Assessment Guidelines
UNICEF Child Protection Assessment Tool

The tool brings together a wide variety of child protection assessment questionnaires into one user-friendly tool. It has been created both to help non-child protection people include child protection in their assessments, and to help child protection people carry out assessments better.

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These guidelines do not explain how to use the technology (e.g. which buttons to press), which is covered in the “Quick Training Session” presentation on the CD. If you are using the electronic version of the tool, these guidelines and that presentation complement each other and should be read together. If you are using the paper version, ignore reference to the electronic tool in this document.
1. What is Child Protection?

The child focused agencies operating in Sudan have reached an agreed definition of child protection:

Activities that reduce exposure of children to abuse, neglect and exploitation and that assist them to achieve their basic rights to care, protection and justice

Such child protection activities are currently undertaken by a variety of actors in Sudan. An example might be the attempt to put abducted children back in touch with their families and communities, or raise awareness on the health risks of female circumcision. But as the long list of Topics (see below) shows, child protection is something that all sectors can contribute to.

Many agencies are helping people meet their basic needs in Sudan. Protection, or better, keeping children safe from harm, is something all people in Sudan would like to happen. All actors should be aware of how their activities, including the delivery of basic services, impact on the lives of people, and how their programmes can be used to help reduce vulnerability to exploitation and abuse of children. For example a water engineer who understands that children in some communities are at risk from sexual abuse may realise that the location of latrines can serve to increase that risk or reduce that risk. Another example might be the realisation by food agencies that there are many separated children living in child headed households within a community. Because they are scared to let adults know that they do not have carers they often fail to get onto registration lists for food distributions.

Child

Whilst in many cultures across the world the perception of when a girl becomes a woman or when a boy becomes a man varies, under the Convention of Rights of the Child, a child is “every human being below the age of eighteen years”. In Sudan all actors have expressed their support for the convention: it has been signed and ratified by the Government of Sudan and forms part of the OLS ground rules signed by the SPLM.

2. Who should use the Tool?

The purpose of this tool is to help anyone, whether they have a child protection background or not, ask the right questions during assessments. It has been designed with the non-expert in mind, for example a water engineer or a nutritionist doing a needs assessment can ask about child protection issues and pass good basic information on to child protection agencies.

If you often do assessments, but have never worked on child protection, you will find the tool is designed to help you ask questions to the right people, avoiding questions that require in-depth knowledge of child protection issues. You can build a precise questionnaire by following simple steps.
For those with a child protection background, you can use the tool to design rapid, intermediate and in-depth questionnaires to help stimulate ideas and structure your interviews.

3. Including Child Protection in Assessments

There are two very important reasons that child protection should be included in all field assessments in Sudan. Firstly, understanding what is happening to children so that we can find more and better ways of keeping them safe is the responsibility of us all. And secondly, those agencies that have a capacity to respond to protection needs can only do so if they have information about what is happening to children in each location. As protection is a very small sector in Sudan it relies on other sectors to help keep it informed.

It is hoped that this tool will enable non-child protection agencies to include child protection in their assessments. It is also hoped that the tool will enhance the assessments already being undertaken by child protection agencies.

Please read the sections on doing child focussed components in assessments and communicating with children carefully.

Why is Child Protection Assessment important?¹

Children and adolescents are frequently among the most vulnerable groups, and without systematic analysis it will not be possible to meet their protection and assistance needs. Many of these needs are not immediately visible: for example, separated children may be taken in by other families (who may not necessarily be able to provide adequate care and where they are less able to make decisions about their lives), and the needs of adolescents are often relatively invisible. It is easy to make incorrect assumptions about needs and resources if these are not assessed in a systematic manner.

Many key protection issues will not be openly spoken about by the members of the community themselves. For example, the recruitment of child soldiers, or the exchange of sexual services for food or goods. If child protection topics are systematically included in assessments, and concerns raised are passed on to child protection agencies, we will gain enough information to understand the causes. By including child protection in assessments, non Child Protection agencies can highlight key issues and pass good quality information on to others that are able to respond appropriately.

