

CASE STUDY

MYANMAR 2021-2022 / CONFLICT

KEYWORDS: Coordination and partnerships, Emergency shelter; Transitional shelter, Wider impacts

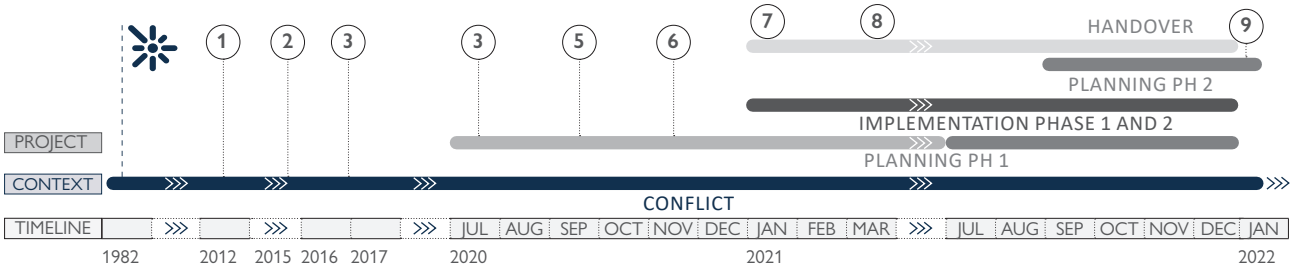
CRISIS	Rohingya Crisis
PEOPLE AFFECTED	630,000 individuals approx.*
PEOPLE DISPLACED	148,000 individuals displaced in Central Rakhine State camps**
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	24,075 HHs (137,884 individuals)***
PROJECT LOCATION	Sittwe, Pauktaw, and Kyaukphyu Townships
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	8,580 HHs (47,190 individuals) supported with shelter reconstruction
PROJECT OUTPUTS	1,050 longhouse shelters constructed in 2021 and 2022
	1,210 mega-tarps installed in 2021 and 2022 Shelter design improvement increased the lifespan of shelters from 1 year to 5 years
SHELTER SIZE	15.5 m² per unit (124.7 m² per longhouse shelter)
SHELTER DENSITY	3.11 m² per person (8 unit longhouse)
	2.49 m² per person (10 unit longhouse)
DIRECT COST	USD 8,200 per longhouse (USD 1,025 per HH)
	USD 140 per mega-tarp (USD 17.5 per HH)
PROJECT COST	USD 1,107 per HH (USD 9.5 million overall)

*Myanmar; UNHCR
 **CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster, Rakhine State
 ***CCCM Camp Profiles, CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster, Rakhine State



PROJECT SUMMARY

Following the 2012 intercommunal violence in Rakhine State, over 130,000 people, including Rohingya, Kaman, Rakhine, and other groups were displaced. While other groups have since been allowed to return or have been relocated, the Rohingya and Kaman still remain in the camps. In these camps they are deprived of basic human rights including access to citizenship, freedom of movement, and livelihoods. In the face of significant challenges, the CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster and its partners have overseen a constantly evolving strategy to improve the quality and design of longhouse shelters, and to ensure the reconstruction of shelters using a multi-functional approach that includes consistent advocacy for both short-term and durable solutions, stakeholder coordination, and protection mainstreaming. This case study looks at the implementation experience and the strategic framework that guided the reconstruction of 1,050 longhouse shelters for the benefit of over 46,000 Rohingya and Kaman IDPs in 2021 and 2022.



- Oct 1982:** Burma Citizenship Law passed, effectively stripping Rohingya of the right to nationality.
- 1 Jun 2012:** Intercommunal violence erupts across Rakhine state between Muslims and Buddhists. Over 130,000 people were displaced into sites and camps. Rohingya, Kaman, Rakhine, Hindu, and other IDPs are placed by the government into central Rakhine camps.
- 2 2015:** IDPs of Rakhine, Hindu, and other ethnicities are allowed to return to place of origin or are relocated. Rohingya and Kaman in camps remain there.
- 3 2016, 2017:** A series of military 'clearance operations' in northern Rakhine State result in the displacement of approximately 800,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh. Those in central Rakhine camps remain largely unaffected.

