

Case study

PALS: Adolescent Life Skills and Parenting in Myanmar

Contents

PALS in Myanmar: overview	2
Summary	3
Background	4
Setting up PALS	5
Implementing PALS	6
Results	7
Challenges and lessons learnt	8
Recommendations	8

Plan International

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and help children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practices and policy at local, national and global level through our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years, we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

Cover photo: Plan International

PALS in Myanmar

Overview

“

“Before, when I was stressed, I used to beat my children. Now, I know how to reduce stress and change my mindset to be more positive.”

- Male caregiver, PALS parenting group

”

PALS programme goal: To promote the psychosocial well-being, health and safety of adolescents aged 10-19 in crisis settings.

Steps towards implementation



Locations: IDP camps in Rakhine State, Myanmar



Training: Plan International Myanmar trained 24 facilitators (13 female, 11 male) on PALS to support adolescents and caregivers in IDP camps.



Contextualisation:
The PALS curriculum was adapted to local needs related to the session duration, locally developed visual aids, local games and the provision of sanitary pads was included.



Monitoring and evaluation:
The team used pre-/post-surveys, personal goal tracking and home visits to monitor progress and adjust activities based on participant feedback.

Recommendations:

- Increase programme frequency: Conduct sessions more regularly and offer refresher training to meet high demand from adolescents and caregivers.
- Establish safe, permanent venues: Create dedicated, weather-resistant spaces for sessions to ensure safety, privacy and comfort during all seasons.
- Enhance interactive learning: Incorporate more creative activities like drawing and painting to improve engagement and knowledge retention.
- Develop visual learning materials: Provide illustrated tools and materials to support participants with limited literacy and enhance understanding.
- Strengthen gender-sensitive approaches: Ensure that sessions on sensitive topics are facilitated by same-sex staff and tailor content to address SRHR and gender-specific needs more effectively.

Impact

- A total of 450 adolescents (165 boys and 285 girls) and 330 caregivers (100 male and 230 female) completed the PALS sessions.
- Adolescents improved skills related to stress management, decision-making and child protection, leading to increased confidence and reduced child marriage.
- Parents and caregivers adopted positive discipline and improved their communication with adolescents, reducing physical punishment and strengthening parent-child relationships.
- Through peer-to-peer sharing of learnings and key messages, over 2,150 adolescents and 150 caregivers were reached, extending the programme's impact beyond direct participants.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- Ongoing conflict and violence, including gunfire and forced recruitment, disrupted sessions and required low-profile, shorter meetings for the safety of participants.
- Cyclone Mocha (2023) destroyed many facilities, forcing sessions to take place in temporary shelters with poor protection from rain and heat, affecting attendance.
- Children often repeated each other's answers during M&E activities and tools were in English, limiting local understanding. Translation support and verbal methods were used to overcome this challenge.

CASE STUDY

PALS: Parenting and Adolescent Life Skills

SUMMARY

This case study describes the implementation of the Parenting and Adolescent Life Skills (PALS) programme in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in conflict-affected Rakhine State, Myanmar. The programme aimed to address key challenges faced by adolescents including psychosocial distress, violence and maltreatment, school drop-out, child marriage and strained family relationships. Through structured life skills and parenting sessions, PALS sought to equip participants with essential coping strategies, improve parent-child communication and empower adolescents to make informed decisions about their well-being. The case study highlights how the programme was designed, implemented and adapted to the unique challenges of the humanitarian context. It examines the effectiveness of life skills sessions, parenting sessions, community engagement and peer-to-peer learning, providing insights into best practices and lessons learnt. Additionally, it explores how gender-specific approaches, creative facilitation methods and localised adaptations contributed to the programme's impact.

About PALS

Plan International's Parenting and Adolescent Life Skills (PALS) programme promotes the psychosocial well-being, health and safety of adolescents aged 10 to 19 in crisis settings.

The PALS programme uses four strategies:

The PALS programme uses four strategies:

- Providing life-saving **information** to adolescents and their families
- Strengthening the **life skills** of adolescents and positive **parenting practices** of their parents and caregivers
- Promoting positive and supportive **parent-child relations**
- Linking adolescents and their families to locally available **services and support**

PALS is a three-month programme with weekly Life Skills sessions for adolescents and Parenting sessions for their parents/caregivers.

PALS Life Skills and Parenting groups run separately but in parallel to one another. This helps to reinforce mutual learning, increase families' access to services and promote supportive parent-child relations.

