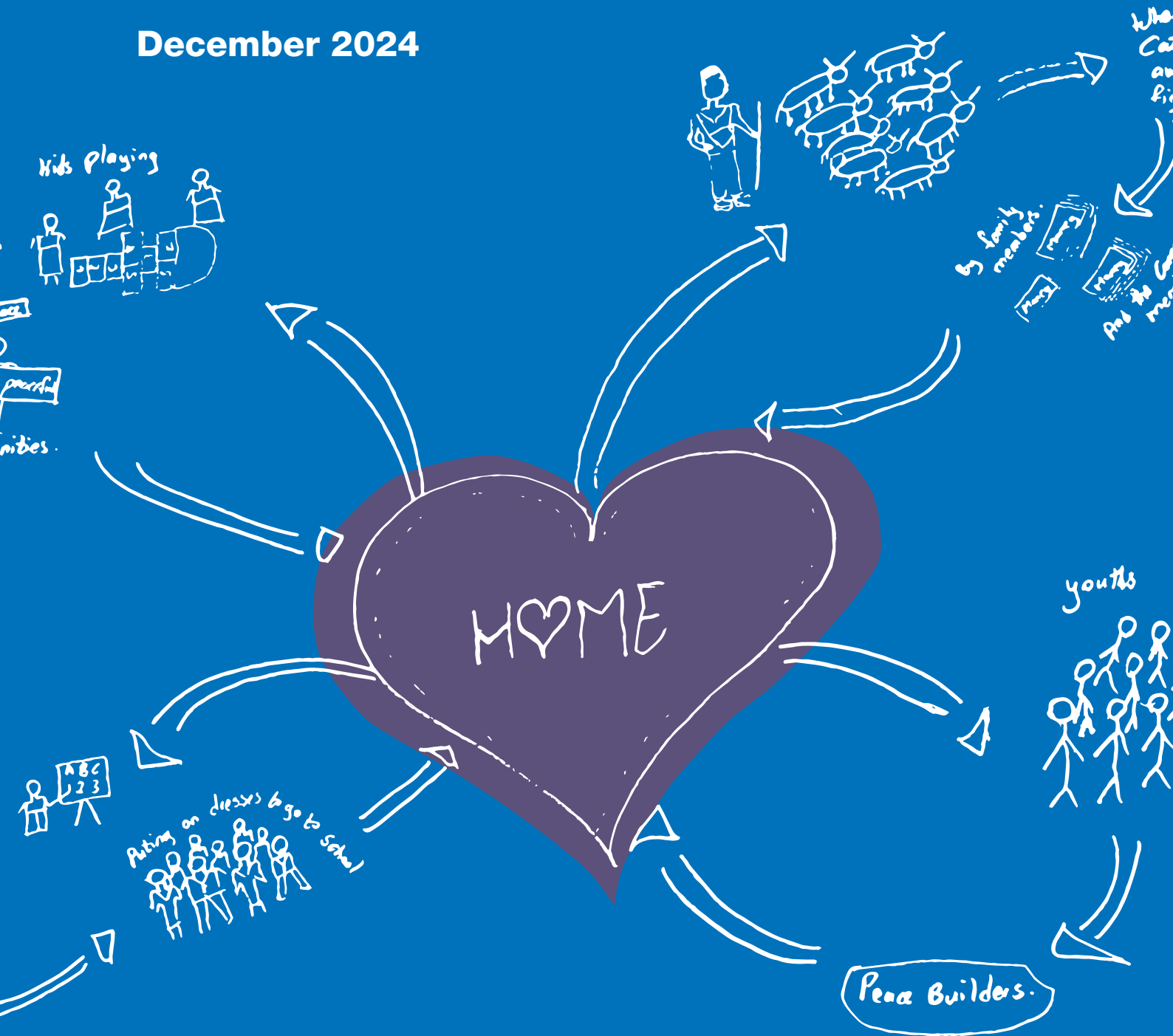


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# Practitioners' Guide for Unarmed Civilian Protection in Cameroon

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# Executive Summary

This guide is designed to provide some practical tips to local unarmed civilian protection (UCP) practitioners, who shape and lead interventions to protect civilians in their communities, as well as UCP organisations that engage regularly in conflict situations to protect civilians at risk. This guide will help those interested in UCP engagements to better establish conditions for successful unarmed interventions to protect affected civilians in times of conflict and violence. It will also help readers to highlight practical lessons relating to the use of UCP strategies. We believe the guide provides best practices and guidance that can be built upon or replicated in diverse situations. Nonetheless, we do not present these ideas as exhaustive since some differences or variations are likely to occur depending on the context wherein UCP is implemented. Information in this guide is drawn from empirical research conducted in February 2023 on the experiences and proactive UCP strategies employed by affected civilians, groups and organisations in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, and supplemented with scholarly and grey literature.

This guide is written primarily for:

- Individuals and organisations that have been actively engaged in protecting civilians in conflict situations.
- Policy makers who are seeking to support recovery in conflict-affected communities and protect civilians.
- Academics who are engaged in training UCP practitioners.

The guide is organised into six main sections. Section one presents the purpose, scope and background of the guide. Section two provides an overview of UCP. Section three discusses the strategies and activities that can be used to protect civilians. Section four focuses on the design and implementation of UCP interventions. Section five examines the outcomes of UCP interventions, while section six concludes with final reflections and thoughts. Readers can refer to a specific section for information or go through the entire guide when preparing or reviewing their intervention programme.

# Section 1: Purpose, Scope and Background

## 1.1 Purpose

The primary goal of this guide is to support local Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) practitioners in Cameroon, where individuals and local community organisations have been the main providers of civilian protection since the onset of the Anglophone armed conflict in late 2017. The guide is also intended to help humanitarian support agencies in Cameroon to integrate UCP activities into their missions. It is furthermore designed to be applicable beyond Cameroon across a wide range of contexts experiencing armed conflict. It seeks to enable civil society organizations (CSOs) in Cameroon and elsewhere to engage in or support UCP activities more effectively. The guide is, however, not intended to be a perfectly complete operational checklist and must therefore be adapted to the reader's context.

## 1.2 Scope

This guide outlines effective strategies for maximising the protection of civilians and lays out the main considerations required for implementing effective protective interventions. The strategies presented here are far from being exhaustive but are among those that are particularly relevant to unarmed civilian protection efforts in conflict situations.

The guide has been developed mainly using data obtained from the study of the Cameroon Anglophone conflict (Crawford et al. 2024), while it is hoped that the advice provided is useful for other contexts. Yet, it is important to note that the guide does not focus on particular vulnerable groups such as children, internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees, and therefore needs to be adapted to each context. It does not therefore attempt to replace other resources on the strategies described.

## 1.3 Background

The Anglophone conflict can fall within the category of 'new wars' which according to Kaldor (2006, 9) refers to conflicts in which civilians are deliberately targeted by belligerents and human rights violations are widespread. The crisis began in late 2016 when teachers and lawyers from the English-speaking regions of North West and South West Cameroon peacefully protested against the erosion of the common law system and the English

system of education, perceived by Anglophones as important elements of their cultural identity. The failure of the government to engage in sustained dialogue with Anglophone civil society organisations towards a peaceful solution, as well as widespread use of armed repression by the government against peaceful protesters, led to an escalation of the conflict. Anglophone separatists increasingly took centre stage, demanding independence for the English-speaking regions, the former British Southern Cameroons. In late 2017, following a symbolic declaration of the Republic of Ambazonia on 1 October, and the disproportionate use of force against the separatists, the conflict morphed into an armed conflict which has resulted in large-scale atrocities committed against civilians by the belligerents.

UCP refers to all non-violent efforts/activities carried out mainly by civilians in situations of conflict to protect themselves or fellow non-combatants. While training can enhance the efficiency of such efforts, they are not and cannot be limited to the activities of trained civilians who are often internationals or unarmed police and military, as some UCP scholars such as Molz (2018: 14) and Wallis (2010: 26-28) have argued. This is one of the reasons why such a guide is necessary – to make knowledge of UCP widely available so that more of those willing to engage can develop the capacity necessary in places such as Cameroon where formal training on UCP remains limited or non-existent.

Academic interest in UCP has increased steadily over the last three decades. Schirch (1995) is widely credited to have coined the term in a discussion of peace team activities for the Swedish Life and Peace Institute. It is, however, important to note that the practice of and interest in UCP predates the writing of Schirch (1995). Protective accompaniment, for instance, was a widely used UCP strategy in the early 1980s in South and North America (Weber 2000).

The history of civilian victimisation in armed conflicts can be considered to be coterminous with that of efforts to protect civilians (Betsy 2005). The idea that civilians should be afforded protection in situations of armed conflict has its roots in different traditions that pre-date global efforts (Bliesemann de Guevara et al 2023: 166; Betsy 2005). The protection of civilians, however, has not always been a major issue in debates on the conduct of war (Spanu 2016). The focus of these debates before the Genocide Convention of 1948, according to Spanu (2016), was not on civilians. International

protection instruments concerned with *ius in bello* or with humanitarianism seldom mentioned the protection of civilians before 1948. In this light, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) played a lead role in global efforts to codify civilian protection in international humanitarian law (IHL) (ICRC 2012), after initially having an agenda that focused on soldiers wounded in war.

It was following the Second World War that global efforts for the protection of civilians can be said to have been given considerable attention. Notable global efforts that paved the way for the protection of civilians, as it is increasingly called today, can be traced to the United Nations Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, enacted in 1948, and the Geneva Convention of 1949 (ICRC 1949) in particular that explicitly used the term civilian protection. In 1977, two protocols (Additional Protocol I Relating To The Protection Of Victims Of International Armed Conflicts and Additional Protocol II Relating To The Protection Of Victims Of Non-International Armed Conflicts) were added to the Geneva Convention which dealt specifically with the protection of victims of armed conflicts (Kosirnik 1977; ICRC 1988; ICRC 2021).

Efforts made in the aftermath of the Second World War, to increase concern for civilian protection, however important, were little concerned with the protection of civilians by civilians and much less so, by local civilians or civil society organisations, which is the focus of this guide. The developments including the ICRC's failed effort to set up a Commission on the treatment of civilians in 1929 (ICRC 2016), and the reference to combatants and non-combatants in war, were however remarkable and paved the way for the evolution of UCP in the 1990s with the deployment of larger civilian missions by the international community (Gehrmann et al. 2015) and academically, through the pioneering work of Schirch in 1995.

Literature on UCP has largely ignored local agency and the measures taken by individuals, groups or communities to protect themselves, and rather focused on external actors. These self-protection measures are likely to receive more attention in future studies because the international UCP actors that the literature has traditionally focused on may face difficulties in accessing areas where help is most needed, given the intense violence experienced there. Hence, recognition of the role of local civil society organisations and grassroots groups has increasingly become critical in UCP.

