

**External Evaluation
of the
Camp Management and Preparedness Programme
in the Karenni Camps
on the Thailand-Myanmar Border
July - August 2021
For Act for Peace (AfP) and The Border Consortium (TBC)**



Disclaimer

This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report evaluates the Australian NGO Co-operation Programme (ANCP)-supported Camp Management and Preparedness Programme (CMPP) from 2018 to 2021. It examines whether the intended programme goals and outcomes were achieved and if the programme meets the needs of the residents. This evaluation covers all the past and current programme activities which occurred from 2018 to 2021 with the refugee community as the primary stakeholders. There are over 14 distinct activities which are part of the CMPP.

Context

Since the 2018 evaluation, there have been significant changes in the political climate in Myanmar and the resultant decrease in funding and implications for the CMPP. The programme was running effectively from 2018, until COVID resulted in restrictions of movement in March 2020 which have affected many programming activities. The 2021 Myanmar coup has provided additional insecurities and reactions from residents anxious about their families and potential return. Respondents wanted to express their personal fears and vulnerabilities in light of COVID and the coup, and this evaluation provided a vital opportunity for their voices to be heard and recorded.

Methodology

The two-person mixed-gender evaluation team commenced the evaluation with a desk review which provided a comprehensive analysis and review of programme documents and data from 2018 – 2021 including some reports from pre-2018 for comparison. These were re-investigated after the research phase to corroborate and triangulate qualitative data. An adaptive, responsive, and flexible approach which kept all stakeholders at the centre of the evaluation design process was chosen to promote participation. Concepts from the Terms of Reference (ToR) were adapted to be culturally appropriate, possible to translate into local languages, and prioritised due to time constraints.

The evaluation team used qualitative methods such as focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) with all major stakeholders. Quantitative data was collected from reports scrutinized to triangulate or further explain qualitative answers. An initial validation workshop was held with the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) to request permission to conduct this evaluation in camps, to explain the approach, and to discuss and pilot the questions. FGDs were conducted by TBC camp staff with eight small and socially-distanced FGDs held across both camps.

Responses were mapped against key evaluation questions (KEQs) to facilitate coding with responses disaggregated by gender, age, and disability. Purposive sampling techniques were used with the intention to include a broad cross-section of camp residents.

Evaluation

Responses were disaggregated by gender, age, and disability. Where further disaggregation was possible by ethnicity or religion, this was recorded to add value. Another step in the process of triangulation was a verification workshop on initial findings, held with TBC, AfP and the key stakeholders from the refugee community to obtain feedback, suggestions and responses.

Limitations and Constraints

The evaluation sample has lower representation of people over 65; and non-dominant religious and ethnic groups. The voices of under 18s are not recorded due to the additional time necessary to follow ethical and safeguarding principles. Very few persons with disability (PwD) participated in the FGDs, partially due to perceptions of what 'disability' is and how PwD can participate. This issue is covered in more detail in the full report. Conducting research virtually/online has limitations because the evaluation team were not able to visit the camps and see the situation in reality, which is a significant shift from the 2018 evaluation methodology.

Respondents

The team reached almost 90 participants (45 men, 40 women) across focus groups, KIIs and interviews with international non-governmental organisations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (INGO/UN). Four KIIs took place in Ban Nai Soi with the KnRC, Site 1 (S1) Camp Committee (CC), the Karenni National Women's Organisation (KNWO) and the Karenni National Youth Organisation (KNYO), and two in Site 2 (S2) with S2 CC and KNWO representatives. KNYO were not available in Site 2 on the day of the KIIs.

Across both camps, 66 people (35 male, 31 female) participated in the FGDs. There were four FGDs in each camp split between men, women, young people (aged 18 – 35), and non-dominant groups, including three PwD. Focus groups were almost split equally between male and female participants. Ethnicity tended to reflect different camps' demographics with non-dominant ethnic groups making up less than 10% of all participants. Similarly, religion was split between the significant Baptist majority across the two camps, with Buddhist and Animist making up approximately a fifth each, or almost 40% of the whole, with Catholics making up just six percent. The 35 – 49 age group made up just over a third of all FGD participants. The two groups which made up 'youth' representation amounted to a significant majority of just over 40% between them with 16 – 24 making up 20% and 25 – 34 making up 21%. Five interviews were conducted with INGOs, including UNHCR.

Findings

Although the evaluation team established systems for the disaggregation of data, in reality there were few differences in how participants experienced programme activities. Instead, different groups disclosed concerns about specific issues which were not necessarily directly related to programme activities. For example, the women's FGDs discussed reproductive and child health facilities; young people discussed the lack of education and training opportunities, older participants discussed concerns about health centres, and older men discussed livelihood and security concerns.

The devastating impact of COVID restrictions on camp activities and the resultant impact on the mental health of camp residents cannot be underestimated, and the coup has added a severe blanket of fear and insecurity on what were already challenging times. However, it must be noted that there has been a significant positive outcome, a silver lining, which is that camp leaders have stepped up to meet the challenges, exhibited substantial leadership and decision-making capacities, and have worked extremely hard with limited resources to protect, support, and bolster their communities. This has been discussed in several sections below.