¹ This section, and “Important Principles” are paraphrased from ARC Action for the Rights of Children, a UNHCR/Save the Children publication.
Important Principles in Assessments

Information-gathering needs to be **systematic** - the attempt to develop understanding by examining a situation fully and not from a single, personal viewpoint. A mixture of **quantitative and qualitative** information-gathering is usually required. It is important to **avoid making assumptions** without carefully checking them out: for example, relying on your own observations may be insufficient.

By self-consciously identifying possible sources of bias and error, their effects can be minimized. Information can be **cross-checked** (sometimes referred to as triangulation) by collecting information in different ways, for example:

- By using **information from different sources**
- By using **different tools** and techniques

It is important to guard against the possibility of members of the community giving **inaccurate information**: for example, in a camp, the fact of an unrelated child having been taken into the family may be concealed because of fears that his/her ration card might be withheld. Political considerations may also result in people giving false information.

Making the process of assessment **transparent** (i.e. sharing your observations, perceptions and understandings) with the community helps to avoid the dangers of missing certain key items of information, and of misinterpretation of findings. **Certain ethical principles** should be upheld. These include:

- Obtaining parental or family consent before interviewing children
- Preserving confidentiality of personal or sensitive information
- Taking care not to raise people’s expectations unrealistically that assessment will result in particular benefits to them

**It is important not to raise expectations** of a child, or promise things that cannot be delivered. In the most obvious form, this might mean not telling a separated child that you are sure she will find her parents soon. But even talking in depth about education or other facilities needs to be done in a sensitive manner, be honest about why you are asking and what you can deliver.

4. Preparation for an assessment

You can use the electronic Child Protection Assessment Tool to create an assessment questionnaire. There are over 300 questions in total (they are organised by they type of assessment they can be used in, each one has been assigned one or more topics that it is about, has a note of who it can be asked to and in which situations) by selecting the topics that you want to ask about, you sort from all the questions the ones that are relevant to your assessment. You should always use your common sense when you use the questions: you may want to ask them in a different order, or choose to skip one or two that are less relevant.
Choosing the topics
It is impossible to cover all topics in a single assessment. How you prioritise will depend on the focus of your organization and what you intend to do with the information you find. The decision to cover many issues in less depth, or few issues in great depth will affect the way you carry out the assessment: who you speak to, what type of questions you ask them, how long you will need for the assessment.

Choosing the Questions
Using this tool you can both find many questions about one issue, to one group of people, or for one situation, and find a very specific and short list of questions. Detailed information on using the tool is given in the Quick Training Session.

Choosing the groups to ask questions to
In the tool, you will see that “who to ask” is included as a means of selecting questions. These groups include a wide variety of actors present on the ground from whom different types of information can be gathered. In reality, particularly with rapid assessments, it is often difficult to carefully select a representative sample (so you will see that the ‘rapid’ questions in the tool are usually aimed at easy to access target groups). You may find it useful to see which ‘who to ask’ target groups the tool suggests questions can be asked to, and use that as a guideline.

Translation
When you do not speak the language of the person you are communicating with, using an interpreter can make communication very hard. The interpreter may not have good communications skills, they may change the question in a way that suggests an answer, not translate all that is being said, or even make things up if they are faced with new or unfamiliar language. Prepare your interpreters well for the assessment, introduce them to difficult concepts and ideas and discuss what they mean. Try and find out whether there are any particular words that create confusion, and avoid using them. For example, a word like “abuse” may have no direct translation, and an interpreter will be forced to find another word in its place, maybe changing the meaning all together.

Before the assessment, it may be useful to have one group of translators translate questions into the language of the target population, and another group translate them back. This will expose any major difficulties before you carry out your assessment.

Reading questions from a questionnaire
If and how you use a checklist will depend on your experience (and how well you know the issues you are dealing with), and the type of assessment you are doing. In all cases you should prepare questions before you start and make sure there is a logical sequence between questions.