In Cameroon, UCP has been widely used and constituted the main source of protection for civilians. Yet the concept remains little known and understood. The legal and customary understanding of civilian protection largely explains the limited understanding of the term. Civilian protection in Cameroon is largely used to refer to measures taken by the government, through its Directorate for Civil Protection, to prevent harm from natural disasters, to protect civilians during such events and ensure their rehabilitation in the wake of crisis. Several legal instruments on civilian protection convey this emphasis on protection from natural disasters. The main legal instruments include:

#### Legal Instruments on Protection in Cameroon

1. Presidential Instruction No. 02/CAB/PR of 18 January 1968 on Safeguarding and Protection of Civil Installations of Vital Importance
2. Law No 86/016 of 6 December 1986 on the General Reorganisation of Civil Protection
3. Decree No. 98/031 of 9 March 1998 relating to the Organisation of Emergency Rescue Plans in Disaster Situations or Serious Risk
4. Order No. 037/PM of 19 March 2003 relating to the creation, organization and operation of a National Risk Observatory
5. Decree No. 2004/099 of 24 April 2004 on the Organisation of the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT)

The activities of the Directorate for Civil Protection and other state bodies formally responsible for civil protection, including the National Council for Civil Protection, are coordinated by the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT). What constitutes civil protection is broader in scope than civilian protection. The law of December 1986 for example considers civil protection as consisting of “permanently ensuring the protection of people, property and the environment against the risks of serious accidents, calamities or catastrophes, as well as against the effects of these disasters”. The application of civil protection to situations other than those mentioned above is recent and is sanctioned by Order No. 2018/127/CAB/PM of 21 November 2018, relating to the ‘Creation,

Organization and Functioning of a Coordination Centre for Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Relating to the Situation in the North-West and South-West Regions'. The coordination of the activities of the Centre is assured by the Director of Civil Protection in MINAT. These activities focus mainly on the provision of humanitarian assistance to "victims of crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions, particularly the internally displaced persons, persons injured, mutilated or disabled people, orphans, and victims of destruction of property, host communities and Cameroonian refugees" (Order No. 2018/127/CAB/PM of 21 November 2018, Art 2). The Order does not, however, address the protection of civilians by other civilians in this crisis.

The above shows that knowledge of the local context of an UCP intervention is important because of the differences in the legal and operational contexts that are often encountered. The local ownership of UCP interventions or, failing this, local guidance and participation can therefore be considered necessary for the success of an operation. This guide is therefore based on a grassroots approach to UCP. According to this approach, the participation of local UCP facilitators, or their leadership, is necessary for the design and implementation of UCP interventions. This is because such an approach ensures an understanding of the context and allows for long-term, sustainable relationships needed for the success of UPC efforts.

## Section 2: Understanding Unarmed Civilian Protection

The idea that unarmed civilians can protect themselves and other civilians from harm in conflict situations has been of growing interest to both scholars and practitioners for more than three decades. It is now widely called unarmed civilian protection (UCP), but its meaning remains the subject of academic debate. While some scholars limit it to protection by international civilian teams, others emphasize protection by local civilians and organisations (Oldenhuis et al. 2021; Crawford et al. 2024). This section briefly examines what UCP means and its relevance, its linkages to civilian agency and the importance of bottom-up UCP approaches.

### 2.1 Meaning and Relevance of UCP

UCP includes all nonviolent efforts that are made in situations where armed conflict is imminent, ongoing or has occurred, with the aim of reducing civilian risks from direct violence, protecting their rights to access essential services and resources, and promoting a safe, stable and just environment (Oldenhuis et al. 2021: 31). There is a risk to civilians when they face a threat of violence or exploitation and are vulnerable to such threats due to their

social background (gender, ethnicity, language, race, etc.), or because they have to go to places that are targeted, such as schools in the context of the Anglophone conflict.

UCP is necessary for moral and legal reasons and needs to be promoted in all situations of contemporary conflict because traditional military and police protection often fails to protect civilians who are mostly affected and often directly targeted by belligerents, including by state security agencies themselves. International humanitarian law (IHL) provides for a general prohibition of attacks against civilians who must be protected (Melzer 2019: 85). Civilians are non-combatants. They are persons not involved in active combat and who are not enrolled in the armed forces of any non-state armed group or militia during conflict (Melzer 2019: 85). In situations where a person cannot be proven to be taking part in hostilities or associated with belligerents, they must be considered as a civilian. Civilian protection often requires more than short-term engagement because threats faced often span years. Threats to civilian protection also change with different protection issues. The protection of civilians can therefore be conceived as comprising a continuum of issues that can be categorized as shown in Figure 1. below.



**Figure 1: Continuum of Civilian Protection**

Source: Developed with data from Dwight Raymond and Sarah Williamson (2020: 12)

Although the issues identified in Figure 1 may suggest that different issues need to be addressed at specific times or as a situation evolves, this is rarely the case. It can be logical to consider, for example, that efforts and strategies needed for physical protection should be considered first before those aiming to address human rights issues, but it may also be considered necessary to address both simultaneously. In situations where they are not addressed simultaneously, overlap is still common and predictable.

UCP refers to measures related to an imminent threat of violence, as shown in Figure 1 above. It helps ensure that civilians are not the target of violence and protects them in situations where armed conflict has occurred. In general, Oldenhuis et al. (2021: 32) underscore five main methods of UCP: proactive engagement; monitoring; relationship building; advocacy; and capacity enhancement. These can be manifested in diverse ways in different contexts. For instance, in Cameroon, three main categories of self-protection strategies of UCP were found. These included spontaneous, early warning and response, and preventive strategies (see detailed discussion of these strategies in subsequent sections). Specific self-protection strategies can include: running away in the face of imminent violence; using evasive measures at home; seeking temporary shelter; and limiting movement or staying indoors (Crawford et al. 2024).

UCP practitioners can also ensure the safety of civilians by making efforts to promote and protect the human rights of civilians in conflict situations. The protection of the rights of persons considered as out-groups, especially because of their identity, can be considered to be important in ensuring the safety of civilians in conflict (implied in Bellamy 2009: 19; Murray 2012: 68–69). It is in this light that Mahony (2006: 3) argues that “there is an obvious overlap between ‘protecting civilians’ and ‘protecting human rights’”. The importance of human rights protection is also reflected in the definition of protection by the United Nations as: “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international law—international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law—regardless of their age, gender, social, ethnic, national, religious, or other background” (Keenan & Beadle 2017: 82). Reducing violations including torture and discrimination on the basis of identity, and promoting the right to a fair trial among

other rights in times of war, can thus be considered as a protection measure. Francis (2013) and Julian (2020) equally concur that UCP is an essential component of violence response as it creates opportunities for sustainable peacebuilding (inclusive of human rights) and peaceful societal transformation. This demonstrates the interlinkages between UCP and positive peace.

Another way that UCP practitioners can prevent harm is by working with relevant organisations and the authorities in the affected country, including local authorities and government, to provide basic services. The provision of such services limits the exposure of civilians to risks by reducing the time and distance they may need to cover to access such services.

Finally, as Figure 1 shows, the political, economic and social structures that explain the conflict, and especially why civilians are significantly affected, need to be transformed to ensure civilian protection in the long term. Civil society organisations and other UCP actors need to engage with stakeholders, especially the belligerents, to develop and sustain interest in such transformation. This kind of engagement can, however, create moral and legal dilemmas where there is a record of abuses by the actors. It can also attract greater risks for civilian protectors and those they seek to protect.

The UCP issues raised above can be addressed effectively by building relationships with stakeholders and developing the capacity of locals to take up UCP initiatives and engage confidently with belligerents. Relationships are important because they facilitate dialogue necessary for the work of UCP practitioners to be understood and tolerated, authorised or allowed where it is needed. Relationships are also crucial in gaining support for the political, economic and social transformation that UCP actors may need to work towards sustained protection.

To be successful, UCP therefore must be nonviolent, nonpartisan, give pride of place to local leadership and ideas of protection, and be transparent and independent with good knowledge of the context. The absence of these can reduce the effectiveness of UCP or result in unintended harm. UCP does not require any form of violence or coercion to succeed. It relies entirely on relationships, mutual commitment/ dedication and local ownership.

## 2.2 Civilian Agency and Bottom-up Approaches

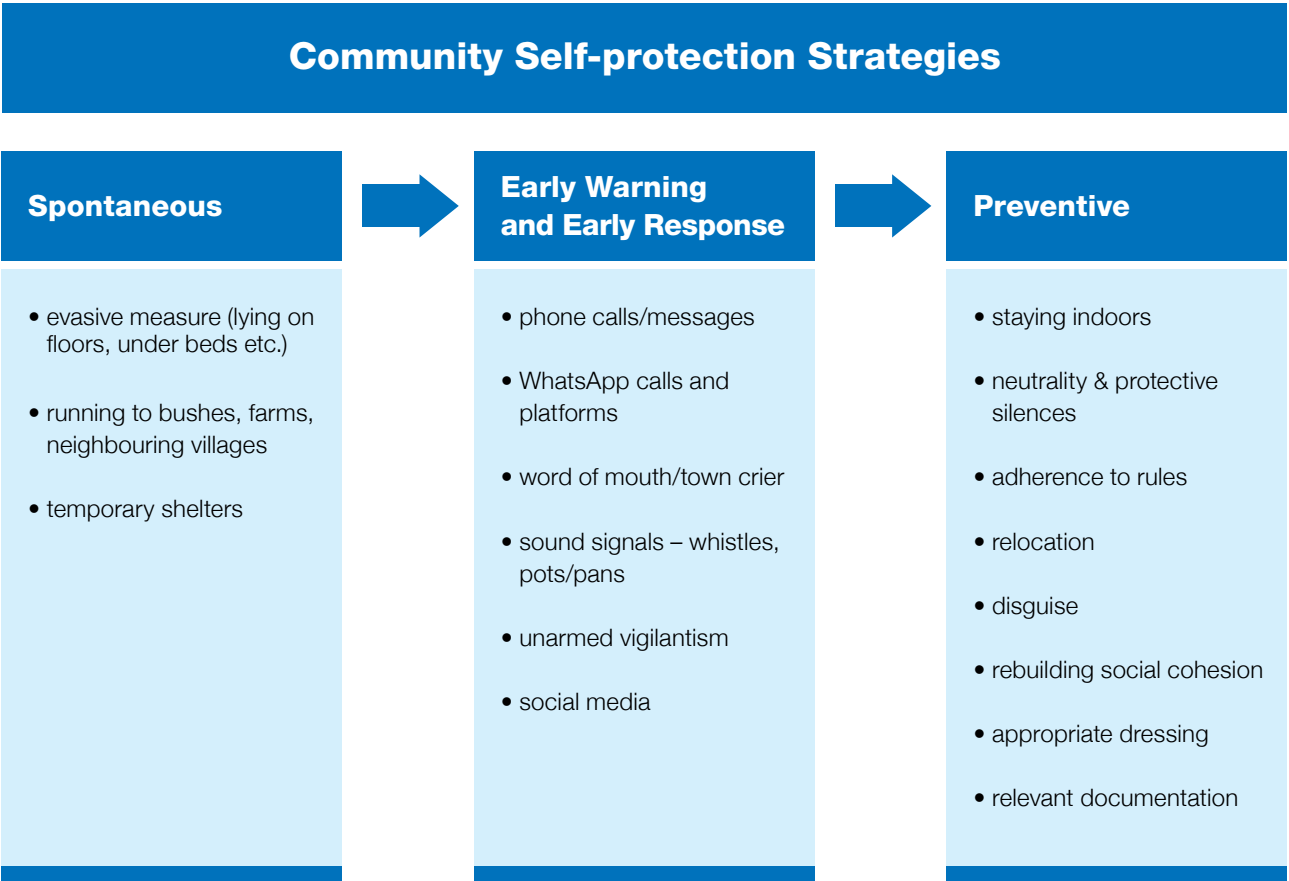
To reiterate, unarmed civilian protection (UCP) is an evolving practice (Oldenhuis et al. 2015; Julian and Schweitzer 2015) that aims to enhance the protection of civilians before, during and after conflict through nonviolent means. It represents a paradigmatic shift to prevailing international responses to conflict operationalised through military peacekeeping by the UN, EU, AU, and NATO, and therefore challenges the notion of using violence to deter violence. Yet, despite this emphasis on civilian agency, there has been limited focus on local actors and approaches as compared to international ones (Oldenhuis et al. 2015; Wallace 2017). Indeed, Molz notes that UCP is perceived as implemented by groups that “frequently come from outside the communities affected by the conflict or even from overseas” (Molz 2018: 14), with little exploration of those grassroots initiatives in conflict settings that constitute community self-protection. Therefore, our study of UCP in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon focused on such bottom-up initiatives and uncovered a wide array of innovative measures of community self-protection employed by conflict-affected civilians in the English-speaking regions (Crawford et al. 2024). Such findings demonstrated local communities’ own protection agency, capacity and knowledge and evidenced how conflict-affected communities have developed a wealth of creative, context-specific, nonviolent protection strategies. The Cameroon study has also contributed evidence that supports the UN’s recent focus on ‘civilian-centered approaches’ to its Protection of Civilians (PoC) policy (UN OCHA 2024)—approaches that the UN acknowledges have “yet to be comprehensively embraced and resourced” (OCHA 2024: 2). It is our hope that the Cameroon study findings demonstrate the importance and relevance of such ‘civilian-centered approaches’ and encourage their fuller adoption.

