



## Executive Summary

Authored by TRIAS Consult. February 2022

Humanitarian actors in Myanmar have faced significant challenges delivering critical assistance in parts of the country with vulnerable populations. Access is increasingly restricted due to coup-related violent crackdowns, sporadic clashes between Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), Peoples' Defence Forces, and the military, and the collapse of critical infrastructure required to deliver aid. In particular, the 2017 humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, including the repression of the Rohingya and their violent expulsion into neighbouring Bangladesh, continues to be a protracted and worsening situation..

This Within that environment, the HARP-Facility engaged the Centre for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) to set up the Community Analysis Support System (CASS) to provide contextual and operational humanitarian analysis, primarily focused on Rakhine State, expanding to Kachin and Shan states and other areas of HARP-F interventions. CASS services include: 1) provision of contextual analysis and a deeper understanding of relevant events, 2) provision of bespoke research, based on the priorities of HARP-F and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO formerly the Department for International Development DFID), and 3) enhanced visibility to humanitarian responders in areas where they lack physical access, including Rakhine State.

The review was conducted from September – December 2021 to assess CASS utility and effectiveness to date. The approach was designed to understand how CASS contributes to the humanitarian knowledge base in Myanmar, in addition to UK government strategic decision making and broader diplomatic priorities. Below is a summary of the key findings and recommendations are geared toward FCDO, HARP-F and relevant stakeholders to provide formative insights relevant to future phases of CASS implementation..



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CASS filled a critical gap in humanitarian analysis for INGOs in Myanmar. On average, 64 percent of survey respondents agreed that CASS filled an important gap across humanitarian, conflict, and political analysis for users in Myanmar. There was evidence that CASS products had a high degree of utility among most users for the purposes of humanitarian coordination, conflict monitoring and triangulation, and political economy analysis. The majority of respondents felt CASS had achieved its mandate through the delivery of high-quality analytical products and remained a necessary service for international actors in Myanmar. There were notable discrepancies in the utility of CASS between international and Myanmar organisations, with the latter relying more on local sources to inform interventions. Stakeholders expressed a desire for greater coordination and collaboration among analysis providers to enhance efficiencies and mitigate duplication.

2

CASS weekly reports significantly influenced the coordination and adaptation of humanitarian interventions in Rakhine State. Overall, 65 percent of survey respondents said that CASS was useful for their work, with 90 percent of respondents saying weekly updates were among the most useful products, followed by flash reports (44 percent), and thematic research (30 percent), when offered multiple responses. Users pointed to specific examples where CASS influenced their organisation's decision-making across a range of sectors, including protection, advocacy, and legal assistance for returnees. Additionally, organisations used CASS recommendations to drive operational and geographic adaptations such as pivoting to assist a rapid influx of IDPs or enhancing localisation of delivery through civil society networks.

3

Thematic products contributed to operational innovation, with slightly less engagement. Comparatively fewer respondents engaged with the products, than with the weekly updates. However, those that did read them found them useful and noted instances where they had influenced operational and strategic planning. Users referenced thematic papers on informal cash transfer networks (Hundis or Hawalas), localisation through Parahita entities (community charities or religious groups), and mobilisation in Kachin State, as having the greatest utility. However, selection of topics for thematic papers was perceived as top-down and ad-hoc, with potential to benefit from greater democratisation among practitioners.

4

CASS was a valuable tool among other analysis providers for triangulating and cross-verifying information. Respondents noted that fewer humanitarian context analysis platforms existed in Myanmar prior to the military coup in February 2021. There was a notable post-coup increase in the volume of context-related analytics, which they attributed to shrinking operational space, prompting some agencies to divert funding to research and analysis. Within such an environment, stakeholders described CASS as instrumental in triangulating and cross-verifying observations, often as a primary source, from other information streams. Other Myanmar-focused research and analysis providers said they reference CASS liberally in their briefs to a diverse range of in-country stakeholders and international crisis forums.

## 5

CASS had less relevance for Myanmar organisations and interventions in Kachin and Shan States, given its recent expansion. Myanmar organisations were less likely to use CASS due to pre-existing information channels, language barriers, and dislike of online login portals. Respondents explained that Myanmar NGOs and CSOs already possess a much deeper understanding of their target areas than INGOs due to on-the-ground presence, established grass-roots networks, and frequently updated local language news sources and social media feeds. There was consequently a desire for CASS to coordinate more proactively with national organisations and analysis providers. Users also observed higher levels of inclusion, nuance, and conflict-sensitivity in reporting on Rakhine and Chin states than in Kachin and Shan states. Such disparities were largely because CASS was originally exclusively Rakhine focused, with a more ad-hoc, recent 2021 expansion to include Kachin and northern Shan.

