Using the PIM Process to design a Protection Monitoring System

> Data Policy Officer in UNHCR's Global Data Service, Rachelle Cloutier explains how she used the PIM Process to design a Protection Monitoring System.

Rachelle Cloutier is a Data Policy Officer in UNHCR's Global Data Service. Prior to her current role, she was Information Management Officer (Protection) in UNHCR HQ's Field Information and Coordination Support Section (FICSS), a role in which she provided technical field support and training on information management.

Developing a national harmonised protection monitoring system

Rachelle was deployed to support a country operation following their request for help to redesign the protection monitoring system. Rachelle describes the challenges the operation was facing:

The protection monitoring system there had developed organically over the years, resulting in each sub-office having its own protection monitoring system and partners. As a result, different data was being collected, with different units of measurement, and at different frequencies.

These localized protection monitoring systems were useful to local staff for their protection work, but the diversity made it impossible to bring the information together and analyse it to generate a national level view of the protection situation of refugees. Therefore, despite the extensive protection monitoring programme in place, it was not possible to identify trends in the protection situation and to use this as evidence to inform national-level programming, prioritization, resource mobilization, advocacy, etc.

The purpose of [my support mission] was to see how we could create a national level, harmonised protection monitoring system. Sub-offices would not necessarily have to use the same partners, but they would start collecting the same data and information, with standardised methodologies and reporting cycles. This also required a process for data to flow from the data collectors to the sub-office to the country office, where it could be compiled, analysed and transformed into a product that would allow senior management at the national level to make evidence-informed decisions and to lead on protection for the refugee response in the country.

Use of the PIM Process

To support the development of this harmonised national-level protection monitoring system, Rachelle organised a series of workshops, first with internal staff and then with partner organisations. Based on the PIM Process, Rachelle unpacked the key decisions that had to be taken to design a protection monitoring system, guided by the PIM Principles:

I started with the PIM Matrix and the PIM definitions to get everyone on the same page about protection monitoring, especially the aspect of trends analysis.
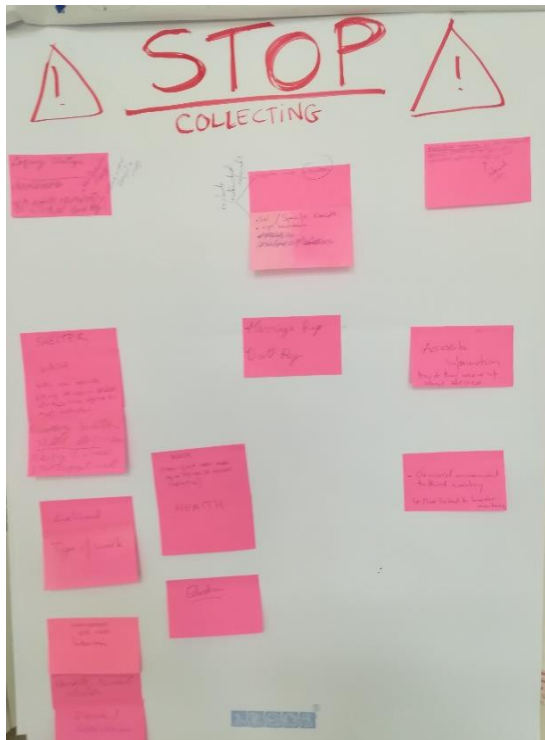
Then we mapped the information that was being collected. We tried to assess its use ('Do we use it?', 'Do we not use it?'), and thought about possible gaps ('What is missing?').

This informed discussions on the list of information needs that would be prioritized for protection monitoring in all sub-offices, some of which would be met through primary data collection by partners.

It was great to see that colleagues were really getting into it, and asking, 'Do we really need to know this information?', but also 'Where can we get this information from?'. So one of the big value-added of the exercise was [answering the question] 'What primary data does the protection monitoring system need to collect and what is already available?'.

This is something the PIM Process helps with. A protection monitoring system relies on a combination of primary and secondary data that comes together at the analysis stage.

But the secondary data will never be pulled in at the analysis stage unless it is deliberately identified as a source and the people responsible for analysis know to go to those sources.