Therefore the intent of this Practitioners’ Guide is to facilitate and promote the application of a bottom-up, civilian-led approach to UCP and thereby stimulate new thinking on best practice amongst UCP practitioners, both conflict-affected citizens on the ground and local NGOs and international organisations that wish to support them. This shift from a top-down to bottom-up approach, however, also involves a significant change in relations between local and international actors, one that recognises the importance of the context-specific knowledge of locally-led UCP.

# Section 3: UCP Strategies, Activities and Collective Protection

The choice of strategies and activities for every given UCP intervention depends on the specific local context in which protection is needed. The strategies and activities used in one context can, however, be adapted or modified and used in another. It is common for several strategies to be used in the same setting, but the mix of strategies and activities depends on the specific context. Research carried out by Crawford et

al. (2024: 42-87) has categorised UCP strategies in the context of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon under three rubrics: spontaneous measures; early warning and response measures; and preventive measures. Figure 2 below highlights these categories and their respective activities. These strategies can be said to be intricately linked with efforts at collective protection by locals which is also discussed here.



**Figure 2: Community self-protection strategies**  
Source: Fieldwork, Cameroon

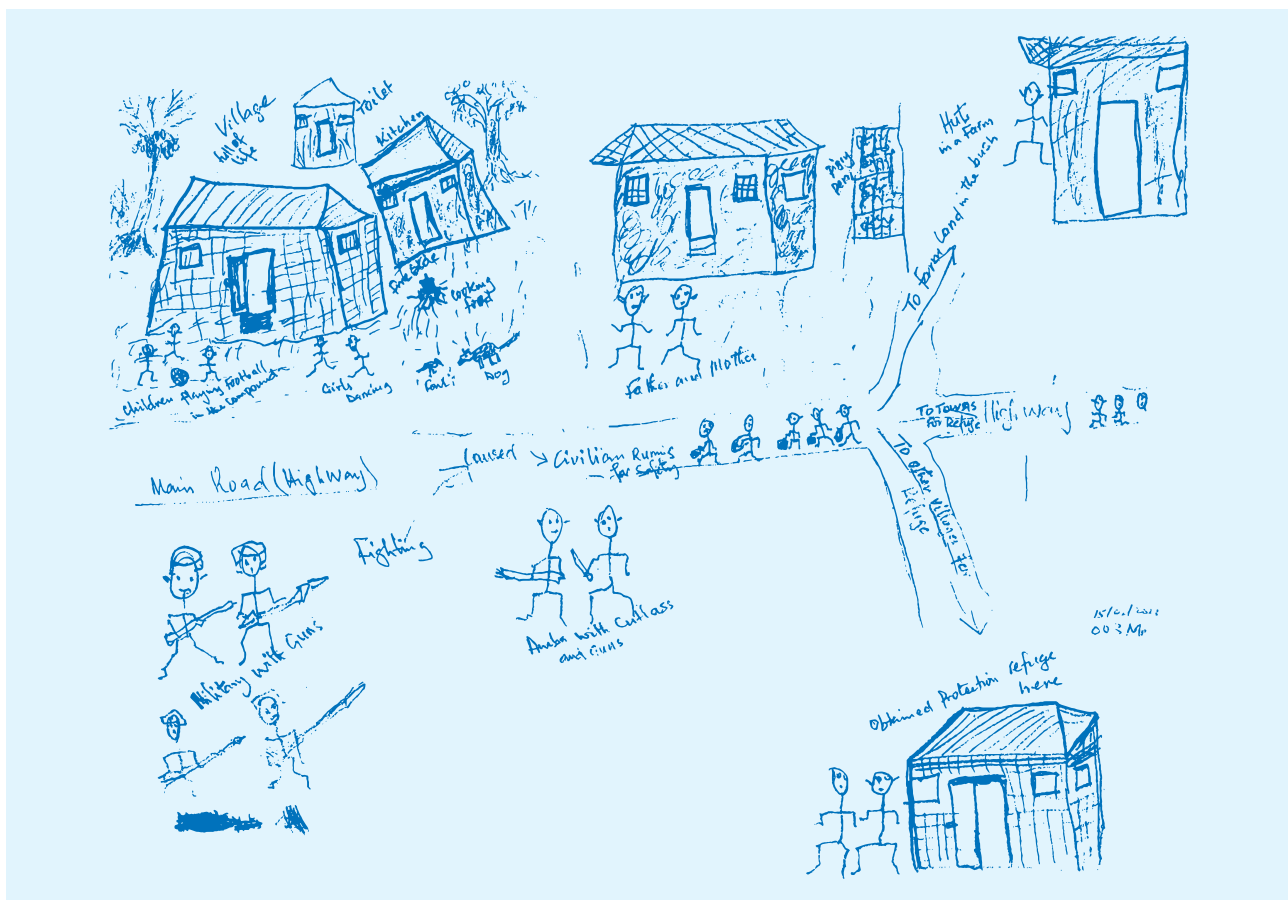
### 3.1 Spontaneous Protective Measures

These are adopted when violence suddenly erupts or when it is imminent. Spontaneous measures include: evasive measures at home; seeking temporary shelter; and moving away from where violence is taking place. These strategies are essentially homegrown, but some can be used by international UCP staff that, although rarely, take up residence where conflict is occurring.

Evasive measures are self-protection strategies used when gun fire or shooting has already started. Although these measures are adopted by individuals, those working to protect others also need to be aware of them and their shortcomings as they may also face situations where they need to apply them while working in the communities. The main evasive measures are lying on the floor and staying away from the windows. These

measures can effectively reduce the risk of being hit by a bullet, but are not effective when the house is made of wood or when armed persons decide to shoot at ground level or break into homes to attack occupants. International staff and other persons residing in conflict-affected communities to provide protection can also use these measures to protect themselves when their homes come under attack.

In conflicts such as the Anglophone conflict where the civilians are likely to be attacked in their homes, other measures are adopted especially when gun violence is imminent. These include running either to the bushes, farms, and neighbouring communities or seeking temporary shelters. Figure 3 below shows the use of this strategy as documented by an Anglophone civilian from the North West region of Cameroon at a drawing workshop.



**Figure 3. Seeking Temporary Shelter**

Source: Drawing workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

Temporary shelter can be sought in abandoned buildings and civilian institutions considered neutral and 'sacred' such as churches, chiefs' palaces and hospitals. In contexts such as the Anglophone conflict where these institutions have also been targeted, they are only a last resort or can be used as shelter only for very brief periods. Those who run away can be accommodated by friends or relatives residing in safer areas or towns often for a short period of time from a few days to a few months. The duration depends on whether they are convinced, based on information received through networks, that violence has reduced and that they can return. These strategies are also not without risks. Those running away can mistakenly move in the direction of the armed attackers or can be faced with the same situation when they seek shelter in a safer part of their neighbourhood that also becomes the target of the armed groups. Hence it is important to use spontaneous strategies with others, such as early warning and response measures, to keep civilians updated on security threats while running or seeking shelter.

### **3.2 Early Warning and Early Response Measures**

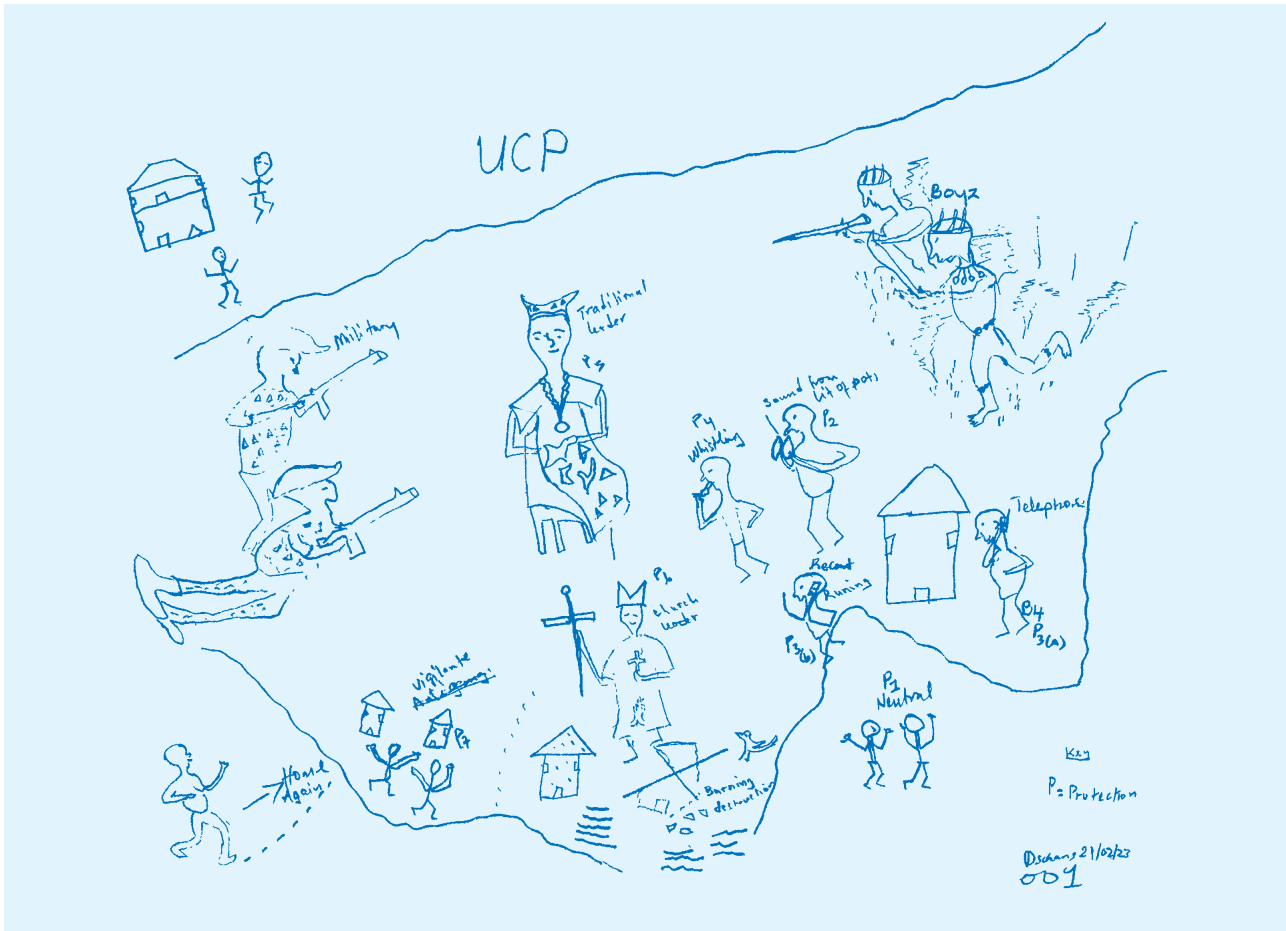
Early warning and early response strategies include intelligence exchange and information dissemination through various modes of communication. These measures are used to enable civilians to prevent and mitigate violence and threats. The most notable examples of these are communication and intelligence exchange and unarmed vigilantism. These are local self-protection measures, but international UCP staff and other non-local UCP personnel can help set-up these strategies in a context where they are non-existent but actionable.

