



Humanitarian Response Plan to the Military Coup in Myanmar

April 2021

These recommendations are to be viewed through the lens of immediate and short-term humanitarian needs. This response plan and recommendations are informed by HARP-F, its partners and the continuous context monitoring by the Community Analysis Support System (CASS).

Background

The situation in Myanmar is highly unstable and humanitarian needs are increasing following the military coup on 1 February 2021. There is, as of end of April, no clear outcome for Myanmar and no quick solution. Any future programming decisions, beyond response to immediate needs, should be carefully considered based on facts, which are few and far between at the moment.

People in Myanmar were already facing Covid-19 and experiencing protracted and short-term displacement due to conflict and insecurity, mainly in Rakhine, Shan, Kachin, and Chin states. Over 1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly in Rakhine, where 470,000 non-displaced stateless Rohingya have extensive unmet needs.

The coup will exacerbate existing humanitarian needs, has the potential to further restrict humanitarian access and to disrupt basic operations. The extent to which this occurs, and which populations are most affected depends on how the coup dynamics play out in the different regions over the coming months. In the short term, the coup has compounded the existing high needs of affected populations; we expect a further increase of humanitarian needs unless there is a substantive change of approach.

HARP-F approach

The high level of uncertainty will necessitate reviewing and rethinking assistance for Myanmar, with humanitarian response, increasingly led by national partners, at the heart of it. A strong humanitarian response delivered in the context of the coup can, in addition to meeting basic needs and over time, provide a space for piloting mechanisms of assistance that work outside of government systems. A major event such as a military coup provides humanitarian donors with the opportunity to develop innovative solutions and push the boundaries of business-as-usual. Going forward, humanitarian response, with secured, multi-year, predictable financing, should be the central pillar to the assistance provided to Myanmar.

This plan makes recommendations for the overall humanitarian response in Myanmar, as well as state and sector-specific ones.

HARP-F will respond to needs caused by the coup and mitigate the uncertainties in this context through the following approach:

1. Maintain and scale up lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations.
2. Continuously monitor and analyse the context through our partners and networks, including key analysis mechanisms like CASS and the MAU, using this information to adjust our response with partners.
3. Ensure operations can be maintained through contingency planning with partners, based on worst case assumptions of access restrictions and operational impacts.
4. Maintain a wide portfolio of partners (CSOs, NGOs, INGOs) across regions to allow for a flexible response depending on which partners retain the ability to operate.

Recommendations for the overall humanitarian response in Myanmar

Recommendation 1 - This is the time to expand and capitalize on localisation

Place national humanitarian partners front and centre of a new type of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar, with a similar profile to traditional humanitarian partners. Use HARP-F to facilitate, support and represent civil society partners to maximise their role in analysis, strategy, implementation and advocacy. Provide immediate funding for the most pressing needs through HARP-F existing partner network.

National partners can lead the first wave of humanitarian response. They have better access to affected populations, an in-depth understanding of the evolving situation on the ground, and are accountable to the communities they serve. HARP-F has built partnerships that facilitate a stronger role for national CSOs in humanitarian response. This partner network provides an opportunity to give Myanmar organisations agency in defining the scope and nature of support as well as in implementation, working alongside more traditional humanitarian partners. Through HARP-F, these partners have due diligence and are present at community-level with direct access to beneficiaries. They can act as the first line of response and also identify priorities and test approaches for longer-term assistance. As they demonstrate successful approaches, many of them can move to multi-year / higher value support.

Recommendation 2 – There is an opportunity to expand the scope and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance

Work closely with HARP-F in developing tools, systems, and response methodologies to adapt to a larger scale humanitarian approach in Myanmar. This could lead the way to bring together the increased humanitarian programming across Myanmar, drawing our stronger national partners into those conversations either directly or through HARP-F as an intermediary.

Humanitarian aid has been under-resourced and under-capacitated compared to its large-scale development and peace cousins. With more focus on life-saving humanitarian assistance, there is an opportunity to attract further expertise and commitment to this sector, and to address risks for the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar to date. HARP-F strives to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance by demonstrating a truly localised approach to aid and adopting innovative ways of delivering assistance.

