

PIM Principles in the Mali Protection Cluster Protection Monitoring System

Dominique Reinecke is Protection Monitoring Officer for the Mali Protection Cluster. She explains the Mali Protection Cluster's Protection Monitoring System, which reveals how this protection monitoring system is consistent with many elements of the PIM Framework.

Overview of the protection monitoring system

Dominique has a role supporting strengthened protection monitoring in Mali. She describes her work and the development of the Mali Protection Cluster Protection Monitoring System:

I am responsible for the management of the national protection monitoring system in the Mali operation, working with UNHCR under the Protection Cluster. It is not very common that there are dedicated protection monitoring officers in UNHCR. In Mali, it is very much needed, as there has been a lack of data on human rights violations and analysis on protection trends serving the humanitarian community. The strategic importance of protection monitoring for an improved protection response, advocacy and resource mobilization is recognized in both the Mali Protection Cluster and the Humanitarian Country Team's Protection Strategies. As a result, my position as Secondment by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) was created to support UNHCR and the Protection Cluster to strengthen the national protection monitoring system.

The protection monitoring system was established in Mali in 2013. Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (AMSS) is the national protection partner of UNHCR implementing protection monitoring since 2016.

AMSS is very rooted in the communities (grassroots organization) and has a vast network of monitors and focal points contributing to the protection monitoring.

This community-based protection approach is instrumental to reach people in need of protection in a security context like Mali which poses serious access constraints for humanitarian organizations.



A protection monitor using Kobo on a tablet

Elements of the Mali Protection Cluster Protection Monitoring System

- **Protection Incident Reporting**
Recording of 34 types of incidents within 6 categories of violations. Non-sensitive data only collected. Referrals to incidents reported is an integral part of the protection monitoring system while response and case management is done through a different process.
- **Protection Risk Index**
Gathers information from community members to build community-level perceptions of severity of protection situation; considers threats, risks and vulnerabilities as well as capacities of the communities. Analysis of trends as the Protection Risk Index is established on a monthly basis.
- **Flash Alerts**
Immediate reports, within less than 48 hours, of serious incidents or threats (imminent or threat of attacks on village, population movement, attacks against civilians or civilian infrastructure) requiring urgent response by humanitarian and peace actors.

A community-based protection monitoring system

The protection monitoring system is undertaken by 57 monitors in six of Mali's conflict affected regions which record individual protection incidents based on established criteria. The monitors are directly employed and supervised by AMSS. They rely on a network of 188 focal points and 168 members of protection committees to access information on alleged violations. In 2021, the collaboration between monitors and focal points is being further strengthened through a more regular information exchange and joint learning opportunities provided by AMSS and UNHCR at the sub-national level (Mopti, Gao, Segou, Tombouctou).

Addressing gaps in the Protection Cluster protection monitoring system

Protection monitoring was initiated in Mali in 2013, implemented by different agencies (IEDA Relief, Intersos, DRC, CIAUD Canada) and starting from 2016 by AMSS. The coverage and role of monitors slightly changed over time. Starting from November 2017, the capacity of monitors was strengthened through targeted trainings on subjects of human rights, categories and types of violations to be recorded, protection analysis as well as techniques and reporting of violations, identification and referral of victims. Despite these efforts, the quantity and quality of information obtained through the protection monitoring system remained limited, not leading to qualitative analysis informing protection responses. Simultaneously, the security situation in Mali started to deteriorate with an increasing information gap about the protection needs of people affected by the conflict.

A process was initiated in 2019 to strengthen the protection monitoring system through three stages: 1.) Self-evaluation undertaken at field level with monitors 2.) Exchange mission (HCR, SDC, AMSS) to identify 'good practices' in the Niger operation 3.) Reflection Workshop with

Protection Cluster members (also based on outcomes of the evaluation and the Niger mission) leading to 12 key recommendations (of a total of 25 recommendations) which have since been implemented. These included the recruitment of a dedicated human resource (Protection Monitoring Officer), to place the protection monitoring system under the Protection Cluster in order to ensure maximum use and utility of available data and analysis, refining the roles of focal points and a digitalization of the system.