To protect themselves, civilians can develop strong intelligence and communication systems and networks that enable them to inform each other of what is happening to avoid getting caught up in crossfire or getting in the path of armed attackers when fleeing for safety. Effective communication and intelligence systems can thus protect civilians from attacks. Intelligence helps to achieve situational understanding and to distinguish between real and perceived threats to civilians. It also helps provide information on perpetrators.

The communication and intelligence networks go beyond the communities affected by conflict and are therefore useful in providing information on the decisions taken by conflict actors far away from the affected communities. In today's context, these systems are mostly set up using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter). In the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, other homegrown tools used for protective communication have included whistles, mobile phone calls, shouting, town criers, pots and pans, church bells and beating a gong. The use of whistles and mobile phones among other means of communication to protect is shown in Figure 4 below by a participant in the research project on UCP in the Anglophone conflict.

The main weakness of this strategy is that attackers can easily infiltrate the network and use the information obtained to change course and make it difficult for civilians to protect themselves from an imminent attack. Most contemporary conflicts often include government forces that may resort to internet lockdowns, phone tracking to stop communication and intelligence exchange through these networks. Non-state armed groups can also destroy transmission equipment, making these platforms inaccessible. It is therefore necessary for UCP practitioners to find ways to ensure access to the internet in conflict situations. This can be done through advocacy to prevent internet lockdowns or to prevent attacks on civilian infrastructure needed for transmission. Other tools of communication such as whistles have also faced setbacks. Those blowing the whistle to warn others about a pending military attack in their community have been killed as the military shoots in the direction of the sound to deter the warning being raised.

Unarmed vigilantism is a strategy that has been widely used in the Anglophone conflict but less reported in other conflicts. This strategy consists in having groups of unarmed individuals stationed at strategic locations in the village or quarter or to undertake mostly nightly patrols to monitor access and alert residents of any incoming armed actors or criminals. Figure 4 below shows how the role of vigilantes was seen by a participant at a drawing workshop organised as part of this research project.



**Figure 4. Communication Tool and Unarmed Vigilante Groups**

Source: Drawing workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

Unarmed vigilante groups are also called non-violent vigilantes or ‘community watch groups’. They are mobilised by the community and provide protection through the early warning and response that is possible as a result of their patrols and discrete monitoring of the movement of combatants. The watch groups also serve to facilitate communication on risks by obtaining information from fellow civilians on the positions of armed actors. The information obtained is circulated through trusted networks to ensure it reaches the rest of the community in good time to ensure that appropriate actions are taken. One of the main challenges of this strategy is funding. Internationals can support resilience in communities where such groups exist by providing funding to ensure they are sustained. Caution must be taken to ensure such groups do not use the trust they enjoy to slip into banditry or other forms of criminality as a way of earning money.

### 3.3 Preventive Measures

Civilians adopt several preventive measures to protect themselves from violence or attacks by combatants. Some preventive measures effectively used in the Anglophone conflict include: staying indoors, neutrality, dressing appropriately, disguise, and relocation among others (see figure 2 above). Of these strategies, it is important to note that neutrality can also be used by and constitutes an important measure for external UCP actors or civilians to help protect other civilians.

Staying indoors is a strategy used to reduce movement and thereby reduce exposure to risk. When people move often, they are more exposed to the risk of being caught up in crossfire or being kidnapped, as has been the case with the Anglophone conflict. Children, for example, have been particularly exposed in the Anglophone

conflict because of the persistent attacks on schools. To protect children, some parents have therefore kept their children at home and explore alternative ways of learning that do not require movement. Neutrality, on the other hand, requires that civilians avoid taking sides or supporting any of the belligerents. Crawford et al. (2024: 71) show that in the Anglophone conflict, a civilian that takes sides, or is suspected of doing so, faces the risk of a violent attack from the opposing warring party. Neutrality is also crucial for international UCP staff and civil society organisations working in conflict terrains. Organisations and staff considered to be partisan are usually denied access by the warring factions. It is important to note that warring factions, as seen in the Anglophone conflict, can and often try to manipulate, obtain or claim the support of international agencies engaged in protection work, making it difficult to avoid being perceived as taking sides. Constant dialogue and communication on mission objectives is necessary to dispel or prevent such perceptions.

In situations where a manner of dressing is associated with any of the warring factions, this must be avoided to evade attacks. In the Anglophone conflict, for example, certain modes of dressing have been associated with separatists by the military (Crawford et al. 2024: 74). Persons dressed in such ways have as a result been targeted by the military. Closely associated with appropriate dressing is disguise. School children, for example, have used this strategy in the Anglophone conflict to prevent attacks. They avoid wearing their school uniforms and carrying their school bags in a visible way to avoid being identified for who they are (Crawford et al. 2024: 76). A major challenge with dressing appropriately is that persons who appear to be wealthy risk being kidnapped, making it difficult to define what kind of dressing will be needed to avoid being targeted. In the same way, a student who disguises to evade separatists may be suspected by the military of being sympathetic to the separatist cause.

The challenges attributed with disguise and other prevention strategies explain why relocation is another common strategy. Relocation involves moving to more distant communities considered to be safer or to towns where there is no confrontation between the belligerents. This has been the case with people who have fled from the English-speaking to the French-speaking regions as a result of the Anglophone conflict (Crawford et al. 2024). Relocation can be considered very effective, but has also proven to be a strategy that can be difficult to adopt over a long period of time due to the high costs. Unlike other strategies, it

however has the advantage of completely removing the risk of exposure to violence from warring actors. It is therefore necessary for UCP actors to explore ways to identify and support persons that relocate in their host environments.

The strategies discussed above are among those that have been widely used by civilians seeking to protect themselves and other civilians in the Anglophone conflict. The strategies are not exhaustive, but it is important to note that any UCP strategy and activity is nonviolent and must be designed solely to prevent, mitigate or end violence against civilians in a situation where conflict is imminent, ongoing or recently terminated.

### **3.4 Collective Protection and Local Agency**

In many conflict-affected communities, at least those in Africa, the above self-protection strategies often go hand in hand with collective protection of the entire community. Put differently, even in times when civilians are engaged in their self-protection, they do so mindful of their collective protection. In the Cameroon case, collective protection is manifested in diverse ways including through creating WhatsApp forums, unarmed vigilantism or community watch groups, assisting fellow civilians to flee violence, providing food and shelter for vulnerable groups, to name a few. Thus, collective protection is manifested, either directly or indirectly, in the majority of unarmed strategies employed by civilians. For Anglophone civilians, providing shelter for persons fleeing from a neighbourhood under attack has helped save lives and protected women from rape, among other risks. Shelter is provided in the form of a house in a safer community, or a newly built hut in the bush. Additionally, collective protection is manifested in the way civilians are attentive to the needs of vulnerable groups such as elderly and persons with disability or women groups mobilising to form sisterhoods of protection to ensure safety from sexual violence. These acts of collectivism are linked to the culture of Ubuntu ('I am because you are') which is embedded in Anglophone communities and by extension several African societies, emphasising that the individual cannot protect him/herself by ignoring the needs and security of every member of the community. In other words, collective protection forms the foundation of UCP in many conflict-affected contexts. Therefore, these collective forms of protection must be identified, harnessed, supported, and maximised in UCP interventions. In Figure 5 below, a participant at a poetry workshop illustrated this.

### **The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection**

I left them when he was dying, being brutally  
Killed by violent soldiers. But as he was dying  
he was thinking of others. He begged them to  
let me go, he was thinking of my safety unto  
Death and this saved my life. When we reached  
the community, we resolved to always think  
of the safety of the other, if we have to remain safe.

I left them limping from the torture meted on me  
But I left them thinking about the other  
My life saved because when I was in danger he spoke,  
he did not remain silent. When I got to the community,  
the community resolved to avoid the philosophy  
of indifference  
If we have to remain safe.

