

Using PIM to Develop a Community-Based Protection Monitoring System

UNHCR Protection Officer, Tin Wun Andrew Mok, explains how UNHCR's community-based protection monitoring system in Kachin and northern Shan States in Myanmar reflects the PIM Principles and the PIM Process.

Andrew Mok was Associate Protection Officer for UNHCR's Field Office in Myitkyina in Myanmar. UNHCR operations there support approximately 105 000 internally displaced people (IDPs) living in camps across Kachin and northern Shan states; the two most north-eastern parts of Myanmar, on the border with China. Andrew also coordinated the sub-national protection coordination forum and co-led the Durable Solutions Working Group (DWSG) for Kachin State.

Improving the Protection Information Management System: Starting with PIM training

Andrew attended a PIM training in November 2018. At that time, UNHCR in Myitkyina were considering how to improve the protection information management systems for their operations; particularly looking to improve how they captured and used the information that they were gathering.



Image from a PIM training. This is not the training described in this case example.

Through 2019 and early 2020, Andrew and his colleagues ran a number of internal trainings for UNHCR staff and then for protection managers from local partner organisations on PIM, ensuring that these concepts were shared in a way that was accessible and could demonstrate added value, especially for partner organisations.

According to Andrew,

When we did the training internally, a lot of [staff] said 'we kind of do this already' so it was a good realisation that it was not anything new but it was a more systematic and structured way of thinking about protection information management and protection.

A Community-based Protection Monitoring System

UNHCR and local partners wanted to develop a monitoring system to monitor conditions and protection risks on a regular basis. While the initial focus and use of the protection monitoring

system was intended for camp level issues and work, this information is also intended to be used increasingly for more strategic purposes, providing overall or 'big picture' analyses to inform program responses and higher-level advocacy.

The Protection Monitoring System that was developed for the region's context needed to be relevant, useful and able to be implemented by community members, with the support of UNHCR's local NGO partners. This was due to access constraints for humanitarian agencies, as well as the future movement of people living in the camps.

In Kachin and northern Shan States, access for international humanitarian actors is limited and local organisations play a primary role in implementing the humanitarian response. The region has strong local NGOs and civil society organisations operating since the 1990s with a development focus. In recent years, these local organisations had been the primary humanitarian responders to issues emerging from the conflict and associated displacement after the breakdown of a ceasefire between the government and main armed group in the area in 2011.

UNHCR's three local partner organisations cover 139 camps. Some of these camps are in non-government-controlled areas on the border with China and were therefore difficult to access, even before access restrictions associated with COVID-19 public health measures in 2020.

Additionally, since 2019, stakeholders have focused on possibilities for resettlement and return of IDPs currently living in camps. Therefore, the number of sites where IDPs are living in camps will likely eventually reduce. There are about 139 camps now, and more than 100 return villages being prepared by government. Andrew explains the implications for the design of a protection monitoring system:

In terms of sustainability of a protection monitoring system, no organisation can cover all these [return] sites with protection monitoring in the way we are doing it in the camps. This is why we are working with focal points because we need to build up community capacity so we have this core kernel of community-based protection awareness and networks of people in these sites who can then flag [issues] and be entry points for protection agencies or other agencies providing more specialised services. That is in the back of our mind; that eventually [people will] leave the camps and spread out to all these locations and the way services are covered and provided will change.

Through 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated public health restrictions on movement, affected humanitarian presence in a number of locations and underscored the need for a community-based system of protection monitoring. The decision was made to utilise an existing network of community-based focal points in the camps.

Using PIM in the Design Process – Balancing Simplicity and Specific Requirements

Because the protection monitoring system is community-based, tools and systems that were developed were geared for the local organisations UNHCR works with, as well as community members in the camps. Andrew describes the design process:

The whole design process was a lot of back and forth in terms of designing tools with partners. The main consideration we had was balancing between simplicity and trying to make the something workable and the need to add specifics.