If it is a rapid assessment, it will be very effective to carry a checklist and record results. If, however, you are doing a more in-depth assessment, writing each answer down may interrupt communication and may make the people you are speaking to feel uncomfortable: you can use the questionnaires to prepare for your assessment, get ideas about what questions to ask and on links between issues.
If you have the option, it may be better for one person to ask questions and put all his or her energy into communicating, whilst someone else takes notes. This is more appropriate when speaking to a group than to an individual.

5. Some Definitions

**Depths**
Rapid questions are designed to be used in short assessments. They are designed to produce quick answers that will give a rough picture of the situation, and will give the person reading them an idea of the immediate needs, or need for a more detailed assessment.

Intermediate and in-depth questions are designed for people who have more time and more child protection experience. The intermediate and in-depth questionnaires can be used as checklists to read from during assessments, or simply to generate ideas in preparation for a child protection assessment. There is no repetition between the depths: the questionnaires complement each other. An in-depth assessment should start with the rapid, move through the intermediate and on to the in-depth questions.

**Topics**
Searching the Database is very simple, as all the assessment questions can be filtered according to the topics that they are about, the type of situation they might be asked in, who you might ask them to, etc. Questions can be assigned more than one topic. For example any question which asks about both boys and girls will be assigned the issue ‘Gender’ as well as the main issue it is asking about.

‘Who to ask’
Whilst many questions could be asked to anyone, a particular group of people might be best placed to provide answers to specific questions. Some questions would not be suitable for anyone else but the specified ‘who to ask’ target group. For example, questions to children returned from abduction, could not be asked to anyone but this target group, whilst a question about warning signs for landmines could be asked to anyone.

**Situations**
The majority of the questions can be asked in most situations, though some are specific to an IDP camp or a community recently affected by fighting. The places, or
reasons you might be carrying out an assessment have been called situations. The tool allows you to filter the questions by the type of situation you will be using it in.

6. Using Common Sense
The electronic tool produces questionnaires that contain questions relevant to your assessment. How you use them is up to you. You may want to change the order in which you ask the questions or skip some if they are inappropriate. For example, if you are asking about HIV/AIDS awareness, and the first question reveals that the people you are speaking to have never heard of the disease, there is little point continuing with the remaining questions on HIV/AIDS.

In preparation for the assessment you should look carefully at the questions in each questionnaire and think about the logical flow. Once you have started the assessment, you may want to change the order in which you ask questions to keep the dialogue flowing. If a question leads into a discussion on a related topic which is not covered by the questionnaire, that does not mean that you cannot ask questions about the new topic. For example, if you are asking about separated children and the people you are speaking to tell you that many children are working to meet their basic needs, you can ask some questions about the type of work (is it dangerous or very heavy, such as quarrying or mining) even if there is no such question on the questionnaire and you have not chosen to talk about child labour as a topic.

In preparation for the assessment you may have decided to ask about different topics in what seemed a logical order. But as in the example above, the assessment may flow better if you change this order: if you had expected to move from ‘Separated Children’ to ‘HIV/AIDS’ to ‘Child Labour’, there is no reason not to leave HIV/AIDS to last if the conversation leads into child labour at an earlier stage.

7. Communication
Communication is a two-way process. It involves trying to understand the thoughts and feelings the other person is expressing, and responding in a helpful way. This involves listening and observing others, and presenting your own thoughts in a useful way.

Much communication is non-verbal: body language, tone and speed of voice are all part of communication. The expression on your face and in your eyes, nodding and shaking your head and the way you hold your body all give out a message. Your intention should be to make the person you are speaking to feel comfortable, relaxed and respected.

We all have a different idea of what a good listener is, but there are some things that define a bad listener. If someone is impatient, not interested, unsympathetic, etc. we find it hard to talk to them about difficult issues, or the way we feel.

