

INVESTING IN LOCALISATION OF AID IN MYANMAR

The HARP (Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme) Facility was established by the UK Government in 2016. The Facility was designed to deliver UK commitments under the Grand Bargain and specifically to advance Localisation. As a result of this innovative approach, significant advances have been made in nationally-led humanitarian response in Myanmar.

LOCALISATION AS A KEY APPROACH IN MYANMAR

Access has always been a major challenge for international organisations in Myanmar, particularly to conflict-affected areas where humanitarian needs are the highest. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and now a coup: post-coup, donors and international organisations are more reliant than ever on national partners. Local and national organisations have better access to crisis-affected communities, and a first-hand understanding of the local context. They are also invested in the communities they serve in the long term, accountable to those communities, and often the first responders in an emergency. They provide a level of sustainability, credibility and proximity to affected populations which international organisations can struggle to maintain.

These benefits come with challenges, as local organisations are often not able to meet the rigorous reporting and risk management requirements of donors, nor do many of them have the financial absorption capacity that INGOs do. Financing local organisations requires enhanced due diligence, accountability, financial and grant management in order to manage key risks- including fraud, the risk of financing terrorism, and risks related to physical or sexual exploitation- and maximise the benefits of a national-led humanitarian response.

HARP-F: LOCALISATION AS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

Localisation therefore requires an investment in both funding and capacity; the HARP Facility embodies that investment. Localisation is interwoven throughout all our work, as a deliberate strategy to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and build the resilience of crisis-affected populations. All HARP-F's work centres on building the capabilities of national partners to play an increasing leadership role in humanitarian response. Since 2017, the HARP Facility has built a network of 74 partners, over half of whom are national and local organisations.

Myanmar faces multiple, complex and long-standing crises. Our focus areas of Rakhine and Kachin are noticeably different from each and require different responses. Understanding the context in these localities is crucial for effective, responsive action. Our understanding of these contexts, and thus the nature of HARP-F's response, is increasingly driven by our national and local partnerships. With these specific differences in mind, HARP-F's impact in localisation encompasses four main areas, aligned with the [Grand Bargain commitments](#):

1. Direct resourcing

Over 33% of HARP-F's grant budget (some £23 million) directly supports localisation in Myanmar. This comes either as grants to local organisations, via a flexible CSO emergency response fund, or funding for the capacity building of local organisations.

We have supported 36 local organisations focused on humanitarian response, resilience and disaster preparedness. Through HARP-F funding our local partners have provided food to some of the hardest to access and most vulnerable communities in Northern Rakhine, provided extensive WaSH services to protracted IDP camps in Kachin and Northern Shan, formed village disaster management committees in high-risk areas of Rakhine, and engaged in highly technical protection response to forced recruitment of children by armed groups.

2. Tailored and comprehensive capacity building

HARP-F has directly supported technical and organisational capacity building for CSO grantees, has funded INGOs to carry out capacity building activities, and has engaged in specific emergency preparedness and response capacity building with CSOs across the humanitarian and development sectors. Capacity building is more than just training: it requires us to accompany national actors

through the process of developing and practicing the key competences to lead, implement and monitor a response. HARP-F's Training Unit supported partners with emergency preparedness planning and testing through simulation exercises and lessons learned workshops. Our capacity

enhancement, grants and regional teams complemented the training with dedicated accompaniment, mentoring and coaching support, and, when possible, peer-to-peer learning visits and peer review workshops and seconded technical assistance.

HARP-F's capacity building support covers the following:

- *Capacity to Manage:* HARP-F empowers its national partners to take a 'can-do' attitude and adopt the operating systems – procurement, financial management and safeguarding – to meet the highest standards of delivery even as the conflict, access, political and /or health situation deteriorates. In both Rakhine and Kachin, HARP-F has provided CSOs with organisational strengthening training tailored to their needs, to ensure that local organisations have the necessary mechanisms to lead and monitor the response. These partners develop and implement their own organisational development strategies, with HARP-F's support. The subsequent training covers topics ranging from protection and safeguarding policies, human resource management, financial management and reporting, to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. In northern Shan, HARP-F's emergency response partner funds a network of Shan CSOs, who can quickly identify needs following conflict-related displacements and seek approval to conduct immediate activities.
- *Continuous Mentoring and Support:* Even after partners have participated in training and collaborated to develop capacity assessments, the HARP-F grants and regional teams work on almost a daily basis with partners to ensure that they deliver their grants to the standards set by HARP-F. This means that we do not take a back seat after training or assessments have finished, as doing so would itself present a risk for effective implementation. We secure our investment in partners by working continuously with them, often supporting them on a daily basis. During the Covid-19 pandemic and now the military coup, we worked with partners to reassess need, adapt their programming, shift to remote management, and realigning budgets to maximise the impact of their humanitarian response.
- *Quality of Humanitarian Action:* HARP-F works to strengthen the technical humanitarian skills of local community bodies and boost their emergency response potential. HARP-F Technical Advisers work directly with partners in our core thematic areas of WaSH, Cash, Nutrition and Protection and support partner organisations to implement grants in a way that reflects the training they have received from HARP-F. When partners take our specialised resilience and humanitarian training, they acquire skills on disaster preparedness and response, climate change programming, cash programming, nutrition, WASH and protection, and how to be more accountable to the communities they serve.
- *Leadership:* HARP-F provides opportunities for local partners to enhance their leadership skills and play greater roles in decision-making on resource use (including about adaptability and evolution of their grants and opportunities to support innovative initiatives). Several national partners have built their capabilities to such an extent that HARP-F has the assurance needed to provide them with greater amounts of funding. All of HARP-F's partners in Kachin are national organisations, while around half of our coup response funding is channelled directly to national partners, with the remainder going to international NGOs who predominantly work through national organisations. In Kachin and Northern Shan we funded a project which addressed critical needs among displaced populations and specifically aimed to shift the leadership from an INGO (Trócaire) to a national NGO (Karuna Mission Social Solidarity – KMSS). This transition process represents a commitment to greater 'localisation of aid' and is being documented in a three part study 'Localisation through partnership: shifting towards locally-led programming in Myanmar'.

