

HARP-F APPROACH TO REMOTE PARTNERSHIP IN MYANMAR

REVIEW



Executive Summary

Authored by Medway, Gonzalez, Win, Kyaw, Russo. August 2021.

The Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) was established as an intermediary grant distribution mechanism for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) humanitarian funding in Myanmar. The challenging and ever-changing operating context required a flexible and adaptable funding instrument that could support partner delivery in such circumstances. These characteristics were built into the design of the HARP-F from the outset.

This evaluation sought to understand why and how HARP-F and its partners used different remote management approaches, how these approaches compared to those described in the literature, whether the preparedness undertaken was helpful and whether HARP-F and partners were able to manage the multiple risks faced through remote management. The evaluation was conducted in a period of significant crisis in Myanmar, largely due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the military coup. Consequently, all interactions with stakeholders were conducted remotely, by a team of both national and international consultants, using a mixed methodology incorporating quantitative and qualitative inquiry.

Our conclusions

- 1** HARP-F's flexibility and adaptability as a fund distribution mechanism was highly appreciated by partners.
- 2** The most localised responses, whether led by national or international partners, have been best placed to sustain delivery through the pandemic and coup.
- 3** The formal instruments HARP-F developed to support remote partnership, specifically the Remote Management Partnership toolkit was not applied by partners but was, nonetheless, aligned with many of the operational adaptations that partners actually took.
- 4** HARP-F's approach was well aligned with documented good practice.
- 5** Donors will continue to need intermediaries in Myanmar. They should be clearer about their accountability and reporting requirements and ensure the capacity of any intermediaries that succeed HARP-F is in place to meet such requirements.

We also make 19 specific recommendations for any intermediary organisations that follow HARP-F. The recommendations are structured around four of the research questions mentioned above, namely how, what, preparedness and risk management. HARP-F has already taken action in some of these areas where there was a self-evident need to take action, such as in the creation of a flexible budget line in each grant to facilitate quick responses to unanticipated emergencies. These are summarized on the next page.

Why

1. Prioritise flexibility and adaptability in programming and operational management to enable agencies to cope with uncertainty and risk.
2. Agree with partners likely operational and programmatic areas / issues where flexibility and adaptation are most likely to occur and discuss parameters of change.

How

3. Document the many adaptations, innovations and solutions to the many challenges partners have faced and found way to overcome, or not, in the various different regions and humanitarian contexts in Myanmar to create a digest of practical best practices and lessons.
4. Continue to develop community-based delivery and monitoring mechanisms through participatory structures that involve project participants. Identify and develop incentive structures to enhance accountable and need-based delivery of assistance within communities.
5. Include a flexible and unallocated budget line for new emergency response in each partner budget to facilitate quick, or anticipatory, response to new hazards. This was used by HARP-F and enabled partners flexibility to respond.
6. Establish autonomous third-party monitoring capacity, through both commissioning an appropriately qualified organisation(s), the use of digital tools for the triangulation of data, and encouragement of collaborative peer monitoring on the ground by national partners.

Preparedness

7. Set out clear and achievable criteria for trust and low risk operations, including incentives for achieving / applying them so that national partners have a pathway to a light touch partnership. Once the criteria are met the partner may be considered low risk. This would then enable partners to, for example, use their own in-house systems for reporting, or enjoy more flexibility to take decisions on programming without consultation etc.
8. Assess demand and need for continued development of the RMP toolkit. If it is deemed useful enough to develop further, this should be done on a partner-by-partner basis in combination with a review and potential re-engineering of management systems and processes.
9. Ramp up preparations for greater use of cash transfers through multiple delivery systems (cash, bank transfer, hundi and similar informal systems, mobile etc.).
10. Pre-position and replenish contingency supplies, including food, to facilitate continuous distribution when access is limited. Identify, train, and equip locally based distribution partners who can access the supplies and distribute to targeted recipients.
11. Ensure partners have access to and know how to use the communications technologies and digital tools that will be essential to delivery assistance in hard-to-reach areas in future.
12. Increase the effectiveness of training by correlating the acquisition of new knowledge and skills with the development of management, monitoring and learning systems.
13. Fund core costs of national partners – these funds contribute to and, therefore, enhance the essential capacities organisations need to both deliver and manage risk effectively, but may entail a higher resource need than those that can be directly associated with project outputs. This funding should be additional to the administrative overhead cost attached to project grants. Pooling donor support for core costs may be a cost-effective approach since many are supporting the same partners.

Risk Management

14. Promote consolidation of community feedback mechanisms on a regional basis.
15. Establish risk management processes, standards and tolerance levels for use of informal (hundi) cash transfer systems.
16. Tolerance of [partial] failure of some innovative approaches is needed and, in some ways, encouraged if new and more successful approaches to working in access-constrained areas are to be found. Seeking innovation in turn requires all parties (donor, intermediary, implementing partners) to adopt the appropriate risk appetite.
17. Ensure partners and their downstream partners have robust security capacity in place and arrange funding, capacity enhancement and communication accordingly.
18. Develop formal, transparent, and objective criteria for due diligence to ensure the right partners are supported, especially in contexts with a substantial reliance on remote management approaches.
19. Adapt the risk management approach to specific partner requirements. Whereas training may have made some contribution to partner capacity for risk management, it is no substitute for direct capacity and support, for security and other risk areas.



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