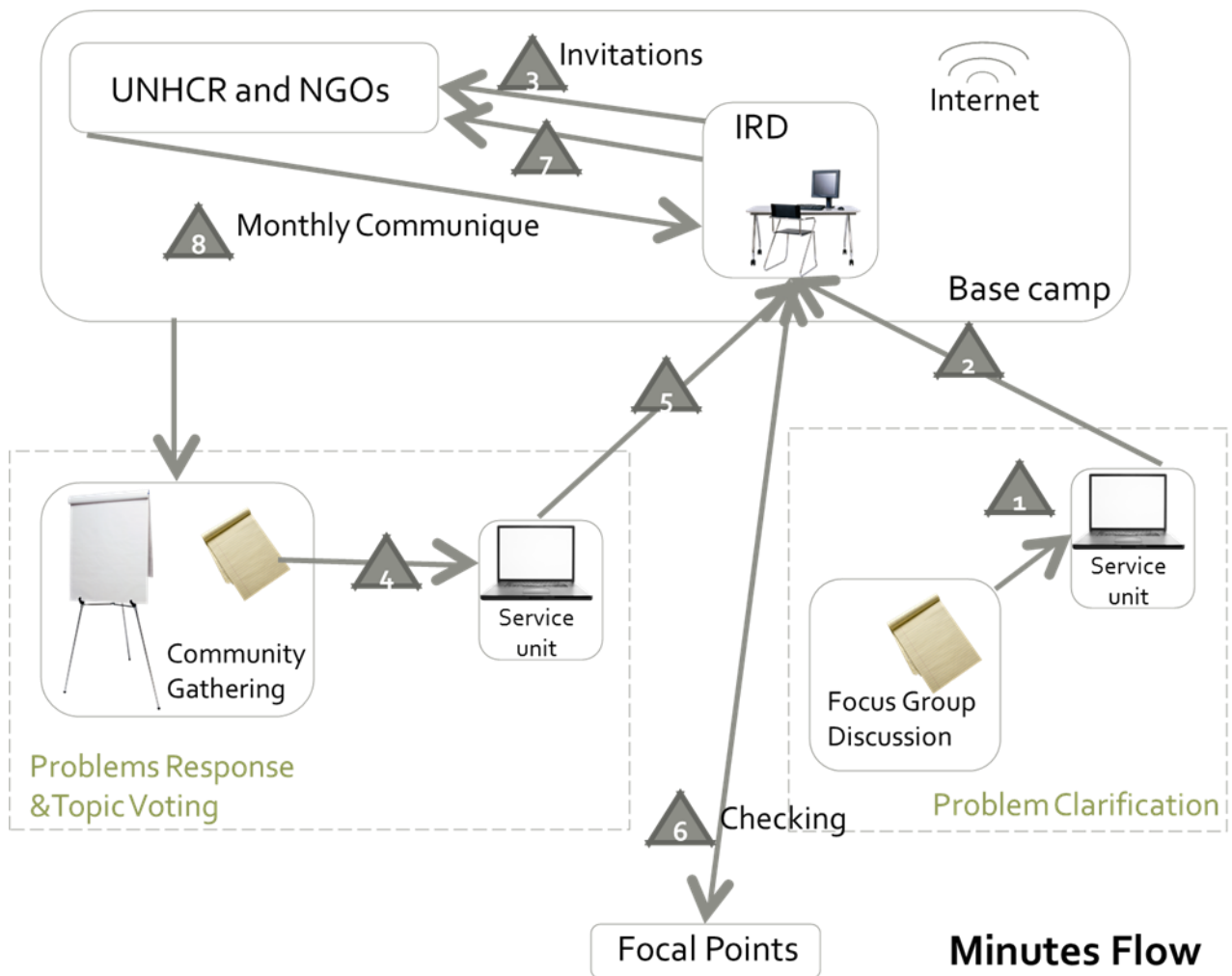
Figure 3 Gathering Minutes Flow

1.3 Engagement Methods and Tools

UNHCR and its implementing partners, community mobilizers and refugee communities are the three main actors in the process of community building. They use various ways and networks to interact within and across communities (Figure 4).

UNHCR and NGOs provides framework and policies to engage refugee communities. Concerned organizations attend various community gatherings and focus group discussions to provide information and gain feedback.

Invitation of community gathering and focus groups for refugees is reached through leaflets, home visits and door-to-door campaign by community mobilizers. They are also the main organizers in facilitating gatherings and discussions.