Humanitarian response and advocacy can be based on understanding of key needs in Rakhine, Kachin and other priority delivery contexts, informed by scenario planning and analysis from HARP-F and partners including CASS. A needs-driven humanitarian strategy can form the foundation for broader assistance outside of government, including support for basic services.

Recommendation 3 - We are in a unique situation to be able to respond in a different, and arguably more effective way, as the need to keep government outside is largely lifted.

Look to models around the world for programming in these circumstances and what can be done, and how, to develop plans for a 'new type of humanitarian response in Myanmar'.

In some areas, we have been greatly constrained due to support for governance and government processes, parts of Rakhine being one such obvious example. We will not have the same expectations of a military junta, and therefore, have a potential opportunity to effect greater change in some ways, speaking from a purely humanitarian perspective. For example, the whole camp closure argument is now a moot point; upgrading facilities to at least a basic human dignity standard in camps could be achievable. It will no longer be seen as supporting government-led internment, but rather understanding that the military will not do this, we are not supporting the military in any way, and therefore, can go ahead. This is just one example to highlight the point, cognisant of the instability and uncertainty around Rakhine and the Rohingya population.

Recommendation 4 - Ensure continuity of humanitarian assistance

Given the pressing needs and the challenges of delivering humanitarian assistance in Myanmar to date, we recommend to increase funding through existing humanitarian instruments and partners, using those existing relationships and skills to build a better response system for the country.

The current situation is unlikely to stabilise, or to resolve, for some time thus ensuring immediate life-saving assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable has to form the crux of any response plan. It is essential that predictable humanitarian financing be secured for a period within which stability or resolution is likely to occur, and that funding instruments suited to the response context are in place and able to operate over and beyond that period. Within this context, it is worth noting that HARP-F is currently scheduled to close all grants by December 2021. However, instruments should be put in place now to support people in the greatest need immediately, and those instruments should be sustained going forward.

State and sector-specific recommendations

Rakhine

Target populations/areas

Based on our context monitoring, we believe the following populations will be most vulnerable over the coming months:

- stateless Rohingya in northern Rakhine
- Rohingya in camps and villages in central Rakhine
- Rakhine/Chin IDPs or returnees and host communities

Context

Reaction to the coup: In Rakhine, protest against the coup has been more muted than in other areas, particularly in central and northern Rakhine where the National League for Democracy (NLD) did not garner much support. However, the coup is still likely to increase humanitarian need in several ways.

Conflict: It is believed that the Arakan Army (AA) is currently negotiating with the Tatmadaw (TMD) and there is speculation that a Rakhine special zone is being agreed. However, the conflict is still likely to resume over the coming months if the AA-TMD dialogue breaks down. Even if the AA-TMD broker some form of peace deal, the AA lacks the administrative capacity to govern effectively and existing needs would be exacerbated, particularly for any Rakhine IDPs that returned to areas that the conflict has decimated. Our worst-case scenarios are based on a dramatic escalation of the conflict, with the AA trying to expand their territory and take advantage of any TMD weakness. Any resumption or escalation of conflict will create new displacements and would exacerbate the difficulties in getting aid into Northern Rakhine State (NRS) and areas where the AA is in control.

Rohingya: Rohingya inside Myanmar are already vulnerable, especially those outside of camps in Northern Rakhine, as they are impacted by the AA-TMD conflict combined with ongoing persecution and lack of freedom of movement. There are currently 150,000 Rohingya in catastrophic need in Northern Rakhine, according to the latest Humanitarian Needs Overview. Though the military has held meetings with Rohingya community leaders and released statements committing to the ongoing camp closure process and a resumption of the repatriation process and identity card distribution, Rohingya communities continue to doubt the TMD's intentions. There is also a concern that the military's stance will put further pressure on Bangladesh to repatriate Rohingya without genuine consultation and into unsafe conditions. The status of the Rohingya is likely to remain a key tool in the TMD's international public relations arsenal, and they have thus opted for statements and activities aimed at placating international objectives. However, since the coup the TMD have taken a more hard-line stance on the issue of 'unauthorised' movements, reportedly sentencing several Rohingya to jail terms on 11 February, likely as a means of appealing to a nationalist base.