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2 This section is a synopsis of chapters from “Communicating with Children”, a Save the Children publication.
Communicating with Children

Children, particularly younger children, are often not used to being talked to or asked about serious issues by an adult, and particularly a stranger. Adults also sometimes forget that children can be confused by complex ideas, complicated language or difficult words. **Language needs to be kept simple**, and it is worth regularly checking if you have been understood. It is easy to make children feel uncomfortable, blocking communication. You should avoid talking too much, being critical or aggressive, humiliating or contradicting children, showing you are uncomfortable if a child is upset, not respecting children’s beliefs, and not creating a situation of trust.

Adults can find it hard to **give an appropriate response**, to a child, particularly when the topic is distressing, but it is important to show that you have heard and understood, without breaking the conversation.

It can sometimes be easier to talk about difficult issues with a **group of children** than one individual child, especially where experiences are common to all children in the group. Groups provide support and friendship to each child, and a sense of communal responsibility (no one child being responsible for a difficult issue on his or her own). Asking questions the right way helps children relax, but the wrong way, the effect it’s the opposite and communication will be blocked. Questions with a fixed answer can block a conversation. For example, if you ask where a child lives, once she or he has answered, the conversation needs to be started again. This is a closed question. The opposite, **open questions**, help stimulate conversation, for example, ‘What is it like living here?’ encourages the child to express his or her own ideas. You should avoid questions that suggest an answer, or that suggest you don’t want to hear about negative feelings and worries. For example, ‘You don’t like living here, do you?’ invites the child to say no.

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8. **What to do with the information gathered**

One of the aims of the tool is to be a resource that as many people as possible will find useful and adopt. Also, everyone who is using the same tool shares their results, a detailed picture of the situation will begin to emerge that all agencies will be able to use in their programming. Your agency will pass on any child protection findings to a child focussed agency.

If you are working specifically for a children’s agency, it would be useful, once you have conducted your assessment, to brief report detailing:

- Location (specific location, payam, county and region)
- Date of assessment
- Main issues of concern to you
- Total population size
- Total sample size (number of different individuals you spoke to)
- Different groups you spoke to (Eg. Community leaders, teachers, children)
- Key finding on each issue (Eg. If your assessment covered separated children, you might note the number of separated children, the ration of boys to girls, the
main problems they face. If you find separated children, as a group, lack access to services more than any other group, you should note this and note which services.
- Which agencies are presently operating in that area.

9. What the Tool looks like

Screen-by-screen details of how to use the tool are given in the training session, however a very brief overview of the main screens is given here. A glossary of these terms is also provided below.

‘Depths’ within the Tool

The questions in the Tool are arranged according to how they will be used. There are three types of assessment questionnaire you can produce – for a rapid, intermediate or in depth assessment.

The depth of the questionnaire users create will depend on the time they have in which to run the assessment, and their own background. After ‘Rapid’ questions, Intermediate and In-depth questionnaires that can be produced. ‘Rapid’ can be used by people with no Child Protection knowledge. ‘Intermediate’ and ‘In-depth’ are aimed at people working with children.

‘Topics’ within the Tool

Searching the DataBase is very simple, as all the assessment questions can be filtered according to the topics that they are about, the type of situation they might be asked in, who you might ask them to. Below is a brief explanation of each topic as used within the Tool.
‘Who to ask’ (questions to) within the Tool
There are 14 ‘who to ask’ groups within the Tool. Whilst many questions could be asked to anyone, a particular group of people might be best placed to provide answers to specific questions. Some questions would not be suitable for anyone else but the specified ‘who to ask’ target group.

‘Situations’ within the Tool
The majority of the questions can be asked in most situations, though some are specific to an IDP camp or a community recently affected by fighting. The places, or reasons you might be carrying out an assessment have been called situations. The tool allows you to filter the questions by the type of situation you will be using it in. These include:

- IDP/Refugee/Returnee Camp
- New Displacement
- Settled Community
- Newly Accessed Population
- Recent Fighting
- Returning Population
This ‘situations’ option is most relevant to IDP/Refugee/Returnee camps as a number of question would be inappropriate outside of this setting.