Within refugee community, informal networking tools are used to communicate with each other. Refugees and mobilizers also build up a strong relationship with each other, as mobilizers' daily job is either in community center or households of their working district.
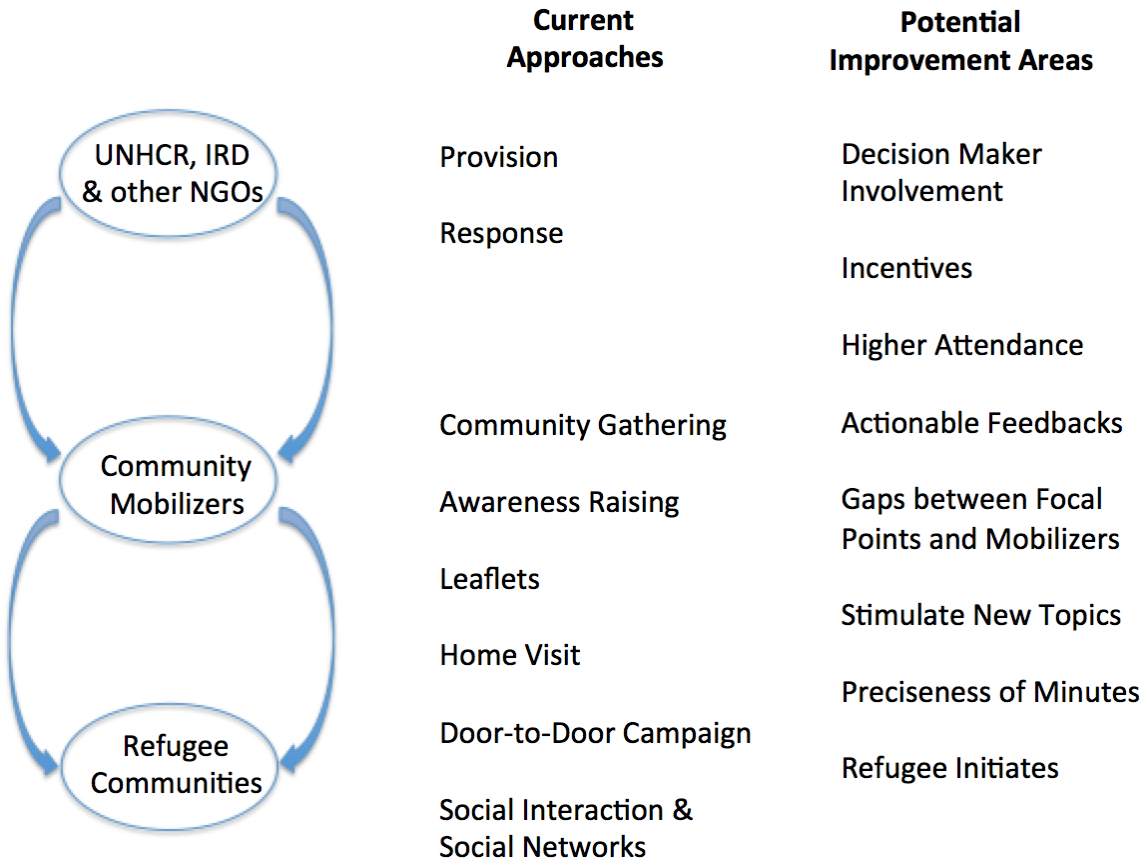
	Current Approaches	Potential Improvement Areas

UNHCR, IRD & other NGOs

Community Mobilizers

Refugee Communities

Current Approaches:
Provision
Response
Community Gathering
Awareness Raising
Leaflets
Home Visit
Door-to-Door Campaign
Social Interaction & Social Networks

Potential Improvement Areas:
Decision Maker Involvement
Incentives
Higher Attendance
Actionable Feedbacks
Gaps between Focal Points and Mobilizers
Stimulate New Topics
Preciseness of Minutes
Refugee Initiates

Figure 3 Community Engagement Methods

After two intensive meetings with NGOs and mobilizers, we identified some potential improvement areas based on the methods that are already in use. For UNHCR and its implementing NGOs, higher involvement of decision makers from various organizations could be served as incentives for higher attendance in community building activities as well as addressing community issues. More ideas sprung up around the community gathering, for example stimulating new topics, generating actionable feedback, effective use of meeting minutes, and empowering refugees in the gathering.

Next we are trying to find answers from the meeting minutes.

2. Meeting Minutes
Meeting minutes consist of the following main information:

- The primary topic voted by refugees from last gathering;
- The subtopics the refugees discuss throughout the meeting as they fall under the primary topic;
- Details of the topic filled after focus group discussions;
- Causes of the issues
- Proposed solutions
- Community capacities
- Sector response
- Agreements and action points
- The district and location the meeting took place in
- The date
- Any additional topics addressed
- The sector that covers the topic
- The next meeting's topic
- The facilitators
- The minutes-takers
- The number of refugees in attendance
- Attendance of NGOs

2.1 Attendance Check (Meetings with Males)

We analyzed 71 meeting minutes collected from January 2015 to July 2015 with male refugees. Topics that were being discussed include birth certificates, caravans, cash for work, education, electricity, health issues, infrastructure, leave permit, malls, protection, relocation, roads, sewage, water, and winterization.

Among all 71 gatherings, 33 met the attendance need, which means all the concerned NGOs attended. In addition, there are many organizations that attended various gatherings even though they were not listed as concerned NGOs for certain specific topics. For example, BNWG: 17 times; case management: 1 time; community services: 3 times; contractor: 1 time; education: 4 times; health: 9 times; IMDAD: 1 time; infrastructure: 3 times; Mercy Corps: 1 time; NFI: 3 times; protection: 7 times; registration: 2 times; shelter: 2 times; site planning: 3; SRAD: 2 times; WASH: 9 times.