This is why the list of information needs and the desk review are such important steps in the PIM Process.
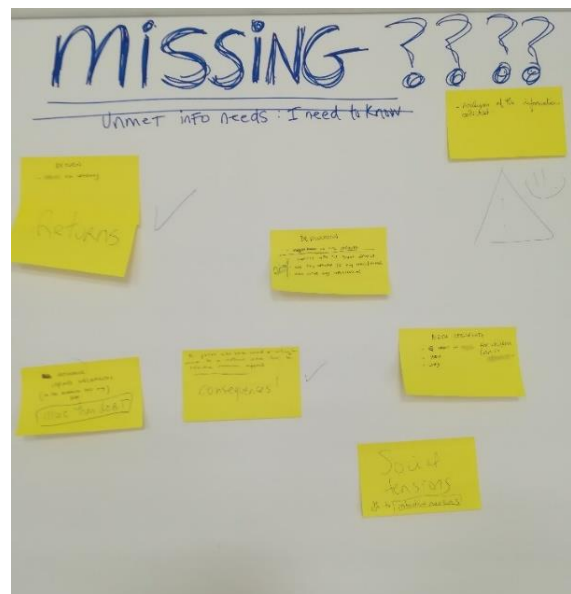
Protection and IM Collaboration

Rachelle's counterparts for this technical support mission were the country Protection staff, given their roles and responsibilities for protection monitoring. However, the work to develop a national harmonised protection monitoring system also drew on the expertise of country Information Management staff. As Rachelle explains:

PIM Protection Information Management

This is one of my main headlines for protection monitoring: Protection monitoring needs to be owned and led by Protection staff. Like all the PIM categories, protection monitoring has a data component [and] it can only function with information management. But it is not information managers who will say, 'We need to do protection monitoring, for these purposes, and have such and such information needs.' Protection staff are the ones who can determine these things and as a priority, protection monitoring needs to meet their information needs.

However, the process to develop a harmonised protection monitoring system also underscored the importance of Protection and IM collaboration, and of drawing on the expertise of IM staff -- not just as 'data crunchers' but also as collaborators with expertise to offer in the process. Rachelle recalls:

IM staff in the country had a lot of expertise, especially with regards to the discussions we were having about whether to shift the data collection methodology towards representative sampling. The IM staff had been engaged in a very large and regular needs assessment [in the country and] had five years of experience with this type of sampling. They could speak to what was required to organize this type of data collection, what worked and what had not worked, [as well as] existing sources of information. Contrary to other operations I had supported, in this case it seemed like protection monitoring was so fully owned by Protection that they had not been sufficiently connecting to the expertise of IM.

Through this work, it was also possible to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Protection and IM staff. For Rachelle,

This work on designing the new protection monitoring system was also a great opportunity to put the analysis responsibility where it belongs. Analysis is often seen as an IM task, but it is the responsibility of the subject-matter experts. They are the ones who can explain and assess the meaning of the information, draw relevant conclusions, and make recommendations. The IMO will consolidate the data, clean and organize and visualize it, but the analysis 'moment' really belongs to Protection.

The process of developing the protection monitoring system also affected budget decisions and therefore raised the need for another collaboration: with Programme. These colleagues could advise on the resource implications of different options for the design of the protection monitoring system.

That was a huge lesson for me and it is something I always include now in my recommendations: [that is] the importance of involving Programme staff at the outset, because of the resource implications of protection monitoring, especially when you are not starting with a blank slate and money has already been allocated.

Developing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The PIM Process also acted as a guide for structuring the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the new, harmonised protection monitoring system. As Rachelle explained:

[The PIM Process] helped ensure that each step – especially the elements included in the "Implement" phase [of the PIM Process] – had a clear process flow, roles and responsibilities, timelines, and outputs.

For example, who does what for the collect, store, process, analyse, and dissemination steps. Often, without the PIM Process, deliberate discussions on each of those elements never happen, and this is how we end up with the problem of collecting data without necessarily getting the information outputs and the evidence base. Those last steps may not be thought about, formally documented, or approved. [In such cases], you don't have a system, you just have protection monitoring data collection.

PIM Highlights

- Used PIM Matrix to build shared understanding of information system categories (PIM Matrix)
- Prioritised information needs and clarified purpose of PMS (PIM Process)
- Built IM and Protection collaboration, and clarified roles and responsibilities in the protection monitoring system (PIM Principle - Coordination and collaboration)

PIM Protection Information Management