3. Coordination

The HARP Facility encourages and supports local agencies and networks to take a greater role and responsibility in coordination of humanitarian action in local, national and international convened fora. HARP-F has directly supported CSO partners to engage with existing coordination mechanisms

(e.g technical working groups, clusters, state officials) where relevant, supported partner initiatives on coordination and has input into national efforts on coordination (e.g LP2 workstream).

In Kachin we also supported our CSO partners to join relevant technical clusters and working groups, including protection, WASH, shelter clusters and also supported one of our partners Dai Fin Social Service to join the Kachin JST. In Rakhine, three of our CSO partners, who received technical and operational capacity building from HARP-F, became three of the founding organisations in the Arakan

Humanitarian Coordination Team. Our disaster risk reduction grants in Rakhine enabled partners to bring communities and the Department for Disaster Management together to organise cyclone response exercises at village level. These exercises improved coordination between the village committees and the state departments and led to better sharing of early warning information. This was evident during cyclone Amphan, when VDMCs were able to alert communities using warning information from the state and community preparedness plans were put into action.

4. Knowledge and learning

As part of its learning agenda, HARP-F is conducting research to:

- Review the impact of localisation initiatives, including the HARP Facility, in relation to the Grand Bargain commitments, and in line with international best practice
- Capture and disseminate learning on how humanitarian actors, including HARP-F, have supported localisation in Myanmar, the challenges of doing so, and how this contributes to best practice in operationalising localisation
- Recommend how humanitarian donors could continue to support localisation in Myanmar, building on the work started by HARP-F and the experience of others.

We will actively seek local partners' experience and feedback to develop this knowledge product, given that so far, they have largely remained excluded from the discussion on localisation, which tends to take place at the international level and between international actors.

LESSONS LEARNED

Building on four years of empowering our local and national response to lead the humanitarian response in Myanmar, we have identified the following success factors for the localisation of aid:

- 1. Build a trusted partnership** – The HARP-F approach relies on a trusted relationship with national partners. Localisation is about managing a gradual power shift, which requires a common understanding of the responsibilities of each partner, open communication and mutual accountability. In Rakhine, HARP-F has established strong relationships with local actors, as a result of having staff working directly with these partners on all aspects of their work, which provided the bedrock of its localisation agenda.
- 2. Make a long-term commitment** – Organisational strengthening takes time and cannot be accomplished by one-off trainings. It requires a comprehensive capacity building approach, based on locally-led needs assessments, supporting locally-led strategies, and offering mentoring, peer learning, and new opportunities for local organisations. This needs to be accompanied by the assurance of multi-year financing, a Grand Bargain commitment in its own right and one that HARP-F has been able to deliver for the FCDO and the organisations we fund.
- 3. Make localisation an integral part of your programme design from the onset** – Localisation should drive programming, rather than being included as a contingency plan. Enabling of a locally-led response determines grant management, leadership roles, and what organisational transformation and culture changes are needed, for all parties. It is not a quick fix for a time of crisis. HARP-F's early commitment to empower its local and national partner to take the lead role in the humanitarian response is the main reason why we are still able to deliver assistance in Myanmar.
- 4. Share the risks** – Localisation comes with even higher demands for accountability, transparency and due diligence placed on local organisations who are often unable to meet these higher standards. Intermediaries such as fund management facilities can shoulder some of the risk management for the donors, whilst giving national organisations the space they need to deliver flexible and adaptive response activities. The lessons learned from this will help the FCDO and other donors to manage their risk appetite with respect to ongoing funding for national partners.