Additionally, there are 36 gatherings where NGOs did not meet the attendance demand and 2 meeting minutes did not provide list of concerned NGOs. NGOs not attending when invited include: ACTED: 5 times; community police: 1 time; IMC: 2 times; JEN: 5 times; JHAS: 1 time; NFH: 1 time; NFI: 2 times; NRC: 8 times; OXFAM: 9 times; SAFEWAY: 1 time; Save the Children: 2 times; UNHCR: 3 times; UNICEF: 7 times; UNOPS: 7 times; WFP: 4 times.

Here is a table for attendance check.

	OXFAM	NRC	UNICEF	UNOPS	ACTED	JEN	WFP	UNHCR	Save the Children	NFI	IMC	JHAS	SAFEWAY	Mercy Corps	WASJ	BNWG
Not attended	9	8	7	7	5	5	4	3	2	2	2	1	1			

Attended when not required									3				1	9	17

2.2 Attendance Check (Meetings with Females)

We analyzed 72 meeting minutes with female refugees, of which 29 met the attendance need. The following NGOs attend various gatherings regardless of whether they are listed as concerned NGOs. IRD: 36 times; UNHCR: 23 times; SCI: 17 times; JEN: 17 times; ACTED: 15 times; IMC: 13 times; IFH/NHF:13 times; Save the Children: 12 times; IOM: 11 times; REACH:10 times; Oxfam: 5 times; NRC: 4 times; WFP: 3 times; safeway: 2 times; JHAS: 2 times; UNwomen: 1 time; Tazweed:1 time; and Mercy Corps: 1 time.

Additionally, there are 20 gatherings where NGOs did not meet the attendance demand. Among them, BNWG did not attend 9 gatherings, NFI did not attend 4, NRC did not attend 2, WFP did not attend 2, and Save the children, UNICEF, JHAS and SRAD did not attend 1.

Lastly, 23 meeting minutes did not specify the list of concerned NGOs in a way that enabled matching with attendance. For example, when specifying attendees by using sectors, such as protection and WASH, or 'all partners in District X,', this forecloses the potential of conducting a post-hoc check on attendance without knowledge of the specific NGOs in these sectors or districts. Also there are times no specific NGOs were identified, instead 'needs based' were used.

Here is a table for attendance check of females gatherings.

	BNWG	NFI	NRC	WFP	Save the children	UNICEF	JHAS	SRAD	IRD	UNHCR	SCI	JEN	ACTED	IMC	IFH/NHF	IOM	REACH	OXFAM	NRC
Not attended	9	4	2	2	1	1	1	1											
Attended when not required				3	12		2		36	23	17	17	15	13	13	11	10	5	4

2.3 Improvements Areas

From a data processing perspective, there are a few aspects of the meeting minutes that could be improved.

2.3.1 Consistency

Different note takers have different style in gaining and recording information. In terms of taking NGOs' attendance, when recording NGOs' attendance information during community gatherings, the names of the NGOs or sectors written down should be consistent. For example, specific sectors like community services, health, education, infrastructure, protection, registration, community police, site planning, shelter, and WASH are used together with organizations like UNHR and other NGOs. Thus, there needs to be agreement on whether to put organization names or sector names on the attendance sheet. Second, in terms of the name of the topic, sometimes

it is written down as its full name and other times abbreviations are used, for example, CFW, cash for work, and cash for works.

2.3.2 Format
The format used to store meeting minutes is Word, which needs to be managed by one IRD staff and the only way to disseminate the minutes to various actors in camp is through email. When analyzing multiple minutes together, there is no efficient way to aggregate all the minutes. For example, it is not easy to get all the details of certain topic.

As CSV is a common format for data analysis, the use of Excel to store a minutes would be more efficient. In addition, it could avoid the inconsistency we discussed earlier by listing all the possible values. For example, when taking attendance information, we could list all the organizations and sectors in a dropdown menu and only allow the selection of one at a time. This requires exhaustive information on the values of all the possible metadata, including names of facilitator, district, location, and name of NGOs. In addition, it is easier for minutes-takers to, for example, select the location from a list of approved meeting locations and maintain consistency instead of simply writing down a location name that might make sense to them, but that might not make sense to the person preprocessing and analyzing the data.

2.3.3 Language
The minutes are stored in English. However, most refugees only speak Arabic and some of the notes are taken initially in Arabic. These lead to missing or misleading information while translation, as well as usefulness when providing to refugees who only speak Arabic. Thus, we recommended using both Arabic and English in storing meeting minutes for both double-checking and dissemination.

2.3.4 Action Points
From all the 71 community gathering with males, 61 did not have specific agreements or action points after the gathering happened. This could also contribute in the phenomenon of repeated topics over time.

2.4 Topic Modeling
To further understand the details and responses of the topics discussed in the gathering, we use topic modeling to visualize the distance of various themes, the key terms of each theme and their use frequencies.