BEFORE GETTING STARTED

In Section Two we identify important contextual factors that should be taken into consideration before, during, and after operations. The impact of participatory mapping can be negative as well as positive, and the success of a project depends on these factors.

First and foremost, we are focusing on *refugee* contexts. A refugee is someone who, by definition, has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution. Refugees are an especially vulnerable group, and are entitled to specific rights under international law. The application of these rights is directly connected to the contexts in which refugees live.

In the toolkit we are covering a range of refugee contexts, in both urban and rural settings. Two areas we are not particularly focused on are active conflicts and formal refugee camps. Our experience is largely related to refugee-hosting countries, but it does not mean that these tools could not be of service in other situations.

Most refugees today are not in the camps of yesterday. Over half of the world's refugees are now residing in cities. It is UNHCR's policy to pursue alternatives to camps whenever possible. For instance, Turkey is home to more than 3.7 million refugees, yet over 90% of them live outside of camps.
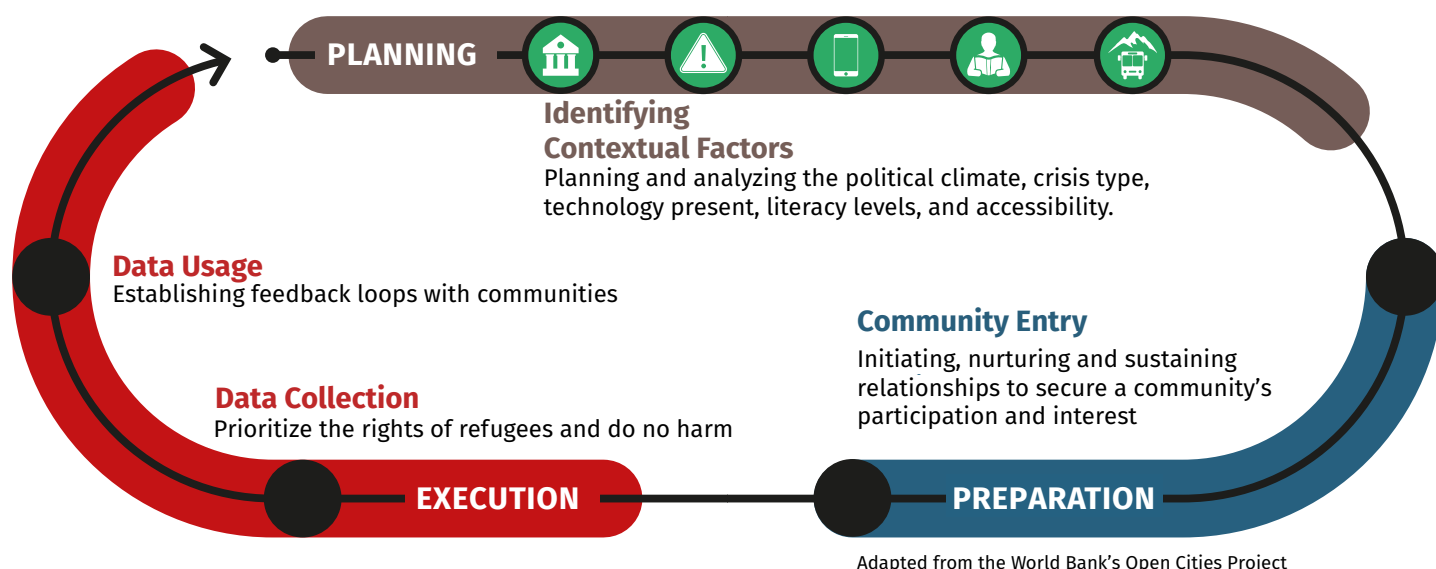

Even though policy has shifted towards alternatives to camps, crises inevitably lead to camp-like settings. In Uganda, for example, the country grants refugees land to build a home and gives the right to travel and work. Yet, this has still led to the creation of Bidi Bidi Settlement, said to be one of the largest refugee camps in the world hosting nearly 300 thousand refugees.

These two contexts are vastly different, and require unique approaches. How an organization engages in participatory mapping always depends on a series of interacting factors. Some are beyond the control of any organization, while some can be influenced in the project phases and by the tools and processes used.

Next we discuss important factors, how to work with communities and to organize your mapping project. The aim is to benefit refugee populations, so we also emphasize the need to keep refugee communities involved in the process along with humanitarian actors.

Mapping Process Diagram

PLANNING

Identifying Contextual Factors
Planning and analyzing the political climate, crisis type, technology present, literacy levels, and accessibility.