PALS Life Skills sessions engage adolescents in participatory ways to learn, share and practise skills which support adolescent well-being, health and protection. Through creative play and arts such as games, music and drama, adolescents can express themselves, build confidence,





learn and connect with peers. Play-based methods have been developed in partnership with Clowns without Borders.

PALS Parenting sessions are discussion- and activity-based and aim to support parents to access essential information, skills and services which support their own well-being and that of their adolescents.

This case study was developed based on conversations with PALS implementing teams and individual participants, as well as analysis of M&E data and project documentation including project reports. All information was collected using informed consent in line with ethical data collection and safeguarding measures. The case study does not include real names or other identifiable information of programme participants.

Key Learnings in Myanmar

Strengthening family relationships: One of the most significant outcomes was the improvement in parent-child communication, with many caregivers transitioning from harsh forms of discipline to more supportive parenting.

Strengthened life skills: Adolescents gained crucial life skills in stress management, conflict resolution and decision-making, leading to increased confidence and resilience. Sessions on early marriage prevention contributed to a reported reduction in child marriage cases according to participants and facilitators.

Peer-to-peer learning: Due to high demand, trained adolescents and caregivers shared key messages with their peers, significantly expanding the programme's reach.

Challenges and adaptability: Security risks, extreme weather and limited safe spaces posed challenges. The programme adapted by adjusting session times, using alternative venues and incorporating interactive facilitation methods to maintain engagement.

Cultural adaptation and accessibility: The need for localised materials, gender-sensitive facilitation and visual learning aids became evident. Participants suggested having same-sex facilitators for sensitive topics and incorporating more creative activities like drawing and storytelling.

BACKGROUND

Humanitarian context in Myanmar

The humanitarian situation in Rakhine State in Myanmar is dire, especially for the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group. Prolonged conflict and political instability have resulted in a complex humanitarian situation in Rakhine with severe disruption of basic services and blockages of essential services such as food assistance, healthcare, education and safe shelters. Rohingya communities have been the target of systemic violence and assault, and the continued lack of access to humanitarian assistance significantly increases the vulnerability of Rohingya, particularly those that have been internally displaced.

Impact of the crisis on adolescents and specific needs of girls

The crisis has had a profound impact on adolescents due to violence, displacement and lack of opportunities. Rohingya adolescents experience high levels of psychosocial distress due to insecurity, lack of freedom of movement, food insecurity and lack of economic opportunities. Restricted mobility particularly affects girls who are often confined to their homes by their families. An adolescent boy highlighted the economic struggles, saying, "We feel depressed living in this condition as we cannot afford to help our family while they are struggling for a daily meal". Caregivers also observed these challenges, with one parent stating, "It is difficult for children as they have no freedom to move around and play like before. We always worry about their safety". The difficult living conditions in the camps were another major concern.

"It is difficult to live for a family of nine in a small room"

- Adolescent girl, PALS Life Skills participant

Case study: PALS in Myanmar

Girls face unique vulnerabilities, including increased risks of child marriage, exploitation and restricted mobility. One adolescent girl shares, "It is more difficult for adolescent girls as they have to stay at home. Also, our decisions and views are neglected by family members". Another adolescent girl noted, "Boys can work and stand on their feet, but girls only have to depend on others". Caregivers are concerned about the safety of girls as one parent explains: "I am afraid for my daughter's safety if she goes outside alone".

Identified programmatic priorities for adolescents

The PALS programme was implemented by Plan International Myanmar as part of broader child protection programme intervention, integrated with food security assistance, in particular food assistance, Cash Assistance, Nutrition and Resilience interventions, funded by the World Food Programme (WFP). The objective of this integrated approach was to reduce violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation including psychosocial distress affecting adolescents, by addressing food insecurity and economic stressors and promoting positive parenting and healthy child and caregiver well-being.

SETTING UP PALS

Participant selection criteria

The programme targeted vulnerable Rohingya adolescents living in IDP camps in Sittwe Township, Rakhine. Adolescent girls and boys aged 13-17 years were selected, including adolescents with disabilities (male-3 and female-7), orphaned adolescents (female-2 and male-3), adolescents in child labour (male-2), as well as out-of-school adolescents and the LGBTQI+ adolescents. Participants were identified through a mini-assessment conducted with community volunteers and mobilisers, ensuring the safe identification and inclusion of the most at-risk adolescents.