10. Glossary

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**Abduction**

In the Tool, questions about abduction aim to pinpoint vulnerable groups, asking not just how many have disappeared, but also who, and where they are. If a decision was made by the community or family to surrender one child, why was that child chosen against the others? Questions about abduction often overlap with questions about recruitment, separated children, etc.

**Access to Services**

Questions categorised as being about access to services seek to go beyond standard questions about health and education, for example, and try to identify who is (or more to the point is not) using those services. An example might be, when speaking to separated children, asking them where they go when they are sick and who takes them
may reveal few have access to healthcare. Asking a similar question to health workers will verify the findings.

Adolescents
In this tool, adolescents refers to that group of children which is between childhood (dependent on adults) and adulthood (independent), yet remain ‘child’ under international law. Questions attributed the topic ‘adolescents’ usually cover the main areas of vulnerability that may affect the age group more than any other group of children: recruitment into fighting forces, early marriage, HIV transmission, etc.

Arms
As a topic, ‘arms’ refers to the impact of light weapons on the community, and specifically women and children. Questions aim to establish the prevalence and availability of arms amongst children under 18.

Child Headed Households
A child headed household is a family unit headed by a boy or girl under the age of 18. This group of families may find it hard to survive, be engaged in sex for survival, be vulnerable to abduction, have reduced access to services and little voice in the community. Questions in the grouping may overlap with questions about female headed households, child labour, separation, etc.

Child Labour
Child labour refers to work carried out by any person under the age of 18. Whilst Collection of water and firewood may be as much daily chores as child labour, the questions in the Tool aim to identify which groups routinely carry out these tasks. The questions also cover heavy physical and paid labour such as working in quarries and mines.

Displacement
Displacement refers to large numbers of people moving from their places of origin, usually as a result of fighting. Displacement can be a one-off, or ongoing event in people’s lives as whole communities fail to settle. In the Tool, questions attributed this topic address specific vulnerability arising from such movement.

Distress
Distress to cover concerns about children’s mental wellbeing: their understanding of their own situation, the support systems in place for children disturbed by events, and children as a barometer of society.

Education
The questions in the tool focus specifically on vulnerability, aiming to identify which groups do and do not have access to education and why. It is clear that these questions overlap with questions about Access to Services, and Gender.

**Female Headed Households**
In most scenarios communities have well developed coping mechanisms for women alone with children. When those systems break down, this group becomes highly vulnerable. In camps or times of food distribution, female heads of household may suffer negative discrimination. The questions in the assessment tool aim to establish how the status impacts on the children under the care of a female headed household. There may be overlap with questions about Gender, and Child Headed Households.

**Gender**
This set of questions includes both questions that look directly at topics affecting female children (such as early marriage), but also includes all questions that ask about both males and females. Because of this, it is a very big group of questions, overlapping with many if not all of the topics.

**HIV**
As a topic HIV looks at the understanding and social impact of HIV/AIDS. Specific groups are targeted, such as adolescents, AIDS orphans, etc to assess vulnerability of those in danger of carrying, or stigmatised by the virus.

**Mines**
Landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXO) are a prime area of concern as large numbers of people move across and return to areas affected by fighting. Mines/UXO can cause injury and death, but also impact on livelihoods, preventing people accessing watercourses, collecting firewood, grazing cattle, using roads, etc. The questions in the Tool aim to assess contamination, coping strategies, and the impact mines have on daily lives.

**Newborns**
Babies and very young children are almost universally recognised as vulnerable, and as a result families and communities are well equipped to protect them. The questions here aim to establish what services pregnant women have access to, and what support there is for during and after a birth.

**Participation**
This set of mostly in-depth questions asks how decisions are made in the community and who by. They focus on adolescents, potentially marginalised groups such as disabled children, and the room for change as the groups of people move and return.