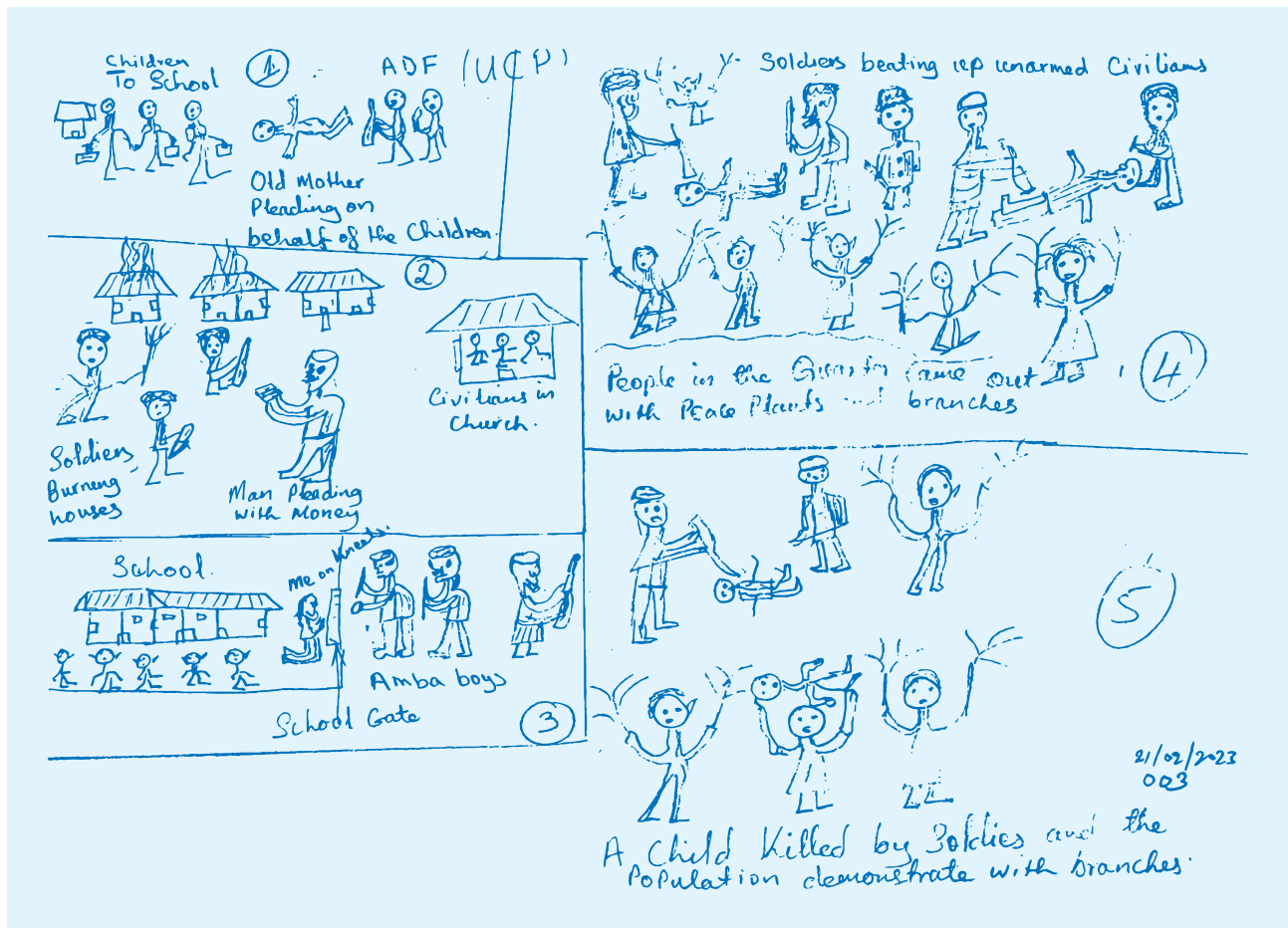
I left them and ran into the community  
Knowing that I belong to the community  
Do I really belong to the community?  
No. I went into the community because  
I am the community, and the community is me  
It was here that we resolved to always put  
Community first if we have to stay safe.

When sleeping my whistle is by my bed  
To signal my neighbour if there is reason  
to escape into the farms.  
I left them being neither the 'they' nor the 'them'  
I left them with the resolve to remain impartial  
Our community resolved to remain neutral  
If we are to remain safe.

What is equally clear is that UCP interventions thrive on existing social capital or groups in affected societies. The local agency of women groups, youth groups, community or religious leaders as well as civil society organisations are instrumental in enabling the individual and collective protection efforts of civilians. Collaborating and partnering with these existing local groups in UCP intervention is essential for its success and sustainability. Through building relationships, interpositioning, protective presence, mediation and negotiation, these groups contribute to UCP. For instance, a strategy often wrongly associated with internationals alone is interpositioning. At the local level, the strategy consists in persons with a certain reputation positioning themselves between any of the warring parties and civilians at risk to prevent harm to the latter (Crawford et al. 2024: 119). Figure 6 below illustrates the use of interpositioning.

**Figure 5: Poem – The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection**

Source: Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023



**Figure 6. Interpositioning**

Source: Drawing workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

In the Anglophone conflict, those more likely to use this strategy successfully include: older women, respected traditional rulers, and priests/church leaders (Crawford et al. 2024: 85-86). A major problem with this strategy is that such persons may not be given the same consideration at all times and may therefore put themselves at risk when they have a poor assessment of how they are perceived by the warring parties.

Building relationships is also a strategy widely used both by local and external UCP practitioners and tends to have implications for the success of other strategies such as interpositioning, protective presence, mediation and negotiation. Relationships are useful as self-protection in one's own community and for interventions by outsiders to deter violence or encourage nonviolent behaviours (Furnari 2025: 5).

Proactive engagement such as interpositioning needs to be associated with neutrality and rely on relationships to succeed. According to Mahony (2006: 16), the physical presence of internationals can be particularly helpful to deter attacks on civilians. He cites an OHCHR field officer in Colombia who believed that "if the international community makes its presence directly known there, the perceived cost is that much higher. It doesn't eliminate the risk, but it lowers the probability of the abuse" (Mahony 2006: 16). Where specialised UCP actors are not given access, humanitarian organisations can use their presence to reduce attacks on civilians. It is in this light that Mahony (2006: 70) holds that "humanitarian activities can often serve as a powerful justification for regular access to threatened populations that might otherwise be isolated. Sometimes humanitarian

access is possible even when the level of fear in these communities is far too high for any explicit human-rights investigation". Although most humanitarian organisations do not explicitly include UCP in their mission objectives, their presence and activities are aimed towards protecting civilians, and they need to be aware of these strategies to make their presence and activities more successful.

When the group or individual using their presence to deter violence is perceived as partisan, they are unlikely to succeed. Similarly, mediation and negotiation are more likely to succeed when those involved have a good network of relationships and are perceived to be neutral. Negotiation and mediation also help build or strengthen relationships among stakeholders (Crawford et al. 2024: 97). Mediation and negotiation are particularly helpful in addressing the issues pertaining to the transformation of political economic and social structures identified in Figure 1 above, required to prevent abuses in the long term.

The role of media practitioners or journalists is equally instrumental especially in devising a media strategy necessary to protect affected civilians who are afforded little coverage by mainstream media. All forms of media coverage including social media are useful and explain why governments have resorted to internet shutdowns in conflicts such as the Anglophone conflict. A media strategy helps increase the influence of UCP practitioners and protects them and those they seek to protect. This strategy works because violent actors often feel comfortable when they believe their actions are not seen or that they can cover them up. A media strategy can also help attract local and international support needed to extend the UCP efforts.

# Section 4: Designing and Implementing UCP Interventions

Designing and implementing UCP interventions is critical, it must therefore be done in collaboration with the affected communities and other local actors to ensure local ownership and sustainability. When the design and implementation process is done by members of the affected community, the problem of local ownership can therefore be said to be largely, if not fully addressed. Community-led design and implementation of UCP interventions is the focus of this section however also requires collaboration with outside actors. This section discusses key elements to consider when designing and implementing UCP. While the focus is on locally-led UCP, these elements are also applicable and have been widely used in interventions by outside actors.

## 4.1 Designing

Designing a UCP intervention involves asking a series of questions and making some considerations. Designing is particularly important to increase the effectiveness of interventions. Current practice, however, shows that the design phase can be largely neglected or at least imperceptible in locally led UCP interventions such as those observed in the Anglophone conflict, potentially because of its spontaneous nature and near absence of funding. It is important to note that not all community-led and self-protection strategies are spontaneous. As the UCP in the Anglophone conflict shows, most of the protection efforts categorised under early warning and response and preventive measures are not spontaneous. As with outside UCP interventions, designing can be particularly helpful in increasing their effectiveness. Spending time on designing the project is necessary to increase the chances of success. It is also necessary to save time, money and frustration for those involved in project implementation by anticipating problems before they occur and preventing harm to themselves and their beneficiaries. To make sure that a project design addresses critical aspects of protection, the following key areas should be included in the planning framework for both community-led and outside actors:

- Identifying the problem
- Assessing the context
- Self-assessment
- Theory of change
- Risk assessment
- Programme implementation considerations
- Planning Monitoring and Evaluation

These are guidelines. Some of these items and considerations will not fit with every intervention, but it is important to use those that fit within the scope of the work that is planned.

### 4.1.1 Identifying the problem

The strategy adopted to protect civilians depends on the local circumstances in which an intervention will take place. What is the root cause of the conflict? And why are there significant civilian casualties? The general problem that necessitates UCP is the harm caused to civilians in a conflict. Civilians are, however, not affected in the same way in all conflicts.

Some conflicts, such as the Anglophone conflict, are characterised by the deliberate targeting of civilians (GCR2P 2024) and record a very high number of civilian casualties as compared to combatants, while in other conflicts, particular categories of civilians are targeted more than others. In some conflicts, there are sustained efforts by the government to protect civilians, while it may be non-existent or limited in others, especially where the state is itself one of the warring parties. In some cases, there can be successful UCP efforts, while they may be limited in others. It is therefore important to document the need for an intervention and why the problem exists. If the root cause of the problem is ignored, then the underlying political, economic and social issues that need to be addressed to ensure the intervention produces sustainable results may not be addressed. While it may be expected that the root cause of a problem will be easily addressed in locally led UCP efforts, this may not necessarily so, as the case in Cameroon shows. In the Cameroon Anglophone conflict, civilians seeking to protect other civilians face a challenge of addressing the questions raised above to avoid being targeted by the parties in the conflict. The failure to identify the source of significant civilian casualties as in this case limited protection efforts. For example, the unlawful confiscation of the mobile phones and the tracking of social media activities of civilian-led early warning platforms and groups by the Cameroonian military impedes the sharing of critical information including on civilian casualties, the warring factions conducting attacks and where, as well as preventive/escape pathways aimed at enabling the protection of affected communities.

The deliberate and systematic targeting of civilians is an important problem. UCP actors need to understand the motivations behind any deliberate attacks on civilians. It is necessary for local UCP actors to be aware that such attacks constitute a serious problem and keep statistics on these. Such statistics are necessary to determine whether there is a cause for alarm. An intervention can be designed to sensitise warring factions on the importance of protecting civilians and the legal implications of targeting them. Although this can suffice for some actors, the root cause of the abuse may not have been addressed. It could be that there is a stereotype held about the affected civilian population or

that civilians are framed or set up by one of the warring factions. In both situations, sensitisation alone may not work. A mere description of a problem is not enough when planning an intervention. It is important to address what actually explains the problem. Many factors can often account for given problems. A good assessment makes it possible to focus the solution on the actual causes. Needs assessment is one of the tools that enables a comprehensive exploration and assessment of the problem, an understanding of the root causes and the needs of the affected populations (Watkins and Kavale 2014). Figure 7 below highlights useful steps to consider when conducting needs assessment.



**Figure 7: Needs Assessment**

Source: Department of Education, Connecticut State<sup>1</sup>

1. For more information see – <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/turnaround/turnaround-office/school-improvement-resources/needs-assessment-toolkit>

Once there is a good understanding of the problem, it is helpful to conduct a literature search to give ideas on how it is being approached in other contexts. There may be reports or articles that point out what works well and what needs improvement.

#### **4.1.2 Assessing the Context**

Similar to assessing the problem, a good understanding of the context where protection needs to take place is required to develop the right protection strategies or the right choice of strategies to be implemented. For community-led UCP, there is often a risk of taking this element for granted. The factors that explain abuse are often not found only within the community. The dynamics in the theatre of operation also changes quickly. A thorough and continuously updated appreciation of the external factors that enable abuse and an assessment of those with the power and influence to either resist or implement change is therefore required. Conflict or context analysis will enable such appraisal which will highlight the operational environment, actors, UCP risks, opportunities, and dynamics within the context. Here, focus is on three main areas: enablers and constraints within the operating environment; conflict dynamics; and stakeholder mapping.

##### ***Operational Environment: Enablers and Constraints***

In the same way that some factors can serve as the root cause of a problem, a range of environmental factors either enable or constrain the effectiveness of UCP in promoting change. UCP actors can determine the environmental factors that are most important to consider, including communication, political, economic, and social factors.