KOBO (digital data collection software) was eventually introduced in early 2020. Previously, monitors were using paper sheets and data entry was done manually. This was time consuming and also led to many entry errors. Information was not centralized at national level and not systematically analysed. The use of hardcopies to do data collection further constituted a security risk for monitors and for the confidentiality and data protection of the victims.

Dominique, as the Protection Monitoring Officer who began in the position in 2020, played an important role in implementing the key recommendations which had been identified in the workshop. These formed the basis for the revision of the system in Mali guiding the process on how the system was transformed and improved.

Review of the protection monitoring system (Applying the PIM Process)

Dominique describes this process of revision:

In the course of [2020] protection monitoring tools were reviewed in an effort to improve the quality of data and harmonize data collection processes i.e. through digitalization of data collection and transfer. Monitoring tools were simplified, harmonized and developed, reviewed as well as validated by technical committee, with adequate representativeness of Protection Cluster and Child Protection and GBV Sub-Clusters members.

The capacity needs were addressed through intensive trainings provided to monitors by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in all regions covered by protection monitoring. We worked gradually with the partner (AMSS) to address technical difficulties and improve data collection, transfer and staff capacity to conduct regional analysis.

At national level efforts were made to streamline processes, namely the sharing protocol of the flash alerts, and develop new products, like the protection risk index. This work was done in collaboration with Protection Cluster members who participated in the review. As this process was led by the Protection Cluster and inclusive in nature, we had a lot of buy-in from members. This ensured that products of the protection monitoring system are of use to a large number of members of the humanitarian community (UN agencies, national and international NGOs), at the operational level serving their programming, advocacy and resource mobilization but also at a more strategic and political level addressing key protection concerns to the Humanitarian Country Team, the Civil-Military Coordination and the MINUSMA Protection of Civilians Unit.

Building the capacity of protection monitors

Dominique explains that a key aspect of the project involved strengthening the capacity of the protection monitors as part of this process.



Monitor using KOBO on his phone during training

We have in the course of the last year really invested a lot in building the capacity of the protection monitors; to familiarise them with the different tools, the different categories and types of violations, how to identify them and how to record them properly.

The security of protection monitors and the volunteers (focal points, members of protection committee) working for the project is also a major concern for us in the Malian context.

We have therefore identified and continue to promote different measures to mitigate risks and enhance the security of monitors and community workers when doing monitoring activities.

Improved protection analysis is enabling stronger protection response

Dominique explains that the information and analysis obtained through the protection monitoring system is improving the protection response:

I really do think humanitarian actors in Mali are providing more targeted and adequate protection responses because of the information that is now available on priority needs, protection and security trends, concerns and risks for the civilian population – which is the ultimate objective of protection monitoring: to lead to better protection outcomes for the civilian population. We have advanced so much from a place where there was very little systematised information available to a point where a wide range of agencies, partners and donors can access and benefit from the various products generated by protection monitoring system.

We have a solid basis for advocacy now. Being able to observe and analyse protection trends and having a more precise picture of the protection concerns that the civilian population is facing, we are now in a position to alert the Humanitarian Country Team on key protection concerns, channelling advocacy to different audiences, including the donor community but also key stakeholders at grassroot level, like parties to the conflict.., As an example, more than 65% of all advocacy initiatives led by the Protection Cluster in 2020 were based on data and analysis provided by the protection monitoring system. We are therefore confident that our advocacy is evidence-based and looking to address the most serious human rights violations occurring in Mali.