## 6

The lack of effective coordination and collaboration between FCDO-funded analytical services impacts efficiency and risks duplication of effort. Some respondents expressed concern that, while services such as CASS and LIS had separate mandates and approaches, there was increasing overlap as CASS expanded its geographic and thematic focus areas. Further, staff of both services reported an absence of coordination and information sharing between the platforms, with CASS noting they do not have access to LIS reports. While CASS and LIS independently suggested to HARP-F and FCDO that they establish mechanisms for greater cooperation, no actions were taken to facilitate such engagement.

## Recommendations

**FCDO should promote pro-active coordination between its analytical platforms** – Given the demonstrated utility of CASS, FCDO should encourage collaboration and coordination between LIS and CASS to streamline mandates and identify synergies across services. Other FCDO-funded research and analysis providers, such as the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC), also highlighted a need for more information sharing and collaboration, particularly in Kachin and Shan states. Examples of potential coordination approaches include joint strategic design workshops, coordinated humanitarian briefings, and collaboration on discreet research and analysis products for the broader community of practice.

**Additional resources required for geographic expansion and harmonisation of methods** – CASS staff and users noted discrepancies in the quality and comprehensiveness of analysis between target geographies, which was largely attributed to weaker primary networks in Kachin and Shan states. CASS noted that as its initial expansion was ad hoc, additional resource is necessary to expand on-the-ground networks in Kachin and Shan to harmonise methods and achieve the quality of analysis it is known for in Rakhine and Chin states. Such expansion should be wary of other research providers in these locations and cautious to avoid over burdening the same networks and contributing to respondent fatigue. FCDO could consider working with its analysis providers to deliberately deconflict primary information sources to improve diversity of analysis and mitigate duplication.

**CASS should strengthen gender-sensitivity and inclusion in Kachin and Shan states with a greater focus on minority and marginalised groups.** Users found CASS to be more inclusive of issues affecting women, girls, and minorities in Rakhine and Chin states, than in other target geographies. They expressed a desire for greater inclusion of such groups in Kachin and Shan states, with more attention paid to issues of domestic violence, trafficking, and child protection. Further, practitioners in these areas requested greater CASS focus on crisis-affected groups, outside of the majority Christian populations, which are less prominent in humanitarian reporting and thus sometimes overlooked in emergency responses. FCDO could encourage an updated joint mapping by its analysis providers of potentially overlooked and/or marginalised information networks to prioritise in future assessments.

**The thematic research agenda should be democratised among humanitarian actors –**

Stakeholders voiced a desire for greater inclusion in identification of priority topics for CASS research based on humanitarian imperatives. While most readers found the CASS thematic research papers to be timely and relevant, there was uncertainty regarding its approach to identification and selection of topics. Some perceived thematic research to be driven by the priorities of the FCDO and broader UK government to inform policy-level decision-making and advocacy efforts. Humanitarian stakeholders expressed a desire for more systematic consultation regarding the CASS research agenda to identify persisting gaps in the knowledge base enhance its relevance to practitioners on-the-ground. Such consultation should be multi-lateral and could occur in events like the INGO forum, humanitarian breakfasts, and among FCDO Myanmar partner meetings to identify and prioritise emerging areas of interest.

**FCDO should re-evaluate CASS utility for Myanmar partners and broader civil society –** Given the comparatively low CASS usage among Myanmar stakeholders due to the previously highlighted barriers, FCDO should reassess how CASS fits within its broader localisation strategy. If CASS is intended to be a resource for these organisations, its products must be translated into local languages and disseminated in a more culturally accessible manner. FCDO should also consider having CASS provide verbal presentations to its partners which could contribute to greater coordination across its portfolio. Further, CASS should proactively engage with national partners to encourage their increased buy-in in the process and promote a greater diversity of perspectives in its analysis.

**Humanitarian donors should better coordinate to maximise synergies across analysis platforms –**

There is potential for greater harmonisation and integration of humanitarian analysis in Myanmar, including services such as CASS, CAR, LIS, and RAFT (LIFT). Senior managers with visibility across EU, UK, and US portfolios, identified potential for economies of scale to be achieved through improved coordination and information sharing. Such cooperation must be donor-driven and would likely deliver substantial dividends in the form of increased knowledge management efficiencies in the sector. FCDO expressed an interest in whether the current CASS platform could be suited to third-party monitoring (TMP) of its portfolio. While this was not an explicit focus of the study, such a reimagining of CASS's mandate would likely require a significant strategic pivot and expansion of resources. While there may be potential for more indirect outcome-level monitoring, FCDO should carefully consider the trade-offs in adjusting methodological approaches and how this could impact the quality of ongoing context analysis.



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