

CASE STUDY 2: An international partner makes the most of community hotlines

This partner has been implementing the 'Promoting needs-based protection and community-based support mechanisms for internally displaced and crisis-affected people in Rakhine State' project since October 2019. The project received two grants from HARP-F, which are focused on protection monitoring and case management. The project supports monitoring of trends and protection issues within Rakhine State. Additionally, the project supports providing information, counselling, and legal assistance (ICLA), undertaking cross-learning with the partner Cox Bazar team and strengthening the communication within communities and accountability to affected populations.

Their approach to remote management, particularly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, was to further focus on community participation and feedback. The first phase of the project supported the maintenance and refurbishment of community centres, including libraries, as a meeting point to engage communities and organize inclusive community meetings. As part of the top up of the project, mid 2022, the partner started a community hotline to identify areas of concern for the communities, collect information on community needs and problems, and inform solutions. The hotline was very helpful in monitoring the changing needs of people from groups of concern, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, older people and ethnic minorities. It also enabled the collection of general feedback on project implementation, access to services and conditions in the communities.

The successful use of community hotline

The community hotline offers a direct two ways communication channel between the partner and the participating communities. It combines the functions of a Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM) with information sharing with beneficiary populations. The overall purpose is to provide support to IDPs and host communities through information sharing and referrals to available services. The hotlines also serve as a tool to identify trends, escalating protection issues, and gaps in services, including but not limited to preparedness and response to COVID19. Finally, the hotline forms part of the partner Myanmar's approach to strengthening its accountability system and ensuring that affected populations participate throughout the project cycle.

The community hotline also has other objectives such as (1) to connect beneficiaries to services provided by other humanitarian organisations through service mapping and building a database on available humanitarian assistance and services within a location, (2) to provide counselling on legal identity, housing, land and property rights where appropriate.

How the community hotline works

The hotline allows users to use all available communication methods, including voice recordings in the Rohingya and Rakhine languages, to ensure access to information is made available to communities and feedback can be shared. Visual methods including drawings, photos and infographics for persons with visual impairments and individuals with low literacy skills are also used to share information with participants. The hotline is operated by staff who can speak on the Maungdzay community hotline in Myanmar, Rakhine and Rohingya languages, with the ability to converse in Hindi on the Maungdaw community hotline.

The staff supporting the hotline have been trained on application of participatory methods on subjects including introduction to psychological first aid [PFA], protection principles, safe referrals to ensure that "Do No Harm" is at the centre of the partner's approach. This is quite important, as very sensitive issues are reported through the hotlines, including reports on people trafficking, smuggling,

kidnapping and suicide. In such cases, to guarantee the safety and provide adequate support to the victim/person reporting, it is referred to the case management team for further actions.

There is also a strong focus on responding to feedback -closing the loop by contacting the caller and the relevant service provider, rather than only collecting information. During key informant interviews, the partner shared that, for example, in May 2021 they received approximately 1500 calls. The information collected was used to adjust programming within the partner and is shared with other partners, with the monthly report going to over 150 actors. The information shared includes a summary of the main complaints and issues raised, by location and gender. When necessary and available, the partner refer callers to other qualified service delivery organisations.

Using the right staff to mitigate communication and access barriers

the partner's projects are implemented primarily by local staff. the partner started recruiting field-based teams in Myanmar in 2017, with most of the local staff based within the areas of work, such as IDP camps or adjacent villages. the partner aims for an equal gender and ethnic balance across its workforce. the partner used the initial years of work in Rakhine to build staff capacity on disaster risk reduction, hygiene promotion, protection incident monitoring (identification and reporting), hotline awareness, communication with communities, community engagement among other things. Currently, they have approximately 40-50 staff based in the field, plus an additional 40-50 community mobilisers. These teams are funded by the many donors supporting the partner (not only HARP-F).

Since the onset of COVID-19 and the military coup, those staff members kept delivering services in areas of operation (most of them are local) and providing monthly reports to identify challenges and find solutions (e.g., through the provision of equipment, ideas on how to maintain internet access, how to negotiate with community leaders). Consistency of staff in the past years, not just since Covid-19, has thus been critical, as many local and international organisations have a high turnover. To ensure that, in general, the partner ensures competitive salaries based on coordination with other organizations in country, has a high focus on duty of care and safety of its staff, beneficiaries and partners, continuous to invest in staff capacity while working towards the pathway of nationalization of key senior positions.

During Covid-19 and also after 1 February events, the partner ensured two ways communication with its staff and partners, by putting in place Covid-19 staff care focal points in each office who have raised weekly or bi-weekly basis concerns on behalf of its team to the partner's Crises Management Team in Myanmar. Budget line was established for national colleagues for COVID-19 related medical support, guesthouses were set up for isolation and quarantine for staff in case needed. The partners also shared key translated principles and guiding documents, such as on Principles of Engagement, Work from Home SoP, revised Emergency Distribution SoPs, the partner Myanmar SoP for Business Continuity and Personal Protection. Among many other further measures, regular all staff messages and updates were shared by the Country Director.