One of the Protection Cluster's products which are based on the protection monitoring are periodic advocacy notes on topics where we feel they need specific attention. In the production of these notes we are often also collaborating with other Clusters, which has given us more visibility in different forums. For example, we have collaborated with the Health Cluster on a note outlining the increase of attacks against health care facilities and staff: it's impact on the civilian population, key figures and trends observed and a section on the concept of protection of the medical mission in international humanitarian law. With the Nutrition and Food Security Clusters we collaborated on an advocacy note for a coordinated response, highlighting that

attacks on means of subsistence have become a strategy applied in the conflict by non-state armed actors, and how the targeted destruction of livelihoods, forced displacement and food insecurity reinforce each other. Data for evidenced-based programming and response needed, largely derives from protection monitoring.

We also have a good collaboration with the Protection of Civilian Unit within the peacekeeping mission MINUSMA. MINUSMA's reporting is largely focusing on security incidents which we are now in a position to complement with our protection analysis and findings from the protection risk index, a tool which is not based on protection incidents only but rather on the severity of the protection situation in a given area based on key informant's perception about threats, vulnerabilities and capacities. We are now in a position to engage, contribute and complement analysis in different fora, informing programme planning and response.

It has [also] definitely helped us to fundraise as well, to outline gaps and priority issues at different levels. We have contributed to policy papers; we see that different actors make reference in reports to the protection monitoring and the reports available...

Links with other stakeholders and other information systems

The information generated by the Mali Protection Cluster through its protection monitoring system contributes to other information systems and informs a wide range of stakeholders:

...We have in our [protection] cluster meetings a very large audience of people from academia, from the Protection of Civilians department of the peacekeeping mission, from Human Rights interested to follow [the analysis and discussion and exchanges following our presentation of the monthly protection analysis].

The protection monitoring system [also] feeds into other systems [such as] the [Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict] (MRM) ... and it is something we now do systematically. So there is collaboration between different agencies and different mechanisms to use all the available data to a maximum extent But it is probably not realistic to think we can only have one mechanism that is able to cater for all the different demands and mandates and objectives. What is crucial is to ensure complementarity and good coordination.

PMS contributes to improved protection environment and protection outcomes

The collection, analysis and dissemination of information on human rights violations is only one activity undertaken in the scope of the project. It is complemented by a broader set of activities conducted by protection monitors aimed at improving the protection environment and the resilience of affected communities. Dominique explains:

In addition to data collection, the protection monitors provide human rights awareness sessions in their communities where other humanitarian actors cannot easily go to due to security constraints. Enhancing their knowledge of their rights, community members positively change their attitudes and practices vis a vis protection. In order to ensure that victims of human rights violations receive adequate support and accessing services, monitors are also tasked with undertaking protection referrals, ensuring that there is a link between protection monitoring and protection response.

PIM Highlights

- PMS has a clearly defined purpose ([PIM Principle](#) – Defined purpose, PIM Process)
- Coordinated, harmonised, digitised system contributes to stronger national and regional level analysis of protection trends (PIM Principle – Coordination and Collaboration).
- Data and information gathered through the protection monitoring system is used to the maximum extent possible (PIM Principles – Do No Harm, People - centred and inclusive)
- PMS facilitates data sharing with other information management systems; e.g. MRM (PIM Principle - Coordination and Collaboration)
- Protection analysis is shared widely and used by diverse stakeholders in Mali, and enables quality protection outcomes. (PIM Principle – Coordination and Collaboration)
- Capacity of protection monitors strengthened as part of focus on community mechanisms (PIM Principles – Competency and capacity, Do No Harm,)
- Introduction of digitised data collection has increased the security of sensitive data (PIM Principles -Do No Harm, Data protection and security)
- Improvement of the PMS through review and applying lessons learnt (Applying the [PIM Process](#))

More information about the Mali Protection Cluster Protection Monitoring System

In a film prepared by UNHCR Mali, a protection monitor working as part of the Mali Protection Cluster PMS describes his protection monitoring work and the protection risks experienced by communities in his region. The film (in French) can be found [here](#).