The PALS programme also targeted the parents and caregivers of the selected adolescents. While most children lived with their biological parents, others were raised by extended family members, including grandparents, aunts and uncles. A small number of adolescents (2 boys, 1 girl) lived with older siblings who participated in the parenting sessions, highlighting the diversity in caregiving arrangements. Caregiver participants were identified mobilised through community outreach and mobilisation efforts, ensuring broad participation.

Formation of PALS Life Skills groups

Separate Life Skills groups were formed for girls and boys for the ages 13-17 to ensure safe and meaningful participation of all and create a comfortable space for discussing sensitive topics. Within the groups, adolescents were divided into smaller groups for certain activities, ensuring age-appropriate discussions for younger and older participants. The groups were formed based on participants from different sections of the camp, ensuring diversity in representation. Each group had between 15 and 20 participants.

One adolescent girl described the group experience, stating, "Girls were aged 13-17 years and they came from different sections of the camps. We met somewhere and walked to

the venue together. We shared what we didn't understand, discussed it and helped each other during the sessions."

Formation of PALS Parenting groups

The caregiver groups were structured to create safe spaces for discussions on parenting challenges and solutions. Similar to the adolescent groups, separate groups for female and male caregivers were preferred. Participants supported each other by reminding members to attend sessions and discussing key topics outside the sessions. One father described his experience, "Parenting groups consisted of people aged between 35 and 50. I got a lot of opportunities to discuss during training".

Adaptation of the curriculum to the local context

While the PALS curriculum was largely implemented as the original programme, some adaptations were made based on participant feedback to ensure cultural relevance and accessibility. The session schedule was adjusted based on caregiver availability. Local illustrations were made to support the sessions on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), ensuring cultural relevance and appropriateness. A PALS participant emphasised the importance of consulting with adolescents during this process: "Girls received sanitary pads and parasols as we had suggested".

Training of PALS Facilitators

To ensure the effective delivery of the programme, 24 PALS facilitators (13 female and 11 male) received the PALS Training. The training was facilitated by Plan's Education Advisor and SRHR Programme Manager, with support from the Senior Protection Specialist. The training included two components: 1) Online self-study before the training (PALS online learning modules) and 2) Face-to-Face training focussed on the practical implementation of the programme including methodologies such as roleplays, brainstorming, and group discussions; Facilitation of sensitive topics; Managing challenging behaviour in sessions; Responding to disclosures of violence and Monitoring and evaluation.

One training participant reflected on the experience, stating, "We have fully reached our goal. We now know about PALS objectives, the target groups, topics, sessions and the benefits of the programme". Another facilitator noted, "Preparing our body and mind as a facilitator is crucial for us. We learnt a lot that things are vital for a facilitator. We gained knowledge and confidence".

Prior to the PALS training, Plan International staff and facilitators also received Creative Facilitation Training, facilitated by Clowns Without Borders (CWB) Sweden. This two-and-a-half-day training programme focussed on the Laughter and Play manual which introduces games and storytelling to enhance learning, trust-building exercises to support psychosocial well-being and techniques for making sessions engaging and fun.

"The game activities were used in PALS sessions, helping build relationships and trust with children, supporting their psychosocial welfare and making sessions fun and engaging".

- PALS Facilitator

IMPLEMENTING PALS

PALS Life Skills Sessions

The Life Skills sessions were implemented as per the curriculum, covering topics such as stress management, communication, SRHR, healthy relationships and child protection. Participants found the sessions engaging and informative. One adolescent girl noted, “The facilitators explained well. The sessions were beneficial and enjoyable.”. Another adolescent shared, “I understood about violence and what to do, how to communicate with caregivers and the negative impact of marriage under the age of 18”.

While the core curriculum remained unchanged, some adjustments were made based on participant feedback. No additional sessions were formally added, but certain aspects like coping with stress in positive ways, safety plan, children and parents’ relationship were emphasised more to address pressing concerns. One adolescent boy explained, “I realised that my behaviour was wrong in the past. After I joined this programme, I know how to live safely in the camp and also shared about it with boys in my neighbourhood”. Additionally, participants suggested including more creative activities, such as drawing and painting, to enhance engagement. “I would suggest including painting and drawing sessions in the programme”.

PALS Parenting Sessions

Similar to the adolescent sessions, the PALS parenting sessions followed the original curriculum and covered key topics such as adolescent development, positive discipline, stress management and improving parent-child relationships. Many caregivers found the sessions useful, particularly in understanding their children’s needs better.

