

Presentation on Woman at Risk

Overview of the UNSW Project in Thailand

- The woman at risk consultations undertaken in Thailand in June 2005 were a continuation of an ongoing partnership which began in 2003 between UNSW, UNHCR, and refugee women in Thailand
- The project took place in two locations: Mae La Camp and the town of Mae Sot (for urban migrants and refugees)
- Involvement of the Karen Women's Organization was an important aspect of the project, given their strong networks within the refugee community
- The project focussed on identifying risk factors for refugee women and girls, and designing strategies to address their protection needs
- The main risks identified by refugee women included:
 - Rape and sexual violence, and the lack of legal redress for such crimes
 - Rape and sexual abuse of refugee children, and of women and girls with disabilities, are particular concerns
 - Domestic and family violence
 - Forced marriage to older men
 - Labor exploitation, including rape and sexual harassment by employers
 - Trafficking of women and girls
 - Lack of confidentiality in camps, resulting in stigma and shame experienced by victims
 - Lack of access for refugee women and girls to protection measures, safe houses, education, and income generation
 - Lack of access by women to the decision-making processes in camps
 - Lack of legal documentation for women, which increases risk of abuse
- The key strategies identified as part of the project to address the protection concerns of refugee women and girls included:
 - The need for clear and enforceable policies within the camps which outlines measures to be taken to address incidents of violence against refugee women and girls
 - The need for better access to legal mechanisms for refugee women and girls, and the prosecution of perpetrators leading to appropriate punishment that is in line with international standards
 - The need for adequate support systems for victims of violence, including counselling to help victims deal with shame and low self-esteem
 - The need for the active involvement of camp committees in the provision of protection for refugee women and girls

- The need for strict rules of confidentiality for NGOs, CBOs, UNHCR, and members of the camp leadership – which is essential for effective referral mechanisms
- The need for better monitoring of foster care arrangements for refugee girls
- The need for community education to address negative cultural practices, such as forced marriages and the high incidence of domestic violence
- The need for improved access to sexual and reproductive health services for victims of violence
- The need for a wide range of capacity-building and leadership trainings to enable refugee women to take part in decision-making processes within the refugee community
- The need for a set of standard procedures for responding to the needs of refugee women and girls at risk, including—
 - A simple and effective tool for identifying those at risk
 - Broad dissemination of information about women at risk programs and services available to victims, including information relating to resettlement programs
 - The establishment of mechanisms for the referral of refugee women and girls for resettlement or other protection measures
- A detailed woman at risk assessment tool has been developed by the team from UNSW, designed to identify refugee women and girls at risk of violence or exploitation, and to identify possible solutions for victims, including resettlement

Results of the Project in Thailand

- The project highlighted the need for more coordinated mechanisms to address incidents of sexual and gender based violence in the camps, and to provide support to victims of such abuse
- The project raised awareness among refugee women and girls that options are available to them when they become victims of violence and abuse
- The project highlighted to refugees, as well as CBO and NGO partners, the role resettlement can play in addressing the needs of refugee women at risk
- The project identified gaps in existing mechanisms for the referral of refugee women and girls in need of support and assistance
- Thus far, UNHCR has received very few referrals from NGO partners – either due to resistance to resettlement as a solution, or because of a lack of capacity. Those received have been limited mainly to cases involving individuals with physical disabilities. UNHCR continues to work with NGOs on establishing a more proactive referral mechanism for women at risk in need of resettlement
- The primary CBO partner, KWO, has continued to be a strong supporter of resettlement as a solution to incidents of SGBV and has referred a significant

number of cases to UNHCR, all of which have been successfully submitted for resettlement consideration