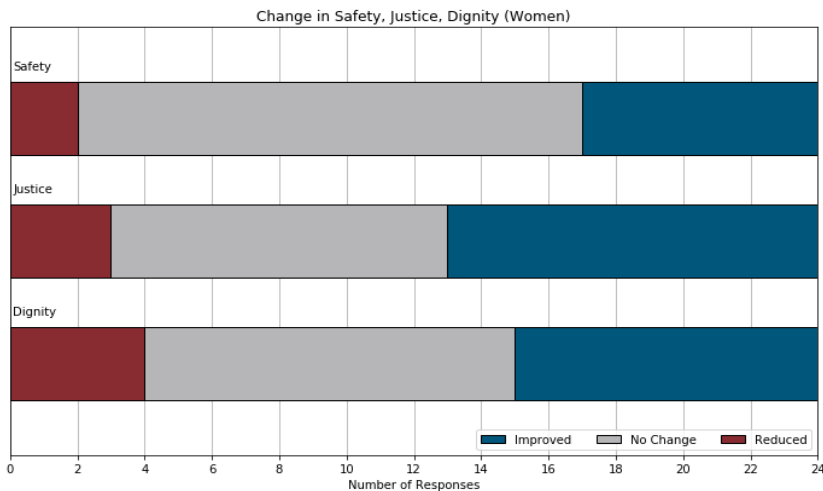
Impact

Strengthening management systems within camps have provided camp leadership with the skills, tools, and confidence to respond effectively to COVID restrictions and these skills promote durable solutions. Future voluntary returns are impossible in the near future as even if the situation in Myanmar stabilises, the fear of the military and the lack of trust in central government will likely take a long time to rebuild before new federal structures are in place and well-tested. As a result of COVID, and more recently, the coup, regardless of disaggregation of results, no participants reported an improved sense of safety and well-being. However, the 'I'm Prepared' evaluation found that in early 2020, many respondents reported an increase in feeling safe which suggests that this was an area of progress pre-COVID, as outlined below (from the 'I'm Prepared' evaluation 2020)

Figure 14 compares responses between 2018 and 2020. Overall, there is a shift towards improved ratings from women for all 3 of the questions. Out of 24 women, there were 7 women who responded they had increased experiences of safety over the 2 years, 11 women had increased experiences of justice, and 9 women had increased experiences of dignity.

Similarly, men's responses showed a shift towards improved ratings for all 3 of the questions (Figure 15). There are different numbers of men compared for each of these questions, because in 2018 a few men did not respond to the question. Out of 20 men, 6 had improved and 2 had reduced ratings of safety. Out of 19 men, 5 had improved and 2 had reduced ratings of justice. Out of 18 men, 6 had improved and 4 had reduced ratings of dignity.

Figure 1: Change in women's responses for sense of Safety, Justice and Dignity between 2018 and 2020 (I'm Prepared)



Self-reliance (SR) is a Community-Managed Targeting (CMT) household status in camp and the majority of respondents only understood SR to refer to this rather than a more general sense of independence. Despite this, it was clear that the majority of respondents felt that their self-reliance and independence had reduced since COVID due to restrictions of movement which prevent camp residents working outside the camp. This has led to a significant loss of livelihoods and resulted in TBC increasing the food card values. This affected male and female residents. Livelihood activities such as community gardens were minimised and working outside the camps prohibited.

Effectiveness

Programme outcomes were significantly impacted by COVID restrictions. However, there was a sense of a positive outcome in that these restrictions empowered camp leadership to make significant decisions about camp safety and security, noted with appreciation by many respondents. In general, the community didn't link information-sharing activities with their capacity, or otherwise, to make decisions, but stated that largely they felt powerless to change the situation under COVID restrictions.

Information-sharing systems were reduced by COVID because the camp leaders, Information Sharing Centres (ISCs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) had limited options. ISCs are positively regarded by residents. Although respondents said that the maintenance of loudspeakers had improved, some said they couldn't hear the announcements, and others that they couldn't understand because announcements were only made in dominant languages. Camp meetings were also mentioned positively and many reported that camp leaders always ask for people's views and give them the opportunity to meet individually if necessary. However, as large gatherings are prohibited by COVID restrictions, these have not occurred recently. Although the majority of responses on this issue affected demographics similarly, young people said that although they had the opportunity to have their say, they felt that elders didn't make changes as a result.