Political factors such as the change in major party leadership or a political transition can serve as enabler for UCP intervention, while in situations where the cost of maintaining the status quo is low, this can serve as a constraint. Communication is also an important factor that can enable or constrain a UCP operation. Consistent media coverage of cases of abuse in a conflict can be beneficial for UCP, while restrictions on media coverage and low coverage can be a major constraint.

##### ***Conflict dynamics***

Understanding the conflict dynamics is essential to finding appropriate solutions and avenues of intervention. Prior to UCP intervention, it is important for practitioners to have full understanding of why the conflict exists, why and how it is escalating or decreasing (Herbert 2017), and more importantly what can be done to protect affected civilians and ultimately enable resolution of the conflict.

An appraisal of the conflict dynamics will expound and nuance the different dimensions of the conflict, its actors and causes as well as the triggers and how these interact (FEWER et al. 2004). It is necessary to ensure that this exercise is conducted throughout the intervention as the conflict dynamics may change.

##### ***Stakeholder Mapping***

Stakeholders in a UCP project include civilian groups, the warring factions, and institutions, decision-makers, organisations and communities that are likely to be affected by the intervention. It is important to identify and include stakeholders early and to include as many of them as possible. Further, it is important to identify relevant stakeholders and categorize them with respect to UCP by level of interest under the following:

**Primary stakeholders:** these are persons and groups that are directly involved with and affected by the conflict such as civilians, and decision-makers.

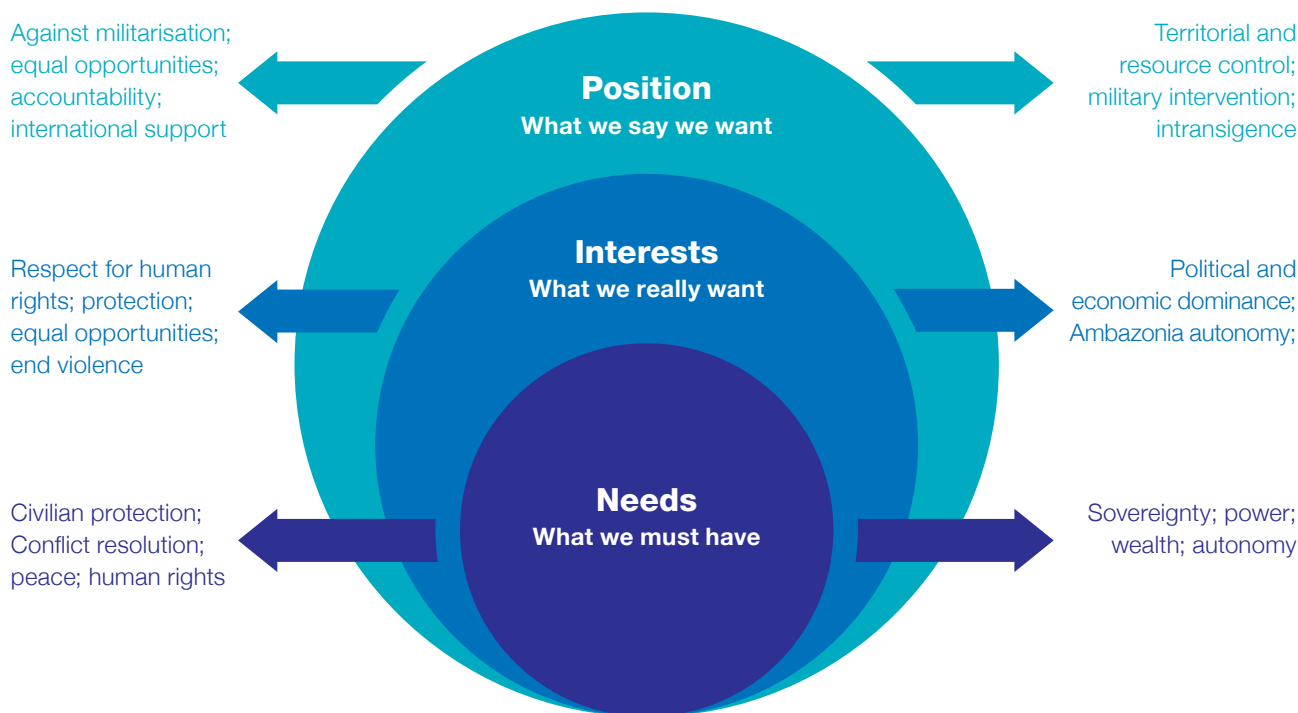
**Secondary stakeholders:** these are those indirectly involved or affected but who have an interest. Persons and groups that influence decision makers; other CSOs that share an interest in protecting civilians from harm can be included here.

The categorisation needs to be regularly updated because the position of an actor may change from primary to secondary and vice versa. Regular review is also important because new actors may emerge. It is also necessary to consider gender and other diversity issues among the stakeholders. It is therefore important to ask. For example: Are women experiencing harm that men do not? Are some attacks directed specifically at men? Another factor to consider is the attitude of all actors towards the planned intervention which may also change in the course of implementation. Some actors may be favourable to the work of UCP staff at one point and oppose it at another point. Finally, some civilian groups may not need protection at one point but require it later.

Additionally, when undertaking stakeholder mapping, it is important to outline and analyse their respective needs, interests and positions in the conflict and UCP. This will help understand the different stakeholders and to navigate ways of building relationships, and maximising their multiple positions, interests and needs toward enabling the effective protection of affected civilians. Figure 8 below uses the Onion model as example to illustrate the possible needs, interests and positions of stakeholders in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon.

## Affected Civilians/ Local UCP actors

## Warring Parties/ Others



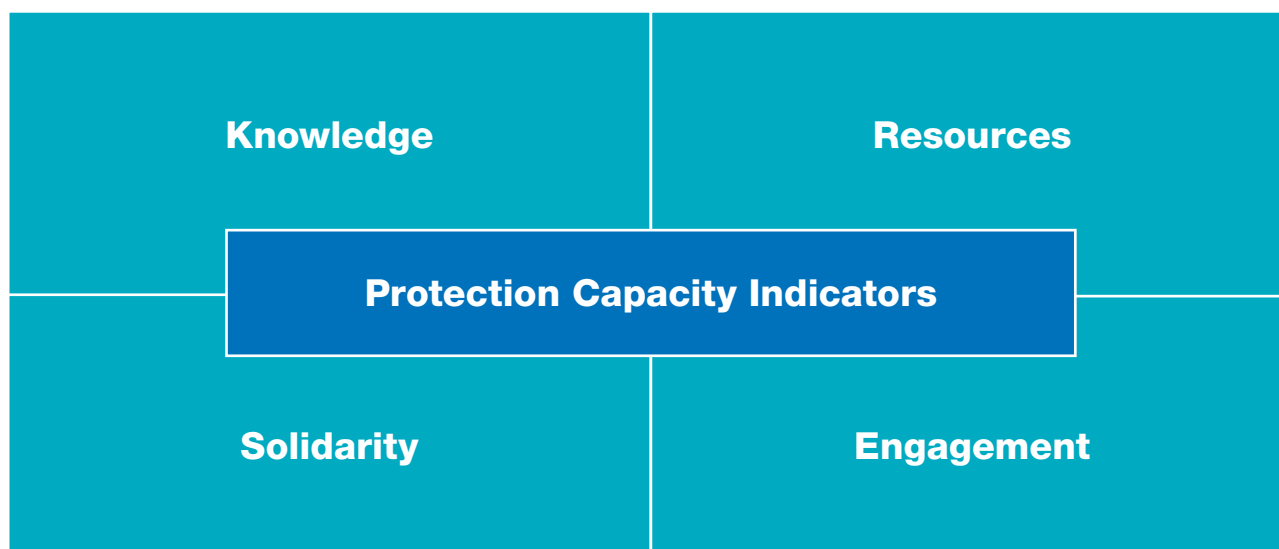
**Figure 8: Onion Stakeholder Analysis**

Source: Adapted from Fisher et al. (2000: 27)

### 4.1.3 Self-assessment

For a UCP intervention to be successful, it must align means with ends. Success depends not only on external factors that enable or inhibit results, but also on the protection capacity of the community, individual, organisation or outside actor carrying out the intervention to effectively implement its strategies. Protection capacity

refers to the “ability of a community, group or individual to prevent, avoid, mitigate or end protection threats” (Santos 2021: 6). Self-assessment enables a community, individual, organisation or outside UCP provider to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Santos (2021: 6) has developed four general categories of the factors that can determine the protection capacity of an UCP actor: Knowledge, Resources, Solidarity and Engagement.



**Figure 9: Protection Capacity Indicators**

Source: Santos (2021: 6). Authors' diagram

### **Knowledge**

Knowledge relates to what is known by the UCP organisation or individual. This includes: information on threats to civilians; the warring factions and available resources and services needed by the affected population; awareness of the rights of civilians and local and international legal instruments for their protection; self-protection strategies that have been successfully implemented elsewhere; the behaviour of perpetrators; skills such as negotiation and mediation; and knowledge in the field of civilian protection (Santos 2021: 7).

### **Resources**

Resources include the material, human and financial resources required and available to implement a protection strategy by a UCP organisation, individual or community. When a community has material or financial resources it can strengthen its overall resilience because the possession of economic resources is associated with the ability to survive violence (Santos 2021: 7). Sharing resources, as Santos (2021: 7) argues, can therefore be a strategy for self-protection.

### **Solidarity**

The main features of solidarity are: mutual concern and assistance within a community or organisation; efforts toward collective responsibility; and to reduce inequality among members. So defined, solidarity helps protect vulnerable persons and promotes trust. Solidarity is therefore of particular importance in the design of a self-protection scheme by a community. These can

include joint peace and advocacy campaigns, press releases calling for the discharge of unlawfully arrested or kidnapped civilians, to name a few. Solidarity is linked to social cohesion within communities in the sense that greater solidarity means there exist wider trust and social networks to seek support from. This implies that weaker solidarity can be a source of tension or violence between community members (Santos 2021: 7).

### **Engagement**

Engagement refers to the ability of UCP actors (community members, individuals or outside UCP providers) to engage key stakeholders who can contribute to reducing threats to civilians. Individuals and CSOs working to protect civilians need to be able to engage stakeholders to succeed. UCP actors need to actively involve all relevant stakeholders, including the perpetrators of threats, humanitarian organisations and affected civilians. They also need to engage with other individuals or groups doing protection work in the area of interest. The capacity to involve stakeholders is important for the success of an UCP intervention. This is because it is through engagement that the behaviour of perpetrators can be influenced, and that the safety of protection personnel can be assured. Engagement also makes it possible for members of the affected communities to be trained and equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to protect themselves and others. It is, however, important to note that these factors are complementary. The capacity to engage stakeholders, for example, depends largely on such knowledge (Santos 2021: 7).

