

# THAILAND

## CAPACITY BUILDING Thailand / Myanmar Border

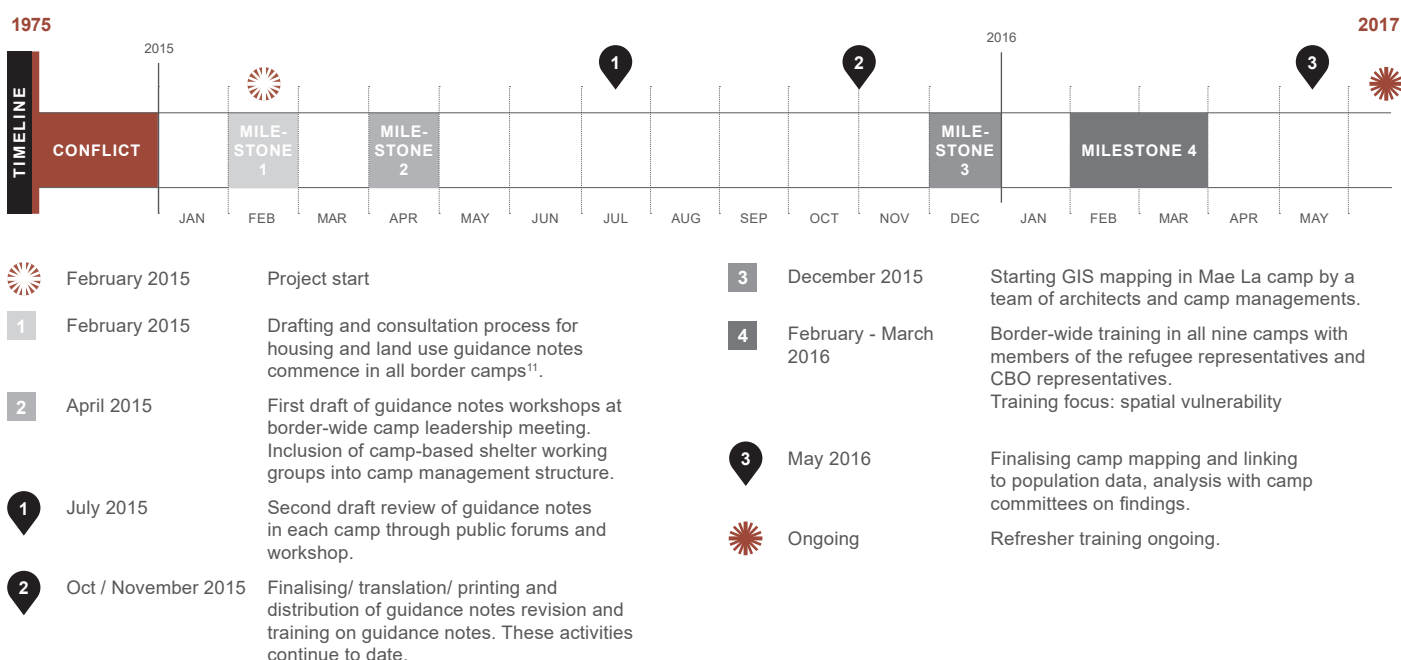
### KEYWORDS:

CAPACITY BUILDING, COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES, WOMEN PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES, MULTI-SECTORAL ASSESSMENT, DISASTER RISK REDUCTION, CARE AND MAINTENANCE

CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT	Conflict
DATE OF EVENT CAUSING DISPLACEMENT	1975 - Present
PEOPLE DISPLACED	150,000 <sup>1</sup> Karen/Karenni refugees
PROJECT LOCATION	Border areas of Myanmar/ Thailand
PROJECT DURATION	2015 - ongoing
NUMBER OF PEOPLE TARGETED BY THE PROJECT	Current <sup>2</sup> temporary shelters' population (9 border camps): almost 96,000
CCCM COORDINATION MECHANISM	Working Group

### SUMMARY:

The community-led governing bodies in the camps along the Thai/Myanmar border initiated a process to formulate housing and land-use guidance notes and trainings to address the unregulated and organic settlement patterns within the border camps<sup>3</sup>. The yearlong process led to the development of guidance notes to more effectively manage land use within the nine camps along the border by the community-led camp governing bodies. This included setting up community-led shelter working groups, community-led GIS mapping of the camps as well as conducting trainings on improved understanding and assistance to vulnerable households' needs.





View of Mae La, with a population of approximately 35,000 people.