Data Usage
Establishing feedback loops with communities

Community Entry
Initiating, nurturing and sustaining relationships to secure a community's participation and interest

Data Collection
Prioritize the rights of refugees and do no harm

EXECUTION

PREPARATION

Adapted from the World Bank's Open Cities Project

Political Climate - One of the most significant factors for a mapping project is the political climate in which it takes place. A hostile climate can make it extremely difficult to carry out operations. Governments may either support or oppose refugees and humanitarian organizations within their country.

🗨 **An enabling or disabling environment -** Is the government receptive to the refugees it is hosting? Are they cooperating or constraining humanitarian organizations?

🗨 **Legal framework -** Is there legislation established to protect the rights of refugees? Are there laws allowing citizen data collection?

🗨 **Socio-economic conditions -** What is the level of economic development and how does this affect the society?

🗨 **Host community acceptance -** What is attitude of the citizens towards the refugees they are hosting?

Crisis Type - An important related factor is the type of crisis you are working in, and what phase of emergency it is. The most basic question an organization needs to ask is whether or not it is a secure environment. The toolkit does not give guidance on active conflict areas.

🗨 **Phase of emergency -** The lines are not always clear, and on the ground things are much blurrier. Still, there are at least four main phases of an emergency situation, each with distinctive features. These include:

🗨 *The Preparedness Phase -* the period before the humanitarian crisis, where use of early warning signals can help avert crisis or prepare the response

🗨 *The Acute Phase -* the outbreak of a crisis with massive destruction of lives and property, along with population displacements

🗨 *The Chronic Phase -* prolonged crisis, displaced populations are settled in temporary locations, whether camps or within host communities

🗨 *The Post-Crisis Phase -* a return to (relative) peace and security, a period of reconciliation, recovery, resettlement, and reconstruction

FACTORS

Technology - Most of the tools and processes are connected to computer-based Geographical Information Systems, therefore the availability and state of technology is important to consider.

- **Infrastructure -** Is there a foundation of technology that supports an organization? This can be related to actual hardware, software, networks, data centers, or the presence of electricity.

- **Imagery Available -** Is there good quality, high-resolution imagery available, from satellites or other sources? Using aerial imagery as a background layer is considered to be the easiest way to map, particularly when many buildings need to be digitized.

- **Internet Access -** Is there an Internet connection? What is the amount of bandwidth or level of connectivity? Many of the tools rely on Internet access. If you don't have an Internet connection, POSM may be a potential solution.

- **Smartphones -** Does the community have smartphones? Though not essential by any means, mobile data collection is a recommended method of field mapping and is done using smartphones.

Literacy - Spatial, or map literacy, isn't universal. Communities understand space differently, and organizations should not assume that people understand maps. Despite this, spatial literacy is fundamental and is an important skill to bring to communities.

- **Map Literacy -** Are communities aware of the basic conventions of maps, can they read them, and do they use them?

- **General Literacy -** Does the community have the ability to read and write? Higher educational levels can assist the mapping process.

Accessibility - Being able to reach populations affected by crisis is not always easy. It is, however, a basic prerequisite to effective operations, and having difficult terrain or lack of transportation can make a mapping project more complicated.

- **Terrain Accessibility -** Are areas you want to map physically accessible?

- **Transportation -** How will you reach the site? Is there public transportation or do you need to hire vehicles?

Other: Beyond these categories there are other factors you might want to consider:

Culture: How can you approach the local community with cultural sensitivity?

Partners: Who is there to work with? Are there other organizations on the ground and open to collaboration?

Gender: What is the best way to promote gender equality in your operations and support all people affected by crisis? Identify the specific needs, capacities and priorities of women and girls, men and boys.

Urban or Rural: Are refugees in one place with access to resources, or are they dispersed in a more rural setting?

COMMUNITY ENTRY

Community entry is the process of initiating, nurturing and sustaining a relationship in order to secure a community's participation and interest in a program. Here were are speaking mainly of the refugee community*, but equal attention should be paid to the host community.

A few practical questions can guide us: How can you involve a refugee as part of a project? How do you enter a community for the first time – and do you need permission?

The most important thing to keep in mind is how refugees can be part of the work as members of projects. They must be given **ownership**. Before starting a project, objectives and strategy should be shared with community members. They should give feedback, and this should be incorporated. If refugees are not given roles in the project, both in terms of strategy and implementation, you will face problems down the road.

Refugees are used to seeing new projects with skepticism, and for good reason. Many organizations and individuals use humanitarian crises as opportunities to exploit people – whether deliberately or through incompetence. It is crucial to build **trust** and **respect** between the organization and community.

Though protected under international law, refugees in host countries are subject to municipal and national authorities. The presence of refugees can put pressure on host communities, which often fuels prejudice. Therefore, the final aspect of successful community entry is taking into account the host community's concerns. Permission should be sought from local authorities – they may or may not endorse the project, but should not be ignored.

Tips:

- Have a consultation meeting to gather feedback from refugees
- Include a community member as part of the team
- Create a WhatsApp group to communicate quickly
- Articulate benefits to host community
- Work through partners

*However, no community is homogenous. It would be more accurate to refer to refugee and host communities.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

So, how do you select the right individuals to work with?
There are three basic principles:

Community

Active participation by the affected population is essential to providing assistance that best meets their needs. The first criteria for participant selection is being from the local community.

Motivation

Participants should have strong reasons for working. Motivations vary, but one of the strongest factors is being emotionally invested in a project. Feeling like you are making progress in meaningful work is a powerful motivator.

Non-discrimination

Non-discrimination – no one should be discriminated against on any grounds of status, including age, gender, race, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, health status, political or other opinion, national or social origin. None of these should be criteria in determining participants.

Traditionally the term "beneficiary" has been used only to describe those affected by a crisis. Now it is widely recognized that beneficiaries should also be active participants in determining their own fates. This is also the core of participatory mapping – beneficiaries should be actors and partners in humanitarian projects.

Payment As a general rule it is good practice to cover costs of active participants. For example, if volunteers join your team as field mappers they should be paid per diems to cover transportation and food. Projects rely on the data these volunteers collect, so it is an integral part of the work and should not be treated lightly. Of course unpaid volunteers can and should also be active participants, but organizations must judge when the line is crossed into work to avoid exploitation. Lastly, be mindful that even seemingly small payments can affect power dynamics in refugee communities and households.

Gender Organizations should be sensitive to gender but avoid using it as criteria to determine participants, aligned with the non-discrimination principle. Within families, paying one member but not another can have unintended consequences - either positive or negative.

Tips:

- Establish a "refugee council" who can help to represent the community – people you can trust who have deep cultural knowledge
- Take into consideration pre-existing social, cultural and political dynamics or practices that may marginalize or exploit certain groups

SAFETY AND SECURITY

In accordance with the first protection principle – do no harm – organizations must prioritize safety, especially of refugee populations. In non-camp situations one of the key goals is expanding the amount of protection space available.

The idea of 'protection space' does not have a legal definition – it is a concept that means the extent to which a conducive environment exists for the internationally recognized rights of refugees to be respected and their needs to be met. In most refugee situations, protection space is not static, but expands and contracts over time according to changes in the political, economic, social and security environments.

Each context is so different that it is difficult to make specific recommendations for safety. Organizations should establish contingency plans to address the different types of security incidents that may occur. Staff should coordinate all responses to such incidents so as to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees, and ensure that staff members and volunteers are not put at risk.

For operations, the key to effective safety and security management is the creation of a culture of security. Each staff member and volunteer has a responsibility for their own safety and security, and that of other team members.

It is possible that in a conflict situation making a community visible will do more harm than good. At the end of the day, each organization must determine whether they should be mapping at all.

Tips:

- Know the emergency services numbers for the country of deployment
- Always have access to a first aid kit; teams should have someone trained as well
- Let people decide where they work and feel most safe in
- Avoid performing field work alone
- Always obtain relevant permits, licenses, permissions, and visas for work
- Develop a country specific security plan; and incident and suspicious activity reports
- Establish a process for regular monitoring and review of hazards
- Sign up for travel alerts from your embassy

DATA USAGE: ENSURING IMPACT

Beyond all of the various factors one must keep in mind when engaging in mapping projects, organizations should never lose sight of their original goal. The first humanitarian principle states that, "The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings." More to the point, data is only impactful insofar as it is used – ensuring that it actually benefits refugees should always be kept foremost in mind.

However, this is much easier said than done. Within the humanitarian community there is no accepted definition of 'impact'. At the same time, its importance has moved up the agenda in recent years. Donors expect you to demonstrate results even when assessment of impact is, in fact, consistently poor. There is also the problem that when attempting to measure impact it can restrict the focus to the intended effects of an intervention, rather than incorporating the wider indirect and unintended consequences.

Despite these complexities the best way to ensure impact is to directly involve refugees within projects. Ideally they will be involved at all stages of the project cycle, but if this is not feasible they should at least be consulted beforehand and shown the products of the data afterwards. The following are some tips for doing this:

Tips:

- Consult with refugees from Day One
- Refugee voices should help design the data model (what information is collected)
- Be mindful of language barriers – a great potential use of OSM is in providing information in the native language of refugees
- Establish regular feedback loops with refugees by visiting community centers to share mapping products
- In terms of information dissemination, participatory mapping projects should aim to develop strong networks with refugees

Read the Northern Uganda Case Study to learn about how refugees were incorporated into a participatory mapping project to ensure impact in Northern Uganda.