- 4 July 2020:** CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster conducts annual comprehensive shelter assessment of all longhouses.
- 5 Sep 2020:** Cluster reviews and prioritizes shelters from the assessment, works with CCCM household data to target and batch shelters for reconstruction.
- 6 Nov 2020:** First version of Shelter Reconstruction SoP developed to emphasise a multi-functional approach.
- 7 Jan 2021:** The first pre-demolition meetings with community members, CMCs, contractors, and humanitarian actors occur. They re-occur on a rolling basis, batch by batch roughly every four weeks.
- 8 Mar 2021:** The first shelter handovers occur as the first batch of shelters is completed, this re-occurs roughly every six weeks.
- 9 Jan 2022:** Second revision of Shelter Reconstruction SoP based on lessons learned from 2021 implementation.

CONTEXT

The Rohingya ethnic group has faced decades of de facto and de jure discrimination in Myanmar. The Rohingya people are from Rakhine State, which has historically experienced several waves of violence and displacement. Amongst the most significant was a wave of intercommunal violence between Rakhine and Rohingya communities in 2012. This violence culminated in the forced displacement of at least 130,000 people into camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). By 2015 IDPs of Rakhine, Hindu, and other non-Muslim ethnicities were allowed to return or were resettled by the de facto authorities, while the Rohingya and Kaman were forced to remain in the camps. Before the 2012 violence, most of the Rohingya population lived in downtown areas of major towns and cities or in rural villages comparable to those of other ethnic groups.

In Myanmar, still today, about 140,000 Rohingya and Kaman live across 21 camps with limited freedom of movement and continued exposure to longstanding protection risks including barriers to accessing basic services (livelihoods, education, and healthcare). Of the over 24,000 households in the camps, approximately 18,100 live in multi-shelter unit longhouses while approximately 5,900 live in self-made or 'makeshift' shelters.

SITUATION AFTER THE CRISIS

Longhouses are the only officially permitted shelter type for Rohingya and Kaman IDPs in 17 camps. Current restrictions mandate that all longhouses must be temporary in nature, and they were originally built to last one year. These light structures are primarily made of bamboo and rope were extremely weak and vulnerable to cyclones. Over the years, the CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster and partners have successfully advocated to gradually raise construction standards to include timber framing, flooring, and CGI roofing. The current longhouse design was updated in 2021 and has an ideal lifespan of five years.

Despite successfully advocating to improve the design quality with the de facto authorities in Rakhine State, increasing the shelter's footprint has not been possible. For an average family of five, the space provided was well below the SPHERE standard of 3.5 m² per person in the typical 8-unit shelter – only 3.11 m² per person. Additionally, there are several camps that have 10-unit longhouses.



Damaged shelters in Sittwe Township camp, March 2022.

These have the same footprint as an 8-unit design, thus the space per household was even farther below SPHERE standards at only 2.49 m² per person on average.

The basic longhouse is composed of eight rooms with one allocated to each family. The outer area was planned as a kitchen space while the interior is a living/sleeping space. The interior ceiling was made of bamboo and the floor of solid wood while the interior walls are plywood. Galvanized CGI roofing is used to mitigate roof deterioration due to the wet tropical climate and damage from high winds during the monsoon season.

NATIONAL SHELTER RESPONSE

The Cluster's shelter response and strategy for Rohingya and Kaman camps in central Rakhine is focused on the overall situation of the camps, with a primary objective of inter-agency advocacy towards durable solutions and camp closure. However, the Cluster maintains that continuing life saving shelter assistance and construction activities are necessary to minimize harm to the IDPs so long as they are forced to reside in the camps without access to basic rights and access to desegregated services.