Community relations: Whilst the AA and the Arakan National Party (ANP) in recent years have sought to improve relationships between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities, public sentiment has been relatively slow to keep up. Dr Aye Maung's release from prison could also see a resumption of anti-Rohingya rhetoric within Rakhine political and public discourse. All the above indicates that extreme humanitarian needs for the Rohingya, especially in NRS, will continue and that conditions could get significantly worse depending on how conflict and intercommunal tensions develop.

Access: Access in Rakhine is already severely constrained due to TA barriers and COVID-19 restrictions. Access is likely to continue to be restricted, though some bureaucratic hurdles could be removed, and there is potential for aid agencies to have access in the short term which should be taken advantage of. Access also has the potential to deteriorate further if the TMD try to increase control over aid organisations or if conflict resumes and there is the potential that organisations will need to move to a fully remote response and rely on local partners.

Recommendations

Food/cash: reports from partners indicate growing concerns around food security, particularly in Northern Rakhine, where most households are reporting a reduction in available food. The second wave of COVID-19 in August 2020 led to a reduction in food security (reported for Central Rakhine State by the MAU and by partners for NRS). Any further conflict or increased access restrictions related to the coup will cause further deterioration of the situation and exacerbate already severe needs.

HARP-F recommends scaling up food, nutritional support and cash distributions, particularly in NRS. We will do this through additional programming with our partners who have access and can scale up their programming.

WASH: COVID-19 and the lack of functional health and nutrition services in Rakhine mean that WASH services are even more vital. Partners have reported gaps in key WASH infrastructure, particularly in NRS, Rohingya villages and new displacement sites. There are also hygiene kit and soap gaps within current HARP-F programmes due to budget constraints.

HARP-F recommends continuing programming in Sittwe and Buthidaung villages, increasing funding for additional hygiene kits, soap and infrastructure in NRS, and to cover hygiene kit gaps in Sittwe camps.

Shelter/NFI: partners have reported continued deterioration in the living conditions in camps across Rakhine resulting in protection concerns for the most vulnerable. Many temporary shelters have reached the end of their lifespan with many more deteriorating due to lack of funding for reconstruction, leaving people in sub-standard shelter. Increased support is critical to respond to new needs and reduce displaced communities' exposure to health and protection risks and unpredictable weather elements. As reported in the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, humanitarian funding has not been sufficient to meet shelter needs for several years.

HARP-F recommends funding to address the urgent shelter needs in Rakhine.

Kachin/ Northern Shan States

Target populations/ areas:

Based on our context monitoring we believe the following populations will be most vulnerable over the coming months:

- Newly displaced people affected by active conflict in Northern Shan and in Kachin if fighting resumes
- IDPs in protracted camps NGCA
- IDPs in protracted camps in GCA if camp closures are rushed

Context

Conflict: In Northern Shan State (NSS), the main driver of humanitarian need will be the conflict, which is likely to escalate as the Shan armed groups are aiming to fight the coup and each other. In Kachin, the resumption of conflict is increasingly likely as the military has increased movements and deployments across the state and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) has now made a statement saying it does not support the coup. The military also has business interests in Kachin and Shan, which will drive armed conflict as the military will deploy troops to protect these interests, increasing the potential to clash with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). In particular, the Myitsone dam near Myitkyina was a cause of conflict in 2011, but was suspended by the NLD government, and there is speculation that the Military will resume construction. If they do, this will be a flash point for conflict breaking out in Kachin.

Access: In addition, access to non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) has the potential to be further restricted as a result of the coup, depending on how the TMD and KIO/KIA relationship develops. We are expecting an increase in military checkpoints to cause additional access issues. To date, there has been no engagement between the military and the United Nations.