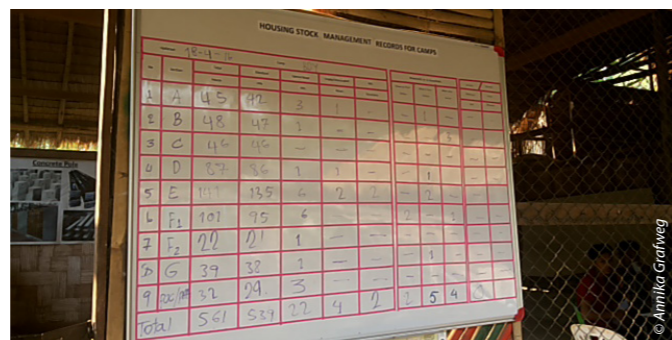
## CONTEXT

Since 1975, displaced people from Myanmar<sup>4</sup> first began arriving in Thailand to escape fighting and counter-insurgency offensives by the Burmese army that targeted civilians in the southeast border regions of the country. The displaced population settled in small settlements along the Thai/Myanmar border. In 1984 the Royal Thai Government (RTG) recognised the settlements as official camps, named temporary shelters by the government. As of February 2019, there are 9 camps located along the border region housing approximately 100,000<sup>5</sup> predominately of Karen/ Karenni displaced persons<sup>6</sup> from Myanmar<sup>7</sup>. Now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, a large percentage of the camp population includes the displaced being born in the camp, never having lived, travelled or worked outside the perimeter of the camps.

The sizes of the camps range from smaller settlements of 2,500 inhabitants to the largest camp of Mae La with approximately 35,000 people<sup>8</sup>. In 1984, Royal Thai Government (RTG) requested a group of voluntary agencies to provide basic humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations, including food, NFIs and subsequently shelter materials (beginning in 1995). The RTG did not invite the implementing agency to coordinate delivery of humanitarian assistance and consequently they did not have a field presence in the border areas until 1998.<sup>9</sup> A collective of NGOs organised under the umbrella of CCSDPT (Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand) still provide humanitarian assistance to the border camps.

For the first decade, relief programmes were coordinated either in partnership with existing administrative and governance structures of the displaced communities or entirely self-organised and implemented by the displaced population. This meant that pre-existing governance structures developed into the camp management system.

The Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) and the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) are the elected community umbrella bodies for the two main camp populations responsible for overseeing all activities conducted by and under camp committees and coordinated assistance provided by NGOs<sup>10</sup>. The KRC/ KnRC represented the displaced population with the Thai government, the Thai camp commander and governmental authorities<sup>11</sup>, UN agencies, NGOs, Community based organisations (CBOs) and other external stakeholders.



Community-led housing stock management in Tham Hin Camp.

## PROJECT

### PROTECTION RISKS

These spatial and environmental conditions of the camps caused serious fire risks during the dry seasons and landslide and flooding risk during the rainy seasons. Vulnerable households were particularly affected as the camps became hazardous to walk, often hindering their access to assistance programmes and services within the camps, such as food distribution sites and markets, health clinics and education programs and facilities, as well as excluding them from participation in camp activities. Seasonal rains affected vulnerable households most, confining them to their shelters, which were ill equipped to respond to their specific needs, such as accessing toilets or WASH facilities. Daily walks to school become unsafe for children, reducing their ability to continue their learning.

### CCCM ACTIVITIES

In 2015, KRC/KnRC, in collaboration with The Border Consortium<sup>12</sup> initiated a process to formulate housing and land-use guidance notes and training for all camps along the Thai/ Myanmar border.

This process intended to develop a community-led guidance to address the unregulated and informal land-use practices within the camps, with the aim of developing a tool for community governance structures to be more effective.

The yearlong process had 4 main components. Firstly, KRC/ KnRC led a drafting and consultation process of the guidance notes in collaboration with the camp committees, shelter and Camp Management and Preparedness Programme (CMPP) working groups, NGOs and CBOs. This was followed by the setting up of community led shelter working groups in each of the nine camps as part of the camp management structure, including female members, representatives of the camp sections and the CMPP members. A GIS mapping exercise of all 9 camps by the camp-based shelter working groups provided accurate spatial and environmental information about location and number of shelters and communal buildings. The fourth component was a training series focusing on capacity building in map reading and analysis, understanding the guidelines and procedures, and learning to understand vulnerable households' specific housing needs in regard to their needs (spatial, environmental and access to services).

### IMPLEMENTATION

Drafting the housing and land-use guidance note was a collaborative process with each part of the guidance note discussed in detail through meetings across all camps, which included representatives from the Royal Thai forestry department, the KRC/KnRC, camp and section committees and active CBOs in the camp, such as youth and women's groups. To facilitate input from a broad spectrum of people, each draft was translated into Karen, Burmese and Thai, and the consultation meetings were multi-lingual, in many instances trilingual, in order to allow each camp to contribute their context specific perspective.

The final guidance notes include 3 chapters:

1. *Chapter one* focused on the repair, provisions and maintenance of community buildings and the use of public spaces within the camps.
2. *Chapter two* described the assistance modalities for house repair and maintenance as well as the procedures and methods to be used by the community-led camp management to allocate repair materials equitable and transparent. This chapter included the process to be followed, complaints procedures and public announcement of all allocations per household and considerations for vulnerable households.
3. *Chapter three* provided guidance on the delivery, distribution and quality control procedures to safeguard households from receiving repair materials that were not to technical specifications.