PROJECT DESIGN

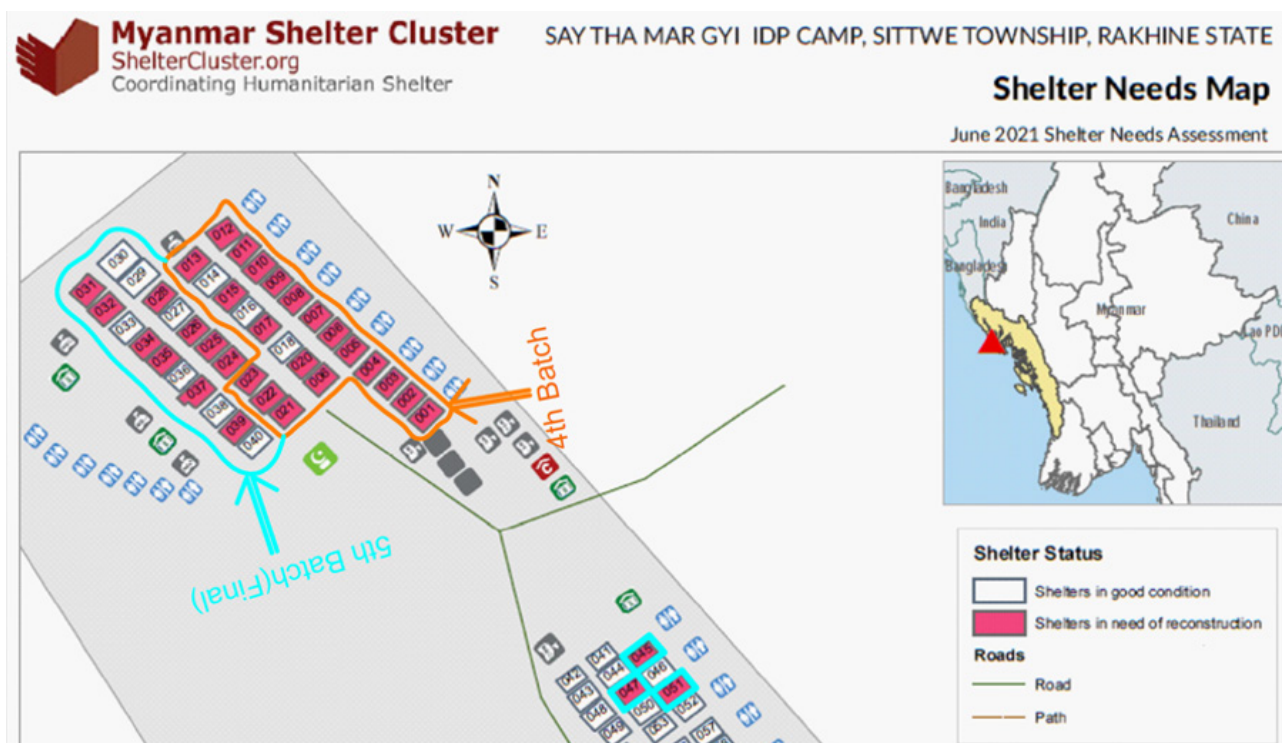
The primary goals of the CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster and partners in Rakhine State in the context of shelter reconstruction in the camps were and remain as follows:

- To advocate for the expansion of camps to accommodate all IDPs in safe shelters that meet SPHERE standards until durable solutions are achieved.
- To ensure that shelter reconstruction activities are monitored and implemented in a contextually sensitive manner that does not create secondary harm to IDPs.
- To work with all shelter actors to develop and follow a common approach that mitigates the most significant challenges and protection risks in the shelter reconstruction process.
- To carefully monitor reconstruction activities to ensure high-quality shelters and to ensure to the highest degree possible that IDPs have safe and dignified living conditions.

These guiding objectives frame the overall approach to shelter construction in this complicated and constrained environment.



Temporary makeshift shelters before reconstruction.



An excerpt of a shelter needs assessment map for Say Tha Mar Gyi camp in Sittwe Township, designating shelters in need of reconstruction (red) as well as batches for reconstruction, June 2021.