Camp closures: In government-controlled areas (GCAs), the State Administration Council (SAC) and the TMD are expected to rapidly close camps with little regard for humanitarian principles or international standards, likely creating additional needs for those that are resettled/returned.

Recommendations

Emergency response: as the conflict escalates in Northern Shan and likely resumes in Kachin, rapid support will be needed for those displaced.

HARP-F recommends supporting our national partners who are the first responders to displacements in Kachin and Northern Shan, with funding to respond rapidly to displacements as they arise.

Food/Cash: food security in NGCA IDP camps is a growing concern as border closures, increased check points and escalation of conflict impact the ability of organisation to move goods.

HARP-F recommends additional funding to current partners to cover the food in IDP camps, and ensuring that all food partners are supported to put business continuity measures in place to deal with the ongoing supply chain and access issues.

WASH: COVID-19 and the anticipated third wave due to mass protests, means that provision of hygiene kit and soaps and ensuring WASH infrastructure coverage and functionality will be key. More than eight years of protracted displacement has caused renewed needs with the majority of WASH facilities in camps requiring significant maintenance to ensure that minimum standards are met. In terms of water quality in camps, 28% of assessed camps in Kachin and 14% in Shan were reported to have contamination with e-coli presence. Similarly, only 62% of the target population in Kachin and 40% in Shan had access to safe and continuous sanitation facilities.

HARP-F recommends additional funding to current partners to ensure Covid-19 prevention measures, hygiene kits and basic wash services are covered in IDP camps.

Multi-region Emergency Response:

Currently, our response focuses on our existing target areas of Rakhine, Kachin and Northern Shan.

Response Recommendations:

HARP-F recommends continuing to support our partners to respond to emergencies across Myanmar, with the focus on existing HARP-F regions of Rakhine, Kachin and NSS.

Funding Requirement (to July 2021)

In accordance with the recommendations outlined above, the HARP Facility has identified an immediate funding gap of £5.8 million across its focal areas, which would meet urgent needs in the priority sectors presented in this paper. At present, this requirement is 37% funded and we propose that gaps be filled by funding from other donors. The specific requirements and funding gaps are summarised below.

Sector	Region	Description	Amount
WaSH	Rakhine	WaSH and COVID prevention in Sittwe, Buthidaung and Rohingya camps in Sittwe	£720,000
Food	Kachin/ NSS	Support for NGCA food gap and emergency response to new displacements	£400,000
Cash	Rakhine	Expand cash distributions, focussing on NRS, and looking at mobile money/ other informal mechanisms that are not dependant on formal banks.	£400,000
Health	Rakhine	Address critical health needs through partner network	£500,000
Food & WaSH	Rakhine	Extended existing HARP-F food and WaSH support for 3 months	£850,000
	Kachin	Food and hygiene support, COVID-19 prevention and response in NGCA. Extension of existing grants to include food and hygiene support for vulnerable communities.	£460,000
Emergency Response	Rakhine	Top-ups to existing partners, new grants, direct CSO funding that would support capacity building and strengthening and would provide additional resiliency for programming in case of severe access restrictions.	£400,000

Sector	Region	Description	Amount
	Kachin	New displacements. Emergency response and preparedness.	£280,000
	Myanmar-wide	Emergency response for South East and any new crises across Myanmar. Would respond via our partner network.	£500,000
Shelter, Protection	Rakhine	To support legal advice for victims of war crimes and arbitrary arrest. Shelter, NFIs and emergency assistance.	£500,000
Food, WaSH, Health	Kachin	Shelter, hygiene, food support and health related activities for IDPs	£400,000
WaSH, Protection and Emergency Response	Rakhine	WASH and CP in Sittwe camps and villages and contingency stocks to respond to new emergencies/ displacements with Rakhine partners.	£400,000
TOTAL NEEDS			£5,810,000
FUNDS AVAILABLE			£2,200,000
DEFICIT			£3,610,000