“Before, when I was stressed, I used to beat my children. Now, I know how to reduce stress and change my mindset to be more positive”.

- Male caregiver, PALS Parenting group

Some adjustments were made to session timings based on caregiver feedback. One mother explained, “The facilitators adapted the session time to the afternoon according to our suggestion, as most of the caregivers have to prepare breakfast in the morning”. Caregivers also suggested improvements in session delivery, such as providing visual materials. One caregiver recommended: “It would be much better if we get a book with pictures to practise well”

Referral services for PALS participants

Some participants required additional psychosocial or protection-related support beyond the scope of the sessions. Save the Children, Plan International Myanmar & Danish Refugee Council (DRC) were child protection focal agencies in the six IDP camps. The case management referral pathway with agency-specific contact details was put in place in each location. During the sessions, PALS facilitators raised awareness of the referral pathways and encouraged participants to report cases of violence or abuse to relevant organisations.

“I am the one who works for my family. The most interesting topic for me was violence, exploitation, this is important for us who work and if we have any concerns, we can report to the organisations”.

- Adolescent boy, PALS Life Skills group

During the PALS implementation in 2023 and 2024, four child protection cases were identified and referred to case management agencies.

Monitoring and evaluation

The programme utilised various Monitoring and Evaluation tools to assess the effectiveness of PALS. These included: Pre- and post-training surveys to measure knowledge and skill improvements, personal goal-setting and evaluation to track individual progress and participant feedback mechanisms to capture insights for programme improvement. One of the main challenges in M&E was cultural barriers



Case study: PALS in Myanmar

in data collection. Due to the local culture, children repeated each other's responses when answering questions. Additionally, language barriers were identified, as most documents were in English. All of the documents are in English, especially the tools and resources. It is difficult to use them locally and there was a lack of budget for translation. This was addressed by ensuring that before the sessions, the team met with the facilitators and reviewed and discussed each mention of tools and resources to ensure that all the meanings would be used correctly. Despite these challenges, M&E data was used to refine programme delivery and ensure that it met participant needs. M&E tools such as the pre-post survey and personal goal were used. When attendance was low for participants, PALS facilitators conducted monitoring home visits to participants' homes. The participants submitted their requests, suggestions and feedback related to the programme to Plan. Any requests for services outside PALS, such as education, vocational training or health services were referred to relevant agencies.

RESULTS

Participation and reach

Since Plan International Myanmar started PALS in 2022, the programme has had a significant impact on both adolescents and caregivers, as shown through the feedback from participants and both the quantitative and qualitative data collected through monitoring and evaluation. This case study is covering a period from August 2023 to June 2024 where a total of 450 adolescents (165 boys and 285 girls) and 330 caregivers (100 male and 230 female) have completed the PALS sessions. Additionally, 2,150 adolescents (1,080 girls and 1,070 boys) received peer-to-peer messages from adolescents who completed the programme between 2023 and 2024. Similarly, 150 caregivers (75 male and 75 female) received peer-to-peer messages from trained caregivers between January and June 2024. The peer-sharing approach was introduced to expand the programme's reach

due to high demand, as the facilitation team could only work with a limited number of participants. Adolescents found this approach beneficial, with one stating, "I shared my knowledge with my community and encouraged them to participate in this session".

Impact on Adolescents

Adolescents also demonstrated behavioural changes, particularly in their ability to manage emotions, handle stress and communicate better with their parents and peers. One adolescent girl stated, "I can manage my emotions and handle stress better. I am fully aware that girls under the age of 18 should not get married, and it is a very risky condition". Others reported gaining a better understanding of child protection issues, with one adolescent saying, "I realised that my behaviour was wrong in the past. After I joined this training, I know how to live safely in the camp and also shared about it with boys in my neighbourhood". Some participants even acted after learning about their rights, with one girl sharing, "I reported a trafficking case to Save the Children after the session".

An unexpected positive impact for adolescent girls was the reported reduction in child marriage cases. Some participants observed that girls who attended the sessions did not get married, indicating the impact of the child marriage awareness module. This outcome highlights the importance of integrating gender considerations and protection components into life skills training for adolescents in humanitarian settings.

Impact on parents and caregivers

One of the greatest successes of the PALS programme has been its positive impact on family relationships and parenting practices. The programme effectively equipped caregivers with improved stress management and communication skills, leading to significant behavioural changes, particularly in the use of positive discipline. One caregiver reflected, "Before, when I was stressed, I used to beat my children. Now, I know how to reduce stress and change my mindset to be more



positive". The programme also encouraged parents to engage more with their children's emotional well-being. One mother shared, "I think before, I didn't fulfil my responsibilities for my daughter. I was always busy with household work and never paid attention to her. Now, I always ask her what she needs and what she wants to tell me". Other caregivers described changes in parenting behaviours.