IMPLEMENTATION

REFLECTION

The Rakhine CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster bases shelter reconstruction on a participatory approach with protection at its center due to the complex nature of the context. At the end of 2021, the Cluster and its members reviewed key lessons learned from previous years regarding common challenges and technical standards. This reflection resulted in three key outcomes:

1. Cluster-endorsed Rakhine Shelter Reconstruction Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) outlined the formal institution of a multi functional approach to shelter reconstruction and the different roles of key humanitarian stakeholders including shelter teams, government liaisons, protection teams, and CCCM teams operating in the Rohingya and Kaman camps. The SoPs also provide context-specific guidance regarding the construction and monitoring process, stakeholder management, and camp-specific environmental concerns.
2. A focus on monitoring households during the time they must live in temporary makeshift shelters while their shelter is being constructed. This led to a policy of increased coordination between CCCM, Shelter, and Protection actors during implementation, and the standard provision of padlocks and keys prior to demolition so IDPs could lock their temporary shelter and use the lock again for their new shelter when it is complete. This also led to a greater overall physical presence of humanitarian actors monitoring shelter reconstruction and enhanced communication with communities (CwC) practices.

3. The revision of the longhouse shelter design following meetings of the Shelter Technical Working Group to accommodate common requests from IDPs following an exercise of field visits and post construction feedback led by CCCM and Shelter. These included lockable window frames for enhanced security, increased floor height for more usable under-shelter space, and clearly marked nut and bolt locations in shelter designs to improve structural integrity.

PwsN IDENTIFICATION AND BATCH SELECTION

The Cluster shelter unit maintained a master database of all longhouses, their reconstruction history, and their current condition based on camp-wide annual shelter assessments. This database is complemented with ad hoc data and verifications. The master database was the central tool for shelter reconstruction coordination among shelter actors. Longhouses were grouped for reconstruction in geographically clustered batches to balance practical criteria related to household vulnerability and logistical considerations. Shelter batches were referred against the CCCM household list and cross-checked with Protection actors to identify Persons with Specific Needs (PwsN). The prioritization of shelter batches was based on a combination of shelter conditions in a batch, and the amount of PwsN living within the group of shelters.

This system allowed for practical prioritization criteria that was considerate of IDP needs and could easily be explained to IDPs or other camp level stakeholders when questions arose about why some shelters were being built before others. The explanation of the system often had an effect of reducing tensions with IDPs or other stakeholders who were upset that certain shelters were not being rebuilt first.

PRE-CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING

After shelters were batched and prioritized for reconstruction, a meeting was called with all concerned stakeholders including community leaders, IDPs, contractors, and relevant camp-level humanitarian actors including CCCM and Protection agencies prior to the demolition of each batch. In these meetings, the shelter agency reviewed the reconstruction work plan, the labor rights of IDPs, conditions and policies on the use of materials from demolished shelters, the contractors and their key staff, and referral pathways for complaints and feedback related to the reconstruction process. Protection actors then reviewed sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) policies with meeting participants and reporting mechanisms for protection-related issues that may arise, including gender-based violence. Time was provided for meeting participants to ask questions so they could be answered by all concerned stakeholders.

These pre-construction meetings are an essential part of the process as they allow all information to be simultaneously shared with IDPs, Camp Management Committees (CMCs) appointed by local administrations, contractors, and camp-level humanitarian service providers. This has helped ensure there wasn't confusion between various stakeholders and limited the ability of influential individuals or groups to present misinformation during the project that could lead to extortion or abuse of power.

Separately, to further mainstream protection – 'Do No Harm' trainings were conducted with construction company members and Camp Management Committees (CMCs) ahead of the reconstruction project.

During the rainy season, tarpaulin and rope were also provided to households undergoing shelter construction shortly after pre construction community meetings to help extend or maintain the temporary makeshift shelters IDPs made with materials from the demolished old shelter.

CONSTRUCTION

Once shelters are demolished, reconstruction begins. Throughout the reconstruction process, engineers conduct weekly monitoring visits in each camp to ensure quality control. Attention to detail during this process was essential, and specific feedback down to the level of individual posts and bolts was given for contractors to correct following the regular checks. Items marked for improvement or correction are noted and followed up with on subsequent visits.

While construction was ongoing, Protection actors carried out regular focus group discussions (FGD) and monitoring of households in temporary makeshift shelters. Results from FGDs and field visits were communicated to other humanitarian agencies and stakeholders. This helped in understanding the needs of the community during the shelter reconstruction process with an age, gender, and diversity (AGD) lens. This monitoring also allowed for the rapid referral of protection cases and issues as they were identified.