#### 4.1.4 Theory of Change

The theory of change (ToC) is an explanation of why a problem is important and how a set of activities will produce the intended result (UNDG 2017: 4). In designing the ToC, some questions and assumptions must be considered. For example, why will the intervention protect civilians? If an individual or a group is driving violence against civilians, what will influence them to stop? This means that if you implement strategy X then Y harm should be prevented, or its incidence reduced (Babbitt, Chigas and Wilkinson 2013: 1). These are the underlying assumptions about why a protection mission should work. Outlining, analysing and addressing these questions are important to ensuring an effective implementation of UCP intervention. The essential element of the theory of change is the clarification of objectives or outcomes. This means it focuses on the change that is sought through an UCP intervention, and why specific strategies can be expected to bring about this change. It makes it possible for decisions on the required resources and activities to be made and for the probability of their success to be determined (Babbitt, Chigas and Wilkinson 2013).

#### 4.1.5 Risk assessment

Assessing the risk of UCP activities at all stages of the protection effort is an important part of the design for an intervention. We can define risk as the probability of incurring or causing harm. Violent conflict situations are complex, and at times the civilians expected to benefit from UCP interventions and the community members or volunteers/staff of the organisation carrying out the protection programme can be exposed to diverse risks. These risks therefore need to be assessed from the outset to ensure that informed and objective decisions are made on how protection efforts should be carried out. It is important to note that risk assessment is, however, a whole of process activity and circumstances can change rapidly in conflict contexts. Although risk assessment is indispensable for all UCP work, it is necessary to be realistic and recognise that interventions in active conflict situations can involve high levels of risk that must be understood by all persons involved in the design and implementation of the protection programme. The framework below can be used to assess risk.

Proposed strategy	Projected benefits	Potential risks to UCP providers, organisation, partners and beneficiaries	Risk mitigation strategies	Recommendations
Proactive Presence	Deterrence, encouragement and influence	Retaliation which can take the form of preventing access to regions or vulnerable populations, the expulsion of the UCP personnel or agency or the banning of the agency where it is local.	Undertaking a thorough context analysis, developing mechanisms for regular dialogue with key stakeholders and being geographically accessible to all key groups	
Unarmed vigilantism	Intelligence and information	Targeting by armed groups	Neutrality, remaining non-violent and avoiding close association with any of the warring parties.	

**Table 1. Risk Assessment Framework for UCP**

The above risk assessment framework identifies the potential benefits to the population and the protection staff, the likely harm to the civilians in need of protection and those offering protection, and ways to prevent these hazards. When plausible risks are identified, their severity needs to be assessed and controls put in place to reduce them. Finally, the assessment needs to be reviewed regularly and re-assessed when necessary.

#### **4.1.6 Programme implementation considerations**

Understanding, knowledge, and training on how to effectively reduce or prevent harm to civilians are required to successfully implement an UCP intervention. Both international and local UCP staff may lack guidance on how to protect civilians more effectively during interventions. Locally led UCP efforts in Cameroon have not shown a systematic use of guidelines and tested principles or theories. This lack of guidance leaves local UCP planners in situations such as the Anglophone conflict, struggling to ‘build the plane while flying it’. In the absence of such guidelines, a well-developed design is important. It should, however, be noted that for an UCP intervention to be successful it should build in flexibility to facilitate quick adaptation, as the situation on the ground can be expected to change rapidly in complex conflict situations.

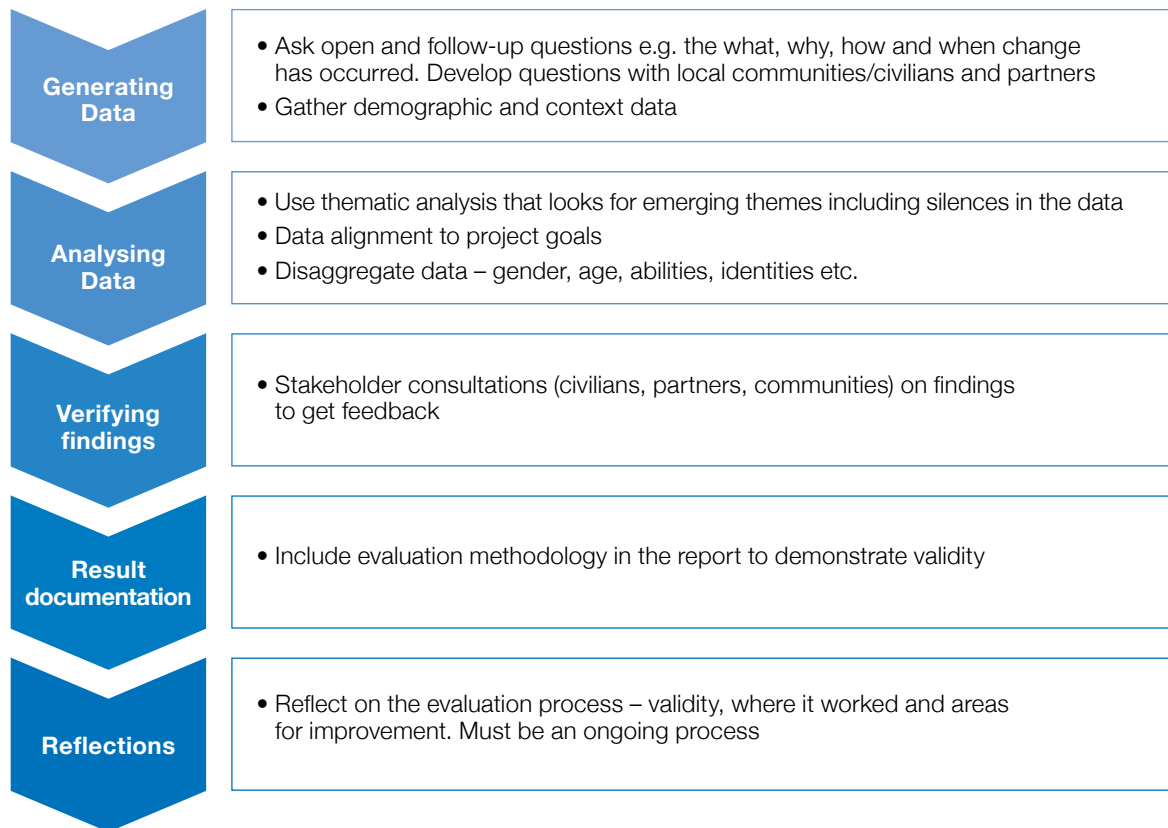
#### **4.1.7 Planning Monitoring and Evaluation**

Many approaches to evaluation have been advanced in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). Monitoring involves tracking the progress of an UCP intervention. It focuses on the intended outcomes of the process and their effects. Evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on the quality of the outputs and the lessons learned.

The choice of M&E approach should be context-driven and guided by the theory of change. Monitoring the effectiveness of an UCP strategy implementation is necessary to determine whether it has been successful in meeting the objectives and producing the outcomes outlined in the theory of change. It is also important because it presents an opportunity to change course and modify the strategies and/or tactics during the lifespan of the intervention.

Effective evaluation requires that primary data are collected from stakeholders in the UCP intervention to monitor the indicators which are spelt out in the theory of change. The data can be collected using focus group discussions, key informant interviews and participant surveys. The information collected makes it possible for the UCP provider to learn about the usefulness of the theory of change and the planned outcomes. When using a grassroots approach or participatory approach, care must be taken to ensure the effective and significant participation of those the protection intervention was meant for without ignoring the other stakeholders. This is important because there is a tendency of not involving those whose protection is supposedly intended in evaluation processes that use key informant interviews. This error is often made because ordinary people affected by conflict may be wrongly perceived not to be qualified as key informants.

To enable effective, and context-driven M&E, the Creating Safer Spaces (CSS) Network, based at the University of Aberystwyth, has introduced a ‘Participatory Evaluation and Learning Methodology for UCP’. Such a participatory approach employs bottom-up and inclusive measures focusing on and linked to civilian-led protection initiatives, as outlined in Figure 10. This serves as a good guiding tool for undertaking UCP-related M&E. Such participatory M&E involves five key steps: generating data, analysing data, verifying findings, result documentation, and reflection, as outlined in Figure 10 below.



**Figure 10: Participatory M&E**

Source: Adapted from <https://creating-safer-space.com/participatory-evaluation-and-learning/>

## 4.2 Implementation

The design of the UCP intervention is followed by the implementation. Implementation involves putting the chosen UCP strategies into action. Implementation requires a good plan which must be followed and updated. Reviewing the implementation plan is necessary when unforeseen circumstances arise. As with designing, it will be mistaken to neglect the preparation of an implementation plan in community-led UCP efforts.

In preparing an implementation plan, the objectives have to be clearly stated because they need to match the resources available. The main objectives of UCP interventions are: physical protection from imminent violence; provision of basic services; protection of human rights; rule of law; and creating safe spaces.

The steps that need to be carried out to implement these objectives can vary depending on the specific objective. Interventions aiming to provide physical

protection, for example, may require field presence, whereas those seeking to provide basic needs will need to identify suppliers of the items needed and decide how to move them to those in need of protection. The bottom-up approach to implementation is recommended for UCP. This approach makes field presence central to implementation. The activities undertaken to realise each objective have to be clearly specified in the project document and plan. The time required for each activity also needs to be specified because different activities will require different times, and this also has resource implications. Monitoring and control are required throughout the implementation to ensure the actions taken are clearly helping to address specific objectives.

Changes can be required when monitoring, and control data reveal gaps in performance and quality of the intervention. Regular monitoring and control are therefore useful to point to problems that may arise and ways these can be addressed. Implementation takes most of the time resources needed for a UCP intervention.

### **4.2.1 Choosing the Implementation Approach**

It is important to decide what approach to implementation will be used for the planned UCP activities. The bottom-up approach is recommended because it helps identify the formal and informal relationships that are often involved in UCP implementation. Some community led UCP interventions such as the vigilantes set up by local political elite in the Anglophone conflict have adopted a top-down approach which potentially explains why these have been counterproductive (see Crawford et al 2024). The focus is on UCP activities of individual and local level UCP actors who are central to the process. To be effective, UCP interventions need to tap into local networks that can promote or undermine them. These networks are important in ensuring both local and government support/collaboration for the UCP programme. A bottom-up approach helps to build possible partnerships but most especially it is useful in minimising the unintended effects of an intervention. This means that making local participation key in UCP implementation will help identify and develop the partnerships at the local, regional and national levels that are needed to scale-up activities or ensure wider protection of those affected by conflict. While some activities such as those involving the provision of basic needs, for example, may be considered incentives, they can equally put the beneficiaries of protection at risk. This has been the case in the Anglophone conflict where beneficiaries of such protection assistance have been attacked due to the lack of understanding of the activity by conflict parties. A case in point is that of a beneficiary in Munyenge, a community in Muyuka Sub-Division affected by the Anglophone conflict, who was shot and wounded alongside two aid workers (Insecurity Insight 2020: 1). Government officials have seen it as undermining their authority, while separatist armed groups have also seen it as undermining theirs, but also perceived it as a government scheme.

### **4.2.2 The Implementation Plan**

An implementation plan needs to be designed to guide the implementation team. In line with the requirements of a bottom-up approach, the plan should be developed collaboratively by the implementation team together with community partners and other stakeholders who will have a role in the implementation of the UCP programme. Planning is critical because it helps identify specific UCP strategies, gender sensitivity, and resources needed to achieve the goals set.