UNHCR Thailand's Program to Address SGBV

- In 2005, UNHCR Thailand received reports of some 125 incidents of sexual and gender based violence committed against refugee women and girls in the camps – more than double the annual number reported since the SGBV reporting mechanism was introduced in 2003
- Incidents reported in 2005 were mainly rape, attempted rape, and domestic violence
- More than 50% of these SGBV incidents were perpetrated against refugee children, which is of course of great concern to UNHCR
- The majority of incidents reported were in camps where UNHCR and international NGOs have established special SGBV programs which encourage reporting. Underreporting of incidents of SGBV remains a concern for UNHCR
- Efforts at prevention of SGBV in the camps began in 2003 and have involved various workshops aimed at raising awareness among refugees – both women and men – as well as camp committees, NGOs and CBOs, Thai government officials, and indeed UNHCR staff
- Workshops have involved participatory assessments in line with the principles of AGDM, and have centered on identifying factors that lead to a higher incidence of sexual and gender based violence among the refugee population, and on finding ways to adequately respond to individual incidents of abuse
- One key conclusion has been the lack of women involved in camp leadership roles, which is an important factor in the failure of community structures to properly deal with SGBV
- In addition to other measures aimed at prevention of SGBV, in 2005 UNHCR Thailand funded a project undertaken by two CBOs – the KWO and Kaw Lah Films – to produce a film designed to raise awareness on SGBV in the camps in Thailand
- The film, entitled “The Silence That Is Everyone’s Secret”, was released last week in Bangkok. It attempts to raise awareness among refugee communities about the devastating impact SGBV is having on refugee women and girls, and to identify the root causes. Some of the causes identified in the film include: men’s loss of traditional roles through displacement and prolonged encampment; lack of freedom of movement and of employment opportunities, leading to frustration, violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.
- This film can be made available to those who are interested in receiving it

- In 2005 and 2006, in an effort to strengthen response mechanisms, UNHCR has introduced a process of developing standard operating procedures for addressing incidents of SGBV – together with refugees and NGO and CBO partners – which identify and define roles of the various actors involved. This process has benefited greatly from the work undertaken as part of the UNSW project in Thailand
- One of the key elements of UNHCR’s response to SGBV has been seeking the prosecution of perpetrators, whether they are refugees or Thai nationals, as part of a broader program to promote the administration of justice in the camps through the Thai legal system
- While a number of cases have been successfully prosecuted in the past three years, a number of factors have impeded progress in this area – including the refusal of victims to seek legal remedy for fear of further reprisals or social ostracism; resistance on the part of the Thai authorities to get involved in legal matters relating to refugees; and the preference of victims to report incidents instead to traditional camp-based justice mechanisms (which generally offer sanctions that are not in line with international human rights standards)
- Other response mechanisms have included ensuring proper access to medical services in the camps for victims of SGBV; establishing safe houses to provide emergency assistance to refugee women and girls who become victims of SGBV; and providing psycho-social support within community structures
- In cases where refugee women and girls have been unable to remain within the community and receive the support they require following incidents of SGBV, UNHCR has pursued resettlement on an urgent basis as a means to ensure appropriate support

UNHCR Thailand’s Resettlement Program for Women at Risk

- UNHCR Thailand is currently in the process of developing specific standard operating procedures for the resettlement of cases involving SGBV, taking into consideration the conclusions of the UNSW project and its risk identification tools
- As part of the re-registration project undertaken by UNHCR in the nine camps in Thailand in 2004 and 2005, all refugee women at risk in the camps have been identified, and this information has been entered into the proGres database – this exercise focussed mainly on single women heads of household, women with disabilities, etc.
- For reasons of confidentiality, victims of sexual and gender based violence are identified in a separate database with restricted access, and this database is used to ensure proper monitoring and follow-up of SGBV incidents
- Since the beginning of 2005, UNHCR Thailand has referred for resettlement through individual submissions a total of 69 cases of women at risk, including 26 cases involving victims of SGBV and their families. In addition to these, a total

of 118 cases involving nearly 700 persons were submitted under the women at risk criterion as part of the Tham Hin group referral

- UNHCR encourages resettlement States, NGOs, and others involved in refugee protection to take a more active role in the resettlement of women at risk, and in particular victims of SGBV, and to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place in countries of resettlement

UNHCR Thailand
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