MEGA TARPS

For shelters that will not be reconstructed during the year but were in a significant state of deterioration, the Cluster lead agency provided and assisted in the installation of 'mega-tarps'. These were locally cut and heat-pressed long rolls of standard tarpaulin that were reshaped into a 15m by 12m piece that could be installed securely over the roof of an entire longhouse. Field testing showed high IDP satisfaction and a lifespan of over one year. The tarps helped provide temporary coverage to shelters not marked for immediate reconstruction and keep families living in those shelters dry through the rainy season. The 'mega-tarps' are often used following reconstruction to roof tea shops, markets, and other structures in the camps.



A shelter team inspects ongoing construction works, September 2021.



'Mega-tarps' used to cover shelters not marked for reconstruction ahead of rainy season. the project, June 2022.



The reconstruction work incorporated pre-cast footings for extending the lifespan of the timber frames, while improving the anchorage of the building to the ground.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Access to project sites and permissions: Accessibility in Rakhine State, like the majority of Myanmar, is highly unpredictable and subject to decisions of the de facto authorities. Permissions were issued monthly, and situations where access and permission to continue reconstruction was revoked or stalled mid-project were common. This resulted in delayed construction, and IDP households having to live in temporary makeshift shelters for longer than originally planned. Mitigating these challenges required robust advocacy from the Cluster system, UN organizations, and coordination between the government liaison departments of different humanitarian agencies.

Stakeholder engagement: Camp Management Committees, alleged landowners and other camp level stakeholders could at times act as challenges by blocking access at the camp level, interrupting activities, or in extreme cases by engaging in physical violence in attempts to see their demands met. Continuing the practices of pre-construction community meetings, a focus on communication with communities and the rapid referral of and action taken for serious issues helped reduce the impacts of these stakeholders.

The economic context: Since the February 2021 military takeover, Myanmar's economy has been in a state of decline. The national currency (MMK) has rapidly depreciated, and the nation has been suffering a paper cash shortage and a banking crisis. This has directly impacted shelter reconstruction with inflation, supply chain issues, and humanitarian procurement and finance functions affected in different ways. Shelter items prices in MMK have risen by 20 percent, there are often material shortages and contractors require greater liquidity than ever to purchase large amounts of material as up-front cash payments are required and credit systems have ceased. Finally, payments from shelter agencies to contractors are often delayed due to strict banking regulations imposed by the de facto authorities.

Durable solutions: The overarching goal for Rohingya and Kaman IDPs is to return to their place of origin in a safe and dignified manner, ensuring sustainability and access to basic rights and services (as per the UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons). In Rakhine, this would mean the closure of camps

and the provision of durable and sustainable solutions for the IDPs, including camp closures done in a consultative and participatory manner and the guarantee of human rights for IDPs after camp closure. However, given that the short-term environment in Myanmar is not conducive to durable solutions, if people are subject to living in the camps it is part of the humanitarian imperative to ensure safe shelter conditions and to advocate for the improvement of the shelter and camp situations that are below SPHERE standards.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Clear and consistent advocacy from the CCCM/Shelter/NFI Cluster since the establishment of the camps in 2013 led to increased shelter quality standards for those living in the longhouse shelters, with the permitted lifespan being increased from 1 to 5 years. This advocacy also helped in getting funding over the course of 2021 and 2022 for the construction of 1,050 longhouses. This has ensured safe shelters for over 47,190 Rohingya and Kaman IDPs. Additionally, the Cluster's adoption of a multi-functional approach to shelter reconstruction has helped mitigate some of the major risks associated with activities, and increased collaboration and communication with communities making the overall shelter reconstruction process more accountable and focused on IDPs. The experience led to an enhanced relationship between operational CCCM, Shelter and Protection actors, allowing them to operate more effectively in their specialized roles, but with a more collaborative and less siloed mentality. In parallel, advocacy for Rohingya and Kaman IDP access to desegregated services and basic rights including citizenship and return to place of origin continues.



The reconstruction works included the replacement of the timber frame and bamboo cladding elements of the longhouse.



