



CPMS MAINSTREAMING CASE STUDIES SERIES

Child Protection and Shelter:

“Reducing Child Protection risks through shelter design and a community-based approach in Malawi”

In emergencies, girls and boys face increased risk to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The way in which humanitarian aid is delivered can further increase these risks. Children may be exposed to harm during the chaos of a distribution or at water points or experience abuse in cramped evacuation centres. Sometimes harm is caused directly due to humanitarian workers’ actions or non-actions. Many threats to the safety and wellbeing of children can be mitigated or even eradicated through timely and sensitive provision of humanitarian aid across all sectors. All humanitarian actors have an important contribution to make to the protection and recovery of children.

*To mainstream child protection means to ensure child protection considerations inform all aspects of humanitarian action. It also minimizes the risks of children being violated by programmes designed without proper consideration for children’s safety or wellbeing. **Mainstreaming child protection is an essential part of compliance with the ‘do no harm’ principle that applies to all humanitarian action.**¹*

Going beyond mainstreaming, integrated programming allows for actions between two or more sectors to work together towards a common programme objective, based on an assessment of needs. Where integrated child protection programming is not possible, child protection mainstreaming is essential. This case studies series looks at both examples of integrated programming and mainstreaming and the CPMS mainstreaming standards are applicable for both.

Malawi hosts more than 36,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from a number of countries in the region, including Mozambican refugees who began arriving in July 2015. The vast majority of refugees from Mozambique are living in overcrowded conditions in an area about 100 km south of the capital Lilongwe. Most are in the village of Kapise, a spontaneous settlement approximately 5km from the border. UNHCR, who was leading the interagency response, and the government of Malawi² agreed to relocate the Mozambican asylum-seekers to Luwani camp, where the refugees would stay for up to two days until they were relocated and provided with a plot of land, food, shelter materials and household items.

¹ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Briefing note to ensure child protection mainstreaming*, “Standard 24: Shelter and Child Protection”, 15 December 2014, http://cpwg.net/minimum_standards-topics/mainstream.

² *Malawi Inter-agency Refugee Appeal: January – December 2016*, 19 May 2016, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Malawi%20Inter-Agency%20Refugee%20Appeal%20-%20Jan%20-Dec%202016.pdf>



This case study describes how shelter actors realize the importance of conducting regular and ongoing consultation with communities to identify cultural practices and needs that can guide the design and allocation of shelter for displaced communities. In this case, concerted efforts involving shelter, child protection, protection and SGBV staff working in Luwani camp in Malawi ensured a protective environment for children, in particular girls, in and around shelters.

This case study is based on interviews with Rehema Miiri, UNHCR Emergency Services Protection Officer for SGBV and Fadela Novak-Irons, (then) UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator (Operations) in Malawi.³

Identifying the Issues – How an unplanned delay prompted a re-design of shelter

Unanticipated delays in the procurement of shelter materials resulted in delays in the relocation of approximately 1,800 refugees from Luwani refugee camp. This meant that instead of a short stay of 2 days at the transit centre, families had to wait for approximately two weeks. It was during this time that humanitarian responders, based on the way that families were organising themselves, identified a number of challenges with the shelter design – one of them being that using average family size to guide shelter design and allocation in reality didn't seem to work.

Cultural Norms and Shelter design

Even though pilot shelters were built together with the refugees and the host community to get to the final model that was going to serve as a standard for all shelters, staff involved in setting up tents in the transit centre became aware that they were running out of tents very quickly. Families were arranging themselves differently than expected; girls were moving away from their families and, in some cases, were living in groups together or living with other female relatives. There were concerns that these young girls were potentially putting themselves at risk by losing the protection of their families.

When talking with communities at the transit centre, humanitarian actors learned that amongst Mozambican refugees it is normal that a girl who comes of age (between 11 and 12 years of age) can no longer sleep in the same space as their father. In some cases, boys of age are also required to sleep in a separate space.

A privileged moment – it's never too late to start mainstreaming child protection

Noting what families were doing, child protection and SGBV staff started asking questions: were these children, in particular girls, safe living with their peers? Where did they locate themselves? Were these new locations safe? What could responders do to address this issue? As a result shelter staff started working with child protection and protection actors who engaged in widespread consultation with the community to understand more about their cultural norms and community approaches to protect their sons and daughters who come of age.

³ Conducted on 8 June 2016 and 7 July 2016 respectively.



Preventing child protection and SGBV risks through shelter design

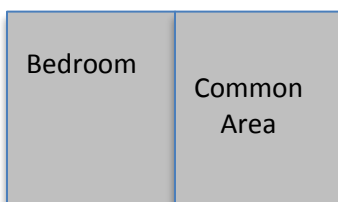
The importance of family unity to protect children

Beyond being a fundamental right enshrined in international law⁴, ensuring family unity is a vital mechanism to provide protection. Families are an essential component of a protective environment for children and most activities humanitarian responders engage to maintaining and supporting this family unity.⁵ In Luwani camp responders were therefore concerned that fragmenting this family unity would create protection concerns for girls and boys. The community consultations made it however clear that community child protection mechanisms were working well, and that families knew where girls and boys were relocating and with whom. Child protection, protection and SGBV staff thus started to work with shelter actors to ensure girls and boys using separate tents from their families were located in a protective environment – near their extended families and away from the edges of the camp.