**Play**
If and how children play can be a good indicator of the wellbeing of a community. These questions aim to establish if children play, and where, if play areas are safe, and what social groups exist.

**Recruitment**
There is often some rational choice making around recruitment, and the boundaries between forced and voluntary recruitment are often blurred. This set of questions seeks to explore which children within a family are likely to be recruited, the gender of children from the community who have been recruited by the fighting forces, and the community’s response. There is some overlap with other topics such as Abduction and Gender.

**Security**
These questions aim to assess the impact of the changing state of security on adolescents, women and younger children. The increase in possession of arms, the presence of mines, an increase in the number of security personnel may increase the vulnerability of different groups among the community. This topic overlaps with Mines, Arms, Sexual Violence and Play.

**Separated Children**
A separated child is one who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. The areas of vulnerability include increased risk of recruitment, sexual exploitation, etc. The questions specific to separated children, within the tool, overlap with questions about Child headed households, Child labour, Access to services, etc.

**Sexual Violence**
This is a broad topic that includes vulnerability to, perceptions of, and, and stigma attached to those who have been forced into coercive sexual relationships. Prostitution and sex for survival are also included. The set of questions aims to assess occurrence, community response, prevention and impact on the individual.

**Under-5s**
The few questions in this category are about the capacity of parents and the community to meet the particular needs of very young children. Areas such as weaning and childcare are covered, in addition to the difficulties faced by female and child-headed households in meeting their basic needs whilst caring for children of this age group.

**Water**
This small group of questions aims to assess which groups are responsible for the heavy task of collecting of water, and to establish if this task increases their vulnerability to any form of abuse.
**Glossary of ‘who to ask’ groups**

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<td>Separated Children</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Carers of Separated Children</td>
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**Local Authorities**

Local authorities refer to those in a position of power above the community level. Agencies will need the consent of these people to carry out an assessment at all, and some questions, particularly about security, population make-up, etc, they are well placed to answer.

**Community Leaders**

This grouping refers to Chiefs, Gol leaders, people in a position of power at the community level. They are well placed to answer questions on many topics, and in the case of a rapid assessment, they may be amongst the only people you manage to speak to.

**NGO Staff**

NGOs may be present in the area, camp or community you are assessing, and having observed the situation as outsiders may be able to shed light on some key areas such as access to services or presence of particular groups amongst the population.

**Pregnant Women**

Pregnant women and newborn babies have particular needs that are easily neglected. Social support structures around childbirth may be very strong, babies being universally recognised as vulnerable. Maternal health is another area of concern.

**Parents**

As a group, parents can answer a large number of questions about children and children’s welfare, but there are some topics that only parents can shed light on. For example, the reasons that some children don’t take part in some activities and others do (household chores, schooling, etc)
Returned Abductees
What problems of reintegration do returned abductees face? How do their experiences whilst abducted impact on their ability to return to their community? What are their own perceptions, and the perceptions of the people around them (stigma)?

Teachers
Where teachers are present, like parents, they can answer a large number of questions about children and children’s, and there are topics that only they can address. Teachers may also be able to indicate the state of children’s access to education, the gender of children who do attend school, their awareness of topics such as HIV and landmines, etc, when time does not allow children to be asked about these topics.

Separated Children
“Separated Children” are defined by UNHCR as children under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver. ‘Previous’, therefore, relates to before the incident or events that led to their current situation.
The areas of vulnerability that affect separated children overlap significantly with unaccompanied minors, and the questions specific to this group, within the tool, overlap with questions to Carers of Separated Children, UAMs and a Group of Children.

Disabled Children
This group includes the physically and mentally disabled from birth, children whose level of dependence may be higher than others’ and who may remain dependent as adults. In addition, children may become disabled, as a result of acts of aggression, landmines or unexploded ordinance or other accidents.

Carers of Separated Children
This group of people will have insights into the difficulties faced by children who have lost their parents and/or been separated from their previous carer. They may be people who at the same time protect children from some types of vulnerability and subject them to others.