The GIS mapping exercise coincided with the drafting of the guidelines, establishing accurate spatial information and documentation of the camps' topography, number and exact location of shelters and community buildings, environmental hazards and overall density.

The final component of the overall process was a series of training workshops for all nine shelter working groups, camp and section committee members and interested CBOs as well as representatives from the Royal Thai Forestry department. The training workshops focused on understanding the spectrum of vulnerabilities households faced in the camps regarding their shelters, the common areas and the effect on their ability to participate in community activities. The workshops were led by community architects and included house to house visits and conversations with the households describing their daily life and barriers they experienced.

### IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The yearlong process developed the capacities of the Shelter Working Group (SWG) to manage the housing and community building stock in the camps. The SWG became incorporated into the camp management structure. Two years later, in 2017, 123 Shelter Working Groups (SWGs) with more than 800 members were responsible for the day-to-day management of more than 19,000 houses and over 2,000 community buildings. The GIS camp mapping process facilitated the shelter working groups and the camp committee to have accurate information about all structures' size and location in the camp. The training workshop was perceived as most helpful by the shelter working group members as it strengthened their understanding of the impact of vulnerabilities on individual and family life.

This project also impacted the current leadership structure of the camps. All camp leadership were now elected bodies, with female officials making up 30 percent of the elected leadership and 2 camps being led by female leaders.

## ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- The inclusive process facilitated the development of a guidance note and procedures that were understandable, appropriate and realistic for the context. Becoming part of the camp management system and procedures.
- GIS mapping of all 9 camps created a simple visual tool to link important household data with physical locations and hazards. The maps were updated regularly by the shelter manager to represent movement within the camps and allowed abandoned buildings to be taken down to reduce fire risk and reduce density.
- Women's CBOs in the camps were actively engaged in formulating and in implementation of the assistance for vulnerable households' shelters. The membership of women in the shelter working groups increased due to this emphasis on engagement, with women even taking leadership positions.
- Guidelines for dismantling/ reallocating households were developed. As families leave the camps, their houses are either reallocated to people living in areas of environmental risk in the camps, or their houses are dismantled, and the land rehabilitated to provide additional space for community activities, gardens etc.

### CHALLENGES

- The main focus of the displaced population was on establishing a livelihood outside of the camps within Myanmar or Thailand, rather than dedicating their time to administrating camp life. Consequently, membership of the working group had a large turn-over, and retaining knowledge and skills remains a challenge.
- Unregulated housing and land use practices, for many years, resulted in a lack of acknowledgement that formalised, transparent and equitable procedures and practices would benefit the whole community. The commitment to the process by the camp committee and working groups was often diverted by other urgent matters.
- Training a large number of shelters working group members was challenging and time consuming. Many had multiple other commitments and the spectrum of age, educational standards and skills of the shelter team members was very diverse, requiring different training methods for different groups.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- The collaboration with the leadership of the KRC/KnRC was a key element without which the process would have not been able to achieve buy-in from the community-led camp leadership groups.
- Working in partnership with the camp leadership and camp committees was a slow and non-linear process that required dedication and flexibility. This partnership was essential to build trust and facilitate collaboration as well as the necessary buy-in to implement the procedures and regulations that were drafted collaboratively.
- The translation of all documents, workshops and trainings into the three main languages used in the camps (Karen, Burmese, Thai) was a key factor, facilitating a wide spectrum of stakeholders to engage in the process and encourage smaller CBOs, youth and women's groups to be engaged.

<sup>1</sup> The Border Consortium website cites 150,000 people in the camps at the peak in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> TBC annual report 2017

<sup>3</sup> The camps are officially called temporary settlements for displaced people.

<sup>4</sup> Karen population were internally displaced into the mountain areas of east Myanmar as early as 1970, were no humanitarian assistance until displacement across international borders into Thailand.

<sup>5</sup> TBC annual report 2017 for accurate population figures by camp; 87,000 Dec 2018 according to TBC sources. UNHCR registration data record 96,593 as of April 2019, and 97,577 as of January 2019 according to AsiaNews.it

<sup>6</sup> The RTG has never considered the people in the camps to be refugees. Thailand has not signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. The RTG refers to the population in the nine camps bordering Myanmar as 'displaced persons' living in 'temporary shelters'. Source: TBC annual report 2017

<sup>7</sup> Other ethnic minorities count for 7% of the population in 2017, data source: TBC internal population data.

<sup>8</sup> From some 2,300 people in Ban Mae Surin camp to some 34,600 people in Mae La camp in 2017, source as above

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR was permitted by the RTG to establish a formal field presence in 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Such as Royal Thai forestry authorities, as some of the camp are located in protected forest areas.

<sup>11</sup> Assessment and allocation guidelines discussions started in mid-2013

<sup>12</sup> The Border Consortium, TBC



Workshop with camp leadership, shelter and settlement working groups and CBOs to assess the spatial vulnerabilities of the camp.