This design process generated a very simple one-page checklist with basic questions that is used by protection focal points. Focal points send this information to UNHCR's partner organisations, who review it and follow up on any issues of immediate concern. The information is then sent to UNHCR where it is entered into a database, from which UNHCR staff can analyse the information against a set of key indicators.

For Andrew, ensuring the value and relevance of the protection monitoring system to the work of partner organisations was an important element of ensuring the system was 'people-centred':

[When you think of something being 'people-centred' [you think about] IDPs [or] beneficiaries but I think it is also the community structures around them and the support networks that have been built, at least in our context, to support and maintain [access] to basic needs; local structures like the local churches, local partners and trying to make sure the PIM system that has been set up also responds to their needs and their aspirations...So... I think it's also important to think about [whether] local partners see the value of it and is it useful for them and is it a system they will be able to use and find relevant to their own work...and help them do their job.

When I first came [to Myitkyina], I would have set up something much more complicated and complex and that would have been a mistake because it would have been unworkable and probably not very helpful...It took a lot of time to get the balance right and this is through repeated interactions with our own colleagues, our partners and their teams to understand where the balance was.



PIM with partners in the design process

Andrew explains that, while the development of the protection monitoring system built on work they were already doing, PIM principles and the PIM process did feature in discussions:

After [a PIM] training given to local partners with [the Danish Refugee Council] in February 2020, we were able to talk to our partners more about... different points of these principles and [whether] the tools we were developing at the time were fitting in with these principles and the PIM process. We were trying to get feedback from them as well; 'Based on what you learnt at the PIM training, do you think the tools will work or what do you think we need to change to make them fit in with your defined purpose'. I rarely heard them articulate this, that based on this principle we should change this, but it does come out in their work more and more. The first question we always hear is 'what are we going to use this for, what's the point of this'?... They already ask that question a lot when it comes to collecting information for protection.

Collaboration between Protection and IM colleagues in the design process

Andrew outlines the collaboration between protection and information management staff as part of this process:

On the technical side, we had to work closely with IM colleagues. They want us to be specific as protection people [and ask us] 'tell us what you need'... The PIM process came up a lot more when talking to IM colleagues; from designing the system to understanding the data flow, how we are going to collect and analyse [the data], how we are going to store and disseminate [the data] and also how we are going to monitor the effectiveness of the system..... That was a bit more structured; maybe not consciously following the [PIM] process, [but] we were following it by necessity as we were setting it up.

There was regular dialogue as we were setting up the system, a lot of back-and-forth about the system's capabilities..., making sure [it] would be accessible from a technical perspective not just to UNHCR users but to our partner [staff] users [so] they [can] sign on and see the data [that they collected]... That was [part of making the system] people-centric, making sure we got buy-in from partners.

Improved protection analysis to inform response

For partner organisations, this system has established regular contact and flow of more structured information about the situation and protection concerns from the protection focal points in the camps.

Information gathered through this protection monitoring helps UNHCR build an overall picture of what is happening in the camps, protection risks and conditions, and areas requiring follow-up action by UNHCR and/or its partner organisations. Andrew explains:

Before there [were] a lot of generalisations that [were] written in humanitarian reporting about the conditions of IDP camps in Kachin state and also bordering Shan state. I would say a lot of that was based on anecdotal information. ... We were able to set up a systematic way of understanding what the actual issues and the conditions are so that is no longer based on bits [of information] from here and there. We can have more confidence in our reporting, in our overall analysis.

PIM Highlights

- Purpose of PMS clearly defined and communicated (PIM Principle - defined purpose)
- Balanced simplicity and utility (PIM Principles - Competency and Capacity)
- Ensured the protection monitoring system was valuable and useful for local NGO and CSO partners (PIM Principle - people-centred and inclusive)
- Regular data quality checks to identify areas of difficulty (PIM Process - Evaluating the effectiveness of the system)
- Continual training and support to focal points and local partners (PIM Principle - competency and capacity)
- Improved analysis to inform humanitarian action