Relevance

The activities and outputs of the programme are consistent with the overall goals and intended impacts. The Mae Hong Son (MHS) Protection Working Group (PWG)'s annual Protection Assessment and design is relevant though it must be regularly updated to reflect the fast-changing current events and situational analyses based on the coup and any security impacts, particularly near Site 2 which is closer to the border. The recommendations which these annual assessments make, and the risks they outline, must also be actioned. Although most programme design is relevant and appropriate, there remain gaps, particularly in terms of provision for young people and PwD. Although it may be beyond the scope of the CMPP, the psycho-social impact of the coup and 18 months of COVID restrictions in addition to protracted encampment must be considered in terms of responding to local needs and priorities, as the Royal Thai Government (RTG) has imposed strict measures around the camps which curtail livelihood opportunities for camp residents. Many respondents requested some freedom of movement identification cards to support livelihood opportunities when restrictions ease. The types of permits allowing legal access to work opportunities outside of camp weren't specified by respondents, as this is in the hands of the responsible Thai authorities, but clearly the longer-term and more geographically-broad access that permits allow would strengthen residents' livelihood options and security.

It was felt that TBC could share information in a more timely manner. For example, information about meetings with camp leaders; COVID updates and numbers of infections in Thailand; updates on the coup situation in Myanmar should all be shared with residents as close to immediately as possible (although the evaluators understand TBC is not the lead agency for the health sector). There have been improvements in internet access in the camps, some supported by the CMPP, but these still do not permit all residents to access information as instantaneously as expected and many participants discussed the fear of fake news and rumours spreading before fact-checking was possible. Residents were mostly satisfied that CMPP took account of their needs and culture.

Coherence

The partnership model provides residents with empowering opportunities to lead their communities and provide culturally appropriate responses for the populations which support the achievement of programme objectives. This camp leadership model and the strong and well-trusted relationship with TBC was often commented on in this research, particularly regarding TBC's responsiveness and flexibility to respond to the community's needs. COVID forced partners to take up more responsibilities and hopefully this strengthening of leadership will be encouraged to continue post-COVID.

The partnership between AfP and TBC contributes to programme outcomes due to continued, reliable, and consistent funding since 1989 which provides residents with some security which is an invisible, but vital, backdrop to the success of programme activities.

Conclusion

The ANCP CMPP evaluation 2021 took place in a challenging context. The impact of COVID restrictions and border lockdowns not only affected findings on the role of camp management in recent years but also the methodology of the research itself.

Overall, all groups of stakeholders were highly appreciative of the Camp Management model and programme, with little divergence between them. In particular, stakeholders recognised the ability of camp leaders and CMPP camp-stipended staff teams to adapt to the sudden change in the wider setting brought on by the COVID pandemic and to take initiatives necessary to protect communities through regulatory and procedural measures despite the ongoing reductions in human, service, and financial resources during the reporting period.

The programme has been adapted to meet the short-term challenge (with robust and widely appreciated technical support from TBC). CMPP camp-stipended staff teams and CBOs mobilised their limited resources, including establishing new domestic co-ordination mechanisms, and reached further into the camp communities which has promoted greater beneficiary participation.

At the same time, longer-term objectives of the CMPP continue to be pursued, including good governance, equitable access to services, and representation and accountability. However, pillars such as self-reliance and livelihoods, preparedness for return, and inter-stakeholder co-ordination have been severely curtailed in the immediate term. These are resulting in significant secondary impacts, such as reported reductions in levels of emotional health and increases in gender-based violence (GBV).

In summary, the CMPP continues to demonstrate its suitability and effectiveness in managing the Karenni camp communities in line with the TBC-AfP-ANCP programme goals and intended outcomes, and the recent COVID pandemic illustrates its ability to respond and adapt in appropriate and timely ways to meet the needs of its constituents and relevant authorities. Despite the short-term reduction in practical co-ordination with agencies, the CMPP has shown abilities to further assume its leadership role. Nevertheless, considering the overall lack of official recognition and lack of security of the indigenous refugee leadership model, the continued robust co-ordination with, and support of, UN/INGOs is vital to ensure the ongoing and rightful protection of the camp populations to ensure their needs are not forgotten or minimised while the focus is on responding to ongoing instability inside Myanmar.

Key Recommendations (in no particular order)

- Refugee leaders must remain central to CMPP and inter-agency co-ordination with junior staff of all agencies working in the camps fully aware of all services available in the camps.
- Information-sharing systems should be improved by ensuring relevant material is disseminated through genuinely accessible channels and residents' comprehension of information is established to enable diverse constituents to make more informed decisions.
- People with Disabilities must be prioritised to assess needs and accessibility challenges with inter-agency training and support mechanisms established to ensure PwDs' rights are being met to aim towards mainstreamed PwD participation in future CMPP activities.
- Young people's participation in CMPP activities should be researched to ascertain whether they are being excluded, perhaps by cultural norms prioritising elders, or by lack of relevance of activities to their needs leading to them engaging in risky behaviours, dropping out of school, or under-age marriages.
- Sexual and Gender-Based Violence risks, mitigating factors and responses must be included in CMPP risk matrix and programme planning with referral and reporting mechanisms strengthened so that incidents of SGBV noticed by CMPP or TBC staff at camp level are handled as sensitively and as quickly as possible.

Remainder of the evaluation has been removed as it contains sensitive program information