(Left) A longhouse in Sin Tet Maw camp in Pauktaw Township before reconstruction, September 2021. (Right) The same shelter in Sin Tet Maw camp after reconstruction in 2021.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Clear and consistent advocacy focused on needs:** Evidence based advocacy focused on IDP needs was generally successful in securing both the funding and permissions for shelter reconstruction projects. This allowed for the reconstruction of shelters to benefit over 47,000 IDPs.
- √ **A multi-functional approach to shelter reconstruction increased accountability to and protection of IDPs:** Standardizing coordination and roles during shelter construction between Shelter, CCCM and Protection actors improved project implementation quality and helped mitigate protection risks during reconstruction.
- √ **Community feedback and practical concerns were incorporated into the shelter design:** Over the years, the Shelter Technical Working group incorporated improvements to the longhouse design based on direct feedback from IDPs and practical engineering concerns to make the shelters more resilient to harsh weather conditions. IDP feedback has been overwhelmingly positive on the most recent designs, though advocacy will continue with the de facto authorities to attempt to meet SPHERE standards.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Lack of beneficiary registration system could mean misallocation of shelters:** Due to the difficult environment with de facto authorities and the nature of the Rohingya context, IDPs have no formal registration. Buying and selling of shelters once completed is difficult to manage and can result in non camp residents living in the camp to receive assistance.
- × **The camps do not have enough space for the current population, which forces people to live in unrecognized makeshift shelters:** Since no new space for shelters has been allocated by the de facto authorities to the camp since their establishment 10 years ago despite advocacy from the cluster, natural population growth has forced many outside of the longhouses. Assisting these vulnerable households remains sensitive since their shelters are not recognized as “official” by the de facto authorities.
- × **Shelter construction in camps is not a durable solution to the Rohingya situation:** The situation of the camps in central Rakhine is a manifestation of violations against the rights of Rohingya and Kaman people. The ultimate objectives of humanitarians must be focused on camp closure and the achievement of access to desegregated services and basic rights including citizenship for the people. In the meantime, shelter construction is a life saving service provided as a gap filling measure in an attempt to meet a basic need for a population confined.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **A multi-functional approach to shelter reconstruction improves project implementation and mitigates risks:** Defining roles and focusing on clear and consistent coordination between all stakeholders involved in shelter reconstruction resulted in a more efficient process that helps to mitigate challenges such as access, communication with communities and protection risks.
- **In complex environments such as the Rohingya and Kaman IDP camps in central Rakhine State, shelter assistance must be viewed as part of the continuum towards durable solutions:** The ultimate goal is camp closure and access to desegregated services and access to basic rights including citizenship for the IDPs. Shelter reconstruction is just one activity required from humanitarian actors to meet a basic need for Rohingya and Kaman IDPs while they must live in camps. Given the protracted nature of displacement and the human rights situation surrounding this IDP population, shelter interventions require constant reflection on balancing possible effects on camp closure processes, impacts on short- and long-term protection concerns, and the roles that humanitarian and non-humanitarian stakeholders have in the overall situation.
- **Constant monitoring and oversight are essential to ensure quality, and systems need to adapt in real-time to the context:** Experience from shelter actors has shown that the best way to ensure high quality shelter reconstruction is constant monitoring of the construction process. Considerable effort and forethought must be put into contingency planning for monitoring and inspection systems. When shelter actors have access to project sites, regular field visits enhance the process and interaction with IDPs and labor groups are prioritized. However, robust remote monitoring systems should be in place too and reviewed with relevant stakeholders before the start of construction to ensure a smooth transition to remote modalities in the event of loss of access.

FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On Myanmar: [A.1 / MYANMAR 2013–2016](#); [A.16 / MYANMAR 2012](#); [A.19 / MYANMAR 2008](#);

On reconstruction: [A.18 / IRAQ 2018–2021](#); [A.23 / SRI LANKA 2010–2016](#); [A.38 / CHILE 2014–2016](#)

On partnerships: [A.2 / CHAD 2019–2020](#); [A.16 / UKRAINE 2016–2021](#); [A.40 / ECUADOR 2016](#)