The solution: A balance is struck between family unity and cultural norms

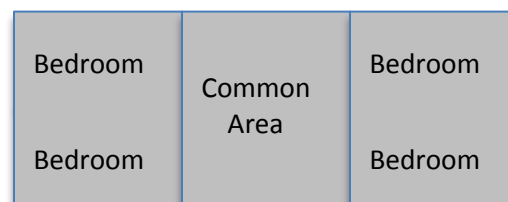
This led to the redesign of shelters that ensured family unity while safeguarding the required privacy according to cultural norms. The image below illustrates this simple transition:

Initial Design



Adapted Design

Bedroom



Child protection through shelter allocation and site planning

In addition to redesigning the shelters for large families and families with specific needs, UNHCR and its partners took a lot of care in considering how shelter allocation could strengthen the protective environment for boys and girls and their families. This was done in part through a closer analysis and understanding of the specific needs of each family. For example, a child who had a significant health issue requiring regular visits to the medical clinic was allocated shelter close to the health clinic. Female headed households, particularly those who had large numbers of children, were located as close to water points as possible.

⁴ The right to family unity is derived from many sources including Articles 17 and 23 of the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights 1966; and Article 10 of the *International Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966*. For more information: Global Consultations on International Protection, *Geneva Expert Roundtable (2001) "Summary Conclusions on Family Unity"*, <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/globalconsult/3c3d556b4/summary-conclusions-family-unity.html>

⁵ On the importance of shelter actors supporting and encouraging families to stay together, see: Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2012), Standard 24: Shelter and Child Protection*, p.199, <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>



Another example concerns a family with two children with albinism who had fled Mozambique because of targeted violence against the children. In Malawi, this family was somewhat safer but still at risk. In addition to ensuring this family was located close to the police station in the transit centre, shelter and site-planners ensured community-based child protection support for this family. The family was connected with other families who were being relocated to Luwani camp around the same time and who also had children of the same age. These connections created a small community and an additional form of protection for the family, including their vulnerable children.

Child Protection mainstreaming through collaboration and coordination

The Malawi refugee response was coordinated using UNHCR's Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) – a model that guides UNHCR's leadership and management of refugee operations, in partnership with government.⁶ In Malawi, this included the use of sectoral working groups led by UNHCR, the government and/or a partner. Interagency weekly meetings ensured there was collaboration across sectors. The shelter working group was led by UNHCR and co-led by Care International. The Protection Working Group was led by UNHCR and included child protection actors (government, UNICEF, Jesuit Refugee Service and Plan International) within it.

Several factors contributed to the successful mainstreaming of child protection considerations into the shelter response in Malawi. UNHCR had a strong commitment to ensure that protection concerns, including child protection, were mainstreamed (identified, communicated and addressed) across all sectors involved in the response. To achieve this goal, the Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG) sits above, rather than beside, sectoral working groups in the RCM structure designed for Malawi. This emphasised the key role for those within the RPWG to work closely with other sectors to support mainstreaming efforts.

Another important factor was the strong collaboration at field level, supported by a number of protection and child protection actors. UNHCR had a protection field officer and associate on the ground at all times to advise and support shelter actors in Luwani camp. In addition, a community services associate worked with communities at the transit centre getting to understand families and their needs to support shelter actors in the allocation of shelter. Plan International was responsible for child protection, SGBV and human rights aspects of the response and Jesuit Refugee Service took the lead on psychosocial support and community-mobilisation around youth activities. All these actors worked together with UNHCR, the government, Care International and other shelter actors. As Fabela, UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator, said, "Coordination is really at the heart of this emergency response...All of us were able to see, analyse and discuss openly these issues together...Because of the way we were working together as partners with agreed responsibilities and accountability, we were able to achieve great outcomes with very little means."

⁶ For more information on the Refugee Coordination Model, please see the *UNHCR Emergency Handbook*, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/60930/refugee-coordination-model-rcm>



Lessons Learned

Community Participation – an essential ingredient for child protection mainstreaming

The Guiding Principle of child participation is the bedrock of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of child protection work.⁷ The principle is also considered an essential aspect of humanitarian work and is closely linked with humanitarian goals of people-centred responses⁸, accountability, transparency and dignity⁹. For participation to be meaningful, it requires ongoing consultation with communities, including children, to understand their contexts, issues and needs.

The case study of Luwani camp shows the importance of thorough community consultation. This lesson prompted a concerted effort involving both shelter, child protection and SGBV staff to ensure a community-based approach, allowing for greater understanding of child protection issues, relevant to the design and allocation of shelter as well as site-planning.

“It takes quite something to place a community-based approach at the heart of a response that requires a lot of expertise. You have to trust a community-based approach can actually give you equally good results as what the experts will come up with. Or potentially even better results!” Fadela Novak-Irons

Flexibility and stepping out of comfort zones

There’s no doubt the collaborative approach involving different sectors was time-consuming and resource-intensive. It required a willingness of shelter actors from UNHCR and Care International to be open to work in a different way and to be flexible enough to adapt their processes and activities accordingly. It also enabled shelter actors to work closely together with families and to identify and respond to child protection issues in their activities. In Fadela’s own words: “It is about really letting go of where you see your own expertise. And that’s a challenge for us in the humanitarian community – to actually fully live up to what we say we stand up for – which is placing the community at the heart of what we do.”

⁷ See for example, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 12, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

⁸ See Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, “Core Standard 1: People-centred humanitarian response”, <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/core-standard-1-people-centred-humanitarian-response/>

⁹ See for example Global Protection Cluster, *Protection Mainstreaming Elements*, <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-mainstreaming.html>



Annex A: Map of Malawi¹⁰

Mozambique / Malawi

as of 08 May 2016



¹⁰ Taken from *Malawi Inter-agency Refugee Appeal: January – December 2016*, 19 May 2016, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Malawi%20Inter-Agency%20Refugee%20Appeal%20-%20Jan%20-Dec%202016.pdf>, at p. 4