"My husband used to beat our children, but after I shared with him about the sessions, he has not beaten them since".

- Female caregiver, PALS Parenting group

Personal Goal achievement

The majority of participants felt that the programme helped them to achieve their personal goals. In 2023, 82% of adolescents reported achieving their goals fully, while 17% achieved them partially. In 2024, 81% of adolescents achieved their goals fully, while 16% achieved them partially. These findings indicate that the programme met participants' expectations and provided them with valuable knowledge and skills which they could apply in their daily lives.

Unexpected outcomes

The programme also led to greater community involvement in child protection, as at least four child protection cases were identified and referred to case management agencies. Additionally, family roles and responsibilities shifted, with some fathers becoming more engaged in caregiving and household duties. One mother shared, "My husband does household work while I am attending the session".

Another unexpected outcome was the high demand for continued PALS sessions, with many adolescents and caregivers requesting that the programme be conducted multiple times a year. One adolescent suggested, "I would suggest conducting this session two or three times a year and providing refresher training to former participants". Due to this demand, facilitators introduced peer-to-peer message sharing to expand the programme's reach, and participants appreciated the opportunity to share what they had learnt with their communities. Between 2023 and 2024, 2,150 adolescents (1,080 girls and 1,070 boys) and

150 caregivers (75 male and 75 female) benefited from these peer-led knowledge-sharing initiatives. Adolescents found this approach valuable, as one participant shared, "I shared my knowledge with my community and encouraged them to participate in this session".

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Several challenges and lessons learnt were documented during programme implementation, including security risks, logistical and environmental challenges and cultural barriers in monitoring and evaluating the programme.

Security risks and programme disruptions

The programme was implemented in a conflict-affected area, where participants experienced incidents of violence and insecurity during sessions. To address this, facilitators conducted sessions in a low-profile manner and reduced the session length to one hour to minimise risks.

Lack of safe and stable venues

After Cyclone Mocha (2023), many buildings and trees were destroyed, forcing sessions to be conducted in temporary distribution spaces which provided little protection from sun and rain. One caregiver shared, "As a response, session schedules were adjusted to accommodate weather conditions, and facilitators worked with camp management to find alternative locations when necessary.

Environmental factors affecting attendance

Extreme weather conditions impacted attendance, particularly during the rainy season. To mitigate this, facilitators adjusted session timings and provided flexibility in attendance.

Cultural Barriers during M&E of the programme

One key challenge in monitoring and evaluation was that children tended to repeat each other's responses, making it difficult to capture individual perspectives. The programme also faced language barriers, as most M&E tools were in English. It was difficult to use them locally, and there was lack of budget for translation. To address this, facilitators used verbal feedback methods and adjusted monitoring tools to be more culturally appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increase programme frequency and expand reach:** Many participants expressed a strong desire for more frequent sessions. Future iterations should aim to scale up peer-to-peer learning models to extend reach further.
- 2. Ensure dedicated safe spaces for sessions:** Given the challenges with venue availability, future programming should focus on establishing dedicated safe spaces for sessions. This would provide stability, security and protection from harsh weather conditions.
- 3. Enhance the curriculum with more interactive activities:** Some participants suggested including additional creative methods such as drawing and painting. Incorporating more interactive and visual learning tools could further engage participants and strengthen knowledge retention.
- 4. Provide more visual learning materials:** Some caregivers suggested that learning materials should be more visually engaging to aid understanding. Future programmes should consider developing illustrated materials to enhance accessibility.
- 5. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation:** Strengthen M&E by adapting tools to culturally appropriate and inclusive methods. Consider also monitoring some of the unexpected benefits of the programme such as child marriage reduction to better understand what works in the PALS programme and more strategically use PALS as a child marriage prevention strategy.

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

Published in 2025. Text © Plan International

Plan International

Global Hub
Dukes Court, Duke Street, Woking,
Surrey GU21 5BH, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1483 755155

Fax: +44 (0) 1483 756505

E-mail: info@plan-international.org



plan-international.org



facebook.com/planinternational



twitter.com/planglobal



instagram.com/planinternational



linkedin.com/company/plan-international



youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv