



MODULE 1
RISK ANALYSIS

Photo by Deborah Espinosa

1.1. THE RISK EQUATION

The risk equation is an analytical tool for understanding the different components of GBV risk in the community. It can be used to break down risk into smaller patterns and features of a crisis or community setting, while encouraging a more outcome-oriented mindset in the program design process. In essence, it is a simple mental tool for visualizing the shape and detail of GBV risks faced by community members, in a context-specific manner. It is an essential part of the continuous, context-specific risk analysis, described in the results-based protection framework in the Introduction.

The equation provides a tool for thinking about GBV risk from the perspective of affected populations. It encourages program teams to embed their analysis in a context-specific picture of particular threats; differing vulnerabilities to those specific threats; and community-based capacities to mitigate them. In this way, it can help teams avoid making assumptions based on global theories of GBV risk and what underlies it, and to move beyond the simple application of pre-existing categories of vulnerability and threat to individual crisis contexts.

The equation itself is presented below:



Threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities are distinct factors that, when taken together, help teams to understand risk. A threat represents the source of the GBV risk (e.g., an armed group who perpetrates sexual violence against communities or individuals). Vulnerabilities are the distinct factors that make a person or group of people susceptible to that particular threat (e.g., membership of a certain ethnic group). Capacities represent the person's or community's ability to mitigate that threat (e.g., coping mechanisms such as walking in groups rather than alone when collecting firewood). Through continuous, context-specific analysis, we can avoid generalizations and break down risk patterns into threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities. This is then used to develop the causal logic for interventions to reduce risk and achieve a GBV prevention outcome.

It is worth remembering that many organizations use different analytical tools for analyzing GBV risk. Indeed, pre-existing guidance such as the IASC guidelines on risk mitigation use different, though related, language. Nevertheless, some organizations do include the risk equation in their risk analysis toolset, and the benefits of doing so are threefold:

1. It provides a framework to tease out the experience and analysis of affected people themselves. Vulnerable people will often have a very strong analysis of their own threat environment and the reasons why they are vulnerable. By providing a framework for asking about the risks they face, the risk equation can help program teams better understand the perspectives of vulnerable people and then design programs around those expressed needs.

2. It helps teams to add depth and context-specificity to project designs. This is particularly important in organizational contexts where global GBV prevention models or theories of change have been developed, and where the challenge comes in ensuring sufficient contextualization to individual community settings. In these contexts, program leads and country-based GBV advisors can use the risk equation to spell out the specific aspects of GBV risk that require amendments to the global program models.
3. It helps program and M&E teams to measure change in the community over time. By outlining the different components of GBV risk, the risk equation can be used to build a broader base of monitoring indicators to track the evolution in GBV risk over time, including where appropriate, indirect or “proxy” indicators such as those discussed in Module 3, below.

The crucial takeaway is that, by using this tool, organizations can encourage program teams to base their GBV risk analysis on a context-specific, person-centered understanding of the micro-level patterns underlying GBV risk in the communities they serve. Whilst the language may need to be adapted to fit organizational practices or cultural perspectives, the core components of the risk equation still serve as useful guide-rails for the different components of a solid GBV risk analysis.

1.2. HOW GBV RISK ANALYSIS CAN BE DONE

One of the biggest challenges faced by GBV project teams operating in humanitarian contexts is a lack of time. Project design cycles often take place in response to donor calls for project proposals, which themselves often include submission deadlines of less than four weeks. This severely restricts the time available for primary data collection as part of project-level GBV risk analysis.

Nevertheless, country GBV program teams often have a significant amount of informal needs analysis available to them, whether through pre-existing community networks or their own tacit knowledge of the crisis context where the organization has been operating in the same community for a significant period of time. The major challenge here is to find a simple-to-use mechanism to map the pre-existing understanding of GBV risk across each of the risk components outlined in the risk equation above. Doing so can help project teams add nuance and specificity to their project designs, and build indicator frameworks that serve results-based program design in the future—without necessarily conducting risk analysis as a “stand-alone” activity requiring significant additional resourcing.

As such, there is significant value in using a short template to structure the information already known about the GBV risks faced by the community being served, as well as to guide any primary data collection that is possible in the time available. Different organizations may want to design their own templates for this purpose, but some of the most critical questions to ask, based on the risk equation presented above, are included below:

Risk Analysis	Critical questions to ask
Risk	Which types of GBV are individuals and groups faced with in this context/area/crisis?
Threat	Who is the perpetrator of each type of GBV?
Vulnerability	Who is more likely to face the threat of this type of GBV?
Capacity	What are community members currently doing to mitigate or reduce these threats?
Underlying factors	What factors do community members think underly these risks? Are they related to harmful traditional practices or underlying beliefs, attitudes or norms? Are they exacerbated by crisis (e.g., by security, food, displacement, or health crisis factors)?

One template for doing this is presented overleaf, adapted from the ACAPS Protection Analysis Canvas developed in 2020.⁵ Critically, this canvas should be completed by country-based project teams in as participatory manner as possible, without presenting a risk to community members or program teams. Suggested approaches to inform the protection risk analysis include:

Participatory Analysis Tool	When to use it
Focus group discussions with community members	Only when possible without causing harm to community members or program staff.
Bilateral discussions with members of vulnerable groups	This might be done, for example, alongside caseworker visits or community-based awareness-raising activities.
Synthesis of pre-existing affected population feedback measurement frameworks	Where primary data collection is not possible due to risk of doing harm.

It is important also to bear in mind that different types of GBV risk will often co-exist within the same context and often for members of the same community. Members of a refugee community living in urban contexts, for example, might face a range of different GBV risks: girls may face the risk of early and forced marriage; women may face the risk of prostitution; and men and boys may face the risk of physical assault on the basis of their gender or sexual identities. Each type of risk may demonstrate a different risk pattern: different perpetrators, different contributory and underlying factors; different types of people being vulnerable to those risks, in different ways; and different community-based capacities emerging to mitigate those risks. As a result, the risk analysis itself will need to be duplicated for each GBV risk present in the community. When using the canvas below, for example, teams should look to build one complete canvas for each GBV risk observed. This might mean, for example, completing one canvas for the risk of early/forced marriage faced by girls in a non-camp displacement setting; another for the risk of intimate partner violence for the married women within the same community; and finally, another for the risk of physical violence and threats faced by men and boys in that community who don't conform to traditional sexual identities.

Finally, once the canvas has been completed in draft form, it is important to pause and reflect about how it would change if any of your underlying assumptions were altered. For example, you can try adding greater specificity about vulnerabilities. Instead of just seeing, e.g., women and girls as the most vulnerable group, what if it is actually women and girls with a disability from a specific ethnic or religious group? How would this change the risk dynamics and the prevention efforts? This process of reflection can help to fine-tune the project design.

⁵ <https://protection.interaction.org/acaps-protection-analysis-canvas/>

GBV RISK ANALYSIS CANVAS⁶

Background	GBV Risk Profile What is known about the GBV risks faced by members of the community being served? E.g. the types of GBV faced, role of duty bearers, the types of harmful traditional practices, beliefs or norms observed in the community. (3-5 bullet points).		
Analysis	Threat Which types of GBV threats are present for the community members?	Vulnerability What influences the vulnerability of community members to these risks?	Capacity What capacities do the community and its members already have at their disposal to mitigate these risks?
	Scenario Describe with 3-5 bullet points the most likely way the situation could evolve		
	Triggers What types of events or factors might make this happen?		
	Worst case		
	Best case		
	Most likely		
Mitigation	Reduce Threat What needs to change for the threat to be reduced? (3-5 bullet points)	Reduce Vulnerability What needs to change for the vulnerability to be reduced? (3-5 bullet points)	Increase Capacity What needs to change in order to increase the community capacity to mitigate these risks? (3-5 bullet points)

⁶ <https://protection.interaction.org/acaps-protection-analysis-canvas/>

An example of what this could look like when completed is presented below, based on a fictional program example presented in section 3.1 below:

GBV Risk Profile			
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internally-displaced persons (IDPs) living in camp settings, with basic needs met by humanitarian actors—excluding fuel for cooking food items. The armed group providing security in the surrounding area presents a known threat of violence and murder for any men and boys leaving the camp to collect firewood. So, women and girls (WAG) collect firewood in their place. WAG face GBV risks including: sexual assault, rape and physical violence inflicted by armed groups during firewood collection. 		
Analysis	Threat Armed groups in the area sexually assault WAG during firewood collection.	Vulnerability Young women and girls, collecting firewood alone at daytime.	Capacity Those IDPs with available resources purchase firewood from local markets.
	Projected evolution		
Scenario	Worst case: sexual assaults worsen, IDPs unable to safely access fuel for food leading to food insecurity	Continuing absence of IHL awareness or accountability mechanisms among armed actors, combined with no alternative to firewood collection for IDPs.	
	Best case: sexual assaults stop, IDPs meet basic needs without fear of sexual assault	Widespread acceptance of IHL obligations by armed group; effective accountability mechanism established; IDPs find firewood alternatives.	
	Most likely: sexual assaults reduce somewhat	Sensitization of armed actors to IHL; IDPs find firewood alternatives.	
Mitigation	Reduce Threat Reduce acceptance of sexual violence among armed groups.	Reduce Vulnerability Changed firewood collection habits (e.g., large groups of mixed ages, collection at dawn).	Increase Capacity Provision of cash to purchase firewood on local markets.

There are alternative formats for risk analysis available for project teams, including those adapted from protection risk analysis tools. The IRC-DRC Results-Based Protection Analysis Project published a Resource Mapping in November 2020 that presented a collection of 18 results-based resources for protection analysis drawn from across the humanitarian community.⁷

One example explicitly bases itself on the risk equation presented in Module 1 above. ActionAid’s 2010 field manual for integrating community-based protection across humanitarian programs includes a simple tool for listing threats, vulnerabilities and pre-existing capacities to mitigate risk:⁸

Protection problem:			
	Threat(s)	Vulnerable	Current capacity
What/Who?			
Why?			
Where?			
How			
Current strategies?			

7 Full details can be found: https://protection.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resource-Mapping-Summary-Findings_final_November-2020-002.pdf

8 ActionAid (2010). Safety with dignity: A field-based manual for integrating community-based protection across humanitarian programs.