The identification of goals and UCP strategies required for effective planning is followed by setting a timeline for the intervention and identifying the person(s) responsible for implementing each of the objectives, resources needed and data necessary to determine if progress is being made throughout the implementation process. When setting up a UCP intervention team, it is important to ensure that it includes civilians from the beneficiary community who have been involved in civilian protection and local community partners. Careful team selection, informed by the need for local leadership where the process is not initiated by a local UCP organisation, is key to maximise the benefits of a bottom-up approach to UCP implementation.

A realistic timeline is important because the duration of an UCP intervention can determine its success. If a UCP intervention is programmed over a long period of time, the beneficiaries and other stakeholders may become disillusioned. Interventions perceived to be prolonged without significant results may, at worst, also reinforce the cynicism of stakeholders. On the other hand, an UCP intervention implemented over a long period of time, even if it is intense, can fizzle out or lead to dispiritedness and cynicism, if it is not strongly supported and funded.

Gender considerations are important to ensure that both women and men are able to benefit from the intervention. In some communities in the North West Region of Cameroon that have been affected by the Anglophone conflict, a team made up only of men will have difficulties in providing protective assistance to women. This is because women tend to be victimised if they have had any direct link with a man other than their husband irrespective of the reasons. In deciding the types of items to provide to persons in need of protection, some items may also be basic for women, sanitary pads for example. The questions on the empty table below require answers relating to implementation needs.

What approach should be used and why?	What is the objective of implementation and why is it important?	What UCP strategies/activities can be used to achieve this objective and why.	When should the intervention begin and when should it end?	Who will be involved in the implementation?	What resources are needed?	What risks may be encountered in the course of implementation?	How will progress be measured?  What data will be used?

**Table 2. Implementation Planning**

There may be a need to amend or adjust the implementation plan as implementation evolves, especially if unforeseen circumstances are encountered. There may be a need to reconsider the strategies for meeting each implementation objective where there is a change in conditions or context. Even the objectives may need to be revised under such circumstances. UCP interventions are influenced by the broader environment, and practitioners need to bear in mind that changes in the environment influence the attitudes of beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This is why monitoring and evaluation is another critical implementation activity.

### 4.2.3 Training

Training is critical to the implementation of UCP. Local UCP actors must create spaces for training to ensure increasing knowledge, the needs and strategies necessary to providing comprehensive and effective protection for affected civilians. Topics of such training could include cultural sensitivity, protection strategies (direct and indirect), trauma management, personal security, case studies, simulations, intercultural/interpersonal skills (including where local and international UCP actors must collaborate), nonviolent resistance, among others (Birkeland 2016). It is important to tailor these trainings to the needs and

realities of the context and must include homegrown protection measures/strategies. Further, training on UCP must not only be conducted before but also during the implementation and must be regular. It must also be provided not only to UCP practitioners, but also to other local actors and communities/civilians. This will ensure that, in conflict affected contexts such as Cameroon, where there is increasing and sporadic violence, local UCP practitioners, external actors/collaborators and populations are always prepared to provide protection for themselves and others.

### 4.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

The UCP objectives serve as the starting point for monitoring and evaluation. To determine whether an UCP project has met its objectives, they need to be understood. The reason why the given objectives were set also needs to be clear.

The very fluid nature of the Anglophone conflict, like many conflicts, is one of the main challenges to evaluating the impact of UCP. Consequently, the analysis at the start of the intervention can change dramatically mid-way or toward the end of its implementation. The objectives set and corresponding indicators at the beginning of the intervention may no

longer be relevant or even possible to evaluate at the later stages of implementation. There is, however, a trade-off for adjusting the UCP project plan in response to the changing context. Data for the revised objectives and indicators may only be possible to collect over a relatively short period of time compared to the programme duration. This makes it difficult for any reliable comparison of the situation between and after the intervention. It also makes the causal impact of the intervention difficult to discern. The complex nature of conflict situations and the challenges these represent for evaluating UCP interventions makes it necessary to use adapted approaches to data collection and analysis. Mixed methods approaches can in this regard be considered to be particularly valuable because of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of conflict contexts and UCP interventions. As discussed above (section 4.1.7), participatory approaches can be especially effective for civilian-led protection initiatives.

The nature of conflict contexts also explains why monitoring should be done in real time. Real time monitoring of the implementation of UCP activities helps to ensure that lessons are learned and corrections are made where necessary in good time to prevent any harm to staff and beneficiaries. It also helps ensure adjustments that may be needed, such as changing strategies or scaling up activities and resources, can be made on time to ensure effective protection.

The above shows that implementation is key to the success of an UCP intervention. UCP implementation is a process that requires a carefully chosen team, networking and the right level of resources to succeed. Finally, possible challenges to effective implementation in complex conflict contexts need to be anticipated and addressed through project-long and real time monitoring and evaluation.

# Section 5: Projected Outcomes of UCP

UCP providers are concerned with reducing or ending violence against civilians. A secure environment in which civilians' exposure to violence is reduced or prevented is therefore one of the outcomes of UCP. The protection of civilians from physical violence can, however, not be sustained without other important outcomes that contribute eventually to conflict resolution such as the rule of law, human rights, mental and psychological wellbeing, that directly relate to civilian vulnerabilities. The pursuit of these objectives can, however, attract opposition to UCP where some groups are perceived to benefit more than others. This explains why UCP efforts tend to be limited to physical protection from violence. One way to avoid limiting UCP to this outcome, which is not sustainable in the long term, is to ensure a thorough needs assessment has been completed and effectively pursue all outcomes from the beginning (see discussion of Figure 1). The focus of this section is on the different outcomes of UCP.

## 5.1 Reduced Physical Violence

The reduction of violence is one of the key outcomes of effective UCP interventions. This explains why authors such as Oldenhuis et al. (2015: 56) consider it as a major objective of UCP. The reduction of physical violence has direct implications for civilian protection. UCP practitioners reduce physical violence using a number of strategies. Some of the most common ones have been discussed above. These include: proactive protection, protective accompaniment, protective presence in vulnerable communities, rumour control and facilitated dialogue. The presence of UCP practitioners in vulnerable communities serves as a deterrent to attacks against civilians. Similarly, when vulnerable individuals at risk are accompanied by UCP providers, then they are less likely to be attacked. UCP providers also engage in dialogue facilitation which reduces tensions between armed actors and consequently decreases physical violence.

## 5.2 Promotes Rule of Law and Human Rights

The rule of law, human rights and UCP activities are mutually reinforcing. The rule of law and human rights are crucial for UCP as they make it possible for those providing protection to be able to work. Ironically, these are however largely eroded in conflict situations. The collapse of the rule of law and human rights in conflict-affected communities explains why they have to be among the tasks of UCP providers.

The rule of law requires measures to ensure compliance with “the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency” (United Nations 2004: para 6). The presence of UCP personnel often influences belligerents to want to demonstrate that they uphold these principles at least to some extent. Respect for the rule of law is in turn critical to ensure the protection of the human rights of civilians such as their freedom from torture or other forms of violence. This is important because authorities behave more responsibly when the rule of law is respected and there is accountability for crimes. The rule of law is especially useful in reducing violence against women and children. It is also helpful in reducing corruption that often characterises conflict settings.

The protection of human rights is also important for the protection of civilians. International human rights law does not distinguish civilians from other actors in conflict situations, as is the case with international humanitarian law, but ignoring human rights violations has direct consequences on the safety of civilians. UCP providers often raise human rights concerns with belligerents, and their very presence or accompaniment of vulnerable persons helps prevent human rights abuses that they might otherwise experience. In some situations, they protect human rights defenders by accompanying them (Crawford et al. 2024: 12). Protective accompaniment for human rights workers was used by Peace Brigades International, for example in Guatemala in the 1980s, to stop their disappearance and killing (Wallis 2010). UCP actors also promote human rights by educating members of the affected population on their rights, as in the Anglophone conflict (Crawford et al. 2024: 82). The importance of promoting the protection of human rights as part of UCP efforts is acknowledged in the Report of the UN Secretary-General which states that “Civilian harm would be reduced if parties complied with their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law” (Report of the United Nations Secretary-General S/2024/385 2024:12). Strong human rights monitoring and reporting abuses helps reduce violence against civilians in conflict.

### 5.3 Mental and Psychological Wellbeing

People living in places affected by armed conflict are likely to experience reduced psychological well-being and high levels of stress and significant mental health conditions like depression, anxiety disorder, substance misuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (UNDP 2022). Current evidence shows that psychological impacts of war and conflict can contribute to cycles of violence (IASC 2024: 8). Similarly, research shows that “mental scars of war increase the desire for revenge-seeking and erode people’s empathy” (Oestericher, Taha and Ahmadi 2024). It is therefore necessary for UCP to improve the mental and psychological well-being of people affected by war as a protection measure.

The study on UCP in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, for example, shows that “the threats of being kidnapped, coupled with other forms of physical violence, have had devastating impacts on the mental and psychological wellbeing of civilians” (Crawford et al. 2024: 27). UCP has been shown in recent studies to reduce or prevent psychological and mental harm in conflict situations. For instance, Crawford et al. (2024: 67) found that relocation has been used as a protective measure in the Cameroon Anglophone conflict and as a preventive mechanism against further mental or psychological deterioration for civilians that have experienced sexual violence. Such studies show that without addressing the mental and psychological effects of war, it is difficult for those affected to be protected in a sustainable way. This is because mental and psychological problems reduce the ability of those who experience them to protect themselves.

A major challenge to the attainment of the outcomes discussed above is, however, that host-governments may perceive and counter them as a threat to their authority. They can also be a source of conflict between beneficiaries and basic needs providers if the former perceive that some groups are benefiting more. When these risks are prevented, the delivery of these outcomes arguably ensures wider and more sustainable protection of civilians.

## Section 6: Conclusion

UCP practitioners, especially those who are part of and work within local communities, have been largely ignored by official civilian protection efforts. The legislation in Cameroon does not explicitly take into consideration the contribution that unarmed civilians can make in conflict situations. Thus, this Guide aims to provide practical guidelines which local UCP practitioners can draw upon in the implementation of their protection efforts. It underscores the need for UCP design and implementation to be underpinned by a bottom-up approach which recognises, leverages and maximises local knowledge, actors, and practices. It also emphasises the importance of taking requisite steps in identifying the problem, assessing the context, self-assessment, the theory of change, and risk assessment when designing UCP intervention. Implementing UCP must be done with a clear and comprehensive implementation plan, one that creates spaces for training, gender sensitivity and inclusion, and regular monitoring and evaluation. Identifying and outlining the possible outcomes of UCP is equally important. Further, while this Guide emphasizes the relevance and utility of locally-devised and locally-led UCP, it equally recognises the importance of collaboration and partnership among different actors in the implementation of UCP. That is, there is a need for collaboration between local, national and international actors and organisations aimed at supporting and scaling-up homegrown strategies and practices to ensure effective protection of civilians and sustainable UCP. Funding, technical exchanges, capacity strengthening by CSOs, governments and international agencies would be useful on this front.

The services of UCP providers also need to be more actively enlisted or supported in conflict situations because of their comprehensive nature. UCP interventions by individuals and groups within communities, as well as those by internationals, have been demonstrated to be potentially more effective in protecting civilians than the traditional military civilian protection missions.

This Guide is not sufficient for the protection of civilians in all contexts but can serve as an important aid to the training of UCP providers that require the knowledge and skills necessary to better protect civilians in conflict situations.

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