

## **Localisation Approach of Humanitarian Protection Responses in Myanmar - HARP-Facility**

This case study has been written by HARP-Facility (HARP-F), bringing together perspectives from the local protection organisations HARP-F partnered with in Kachin state, experiences of the national Technical Assistant (TA) hired by HARP-F and the HARP-F regional programmes team. This case study aims to showcase how the HARP-F localisation approach was applied in the protection sector through partnership with two local organisations. The case study discusses the localisation context at the time of partnership and HARP-F's approach, both the broader approach HARP-F took and specific approach within protection in Kachin state. Finally, the case study discusses achievements, lessons learnt and emerging recommendations from the experience of HARP-F and the partners.

### **Localisation Context: Protection Sector Experience**

Humanitarian protection response is one of the main humanitarian-thematic responses in Myanmar as identified in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Housing, land, property, general protection, women's protection, and child protection are notably the key protection clusters that have been implemented across Myanmar. The implementation modality most applied is through INGO partnership with local protection organisations. This is due to access restrictions and the sensitivities of engaging with ethnic armed organisations, particularly in Kachin state. Some INGOs apply direct implementation, though this is more common in Rakhine state than Kachin state.

Transparent, professional, and friendly relationships between INGOs, UN Agencies, intermediaries and local partners are the foundations of achieving localisation partnership objectives. However, as was observed by some protection stakeholders, many local organisations were continually reluctant to share challenges and difficulties with upstream partners. This occurred as a result of two main beliefs; first, that their own funding could be impacted as the result of sharing challenges faced in implementation, and second, that the upstream partner might be monitoring them under the guise of technical assistance and support. These perceptions resulted in less openness from local organisations with their partner organisations, despite efforts by INGOs and UN Agencies to ensure that strong partnership foundations were properly communicated and maintained.

Another challenge by local protection organisations is the varied standards of training and technical guidelines, as well as on-the-job learning opportunities provided by international organisations to their local partner organisations. This was due to the structure in which protection projects were implemented through. Generally, technical staff and experts were managed by protection INGOs and intermediaries, while field implementers were managed by LNGOs. As those two workforces are distinct from each other and physically located in two different areas, several challenges emerged. Firstly, protection technical staff have only filtered knowledge, as they rely on updates from implementing organisations. These updates were often limited to project-only information and lacked the broader contextual and organisational information. This made it difficult for technical staff to provide effective protection and technical inputs, or to prioritise the protection issues for programming as they couldn't ascertain all the difficulties that the partner team were facing. Secondly, the protection technical staff based in INGOs

offices had multiple tasks and had to cover wider project areas. This limited their capacity to spend sufficient time with partners, at partner offices and in the field. Thirdly, many protection technical staff from INGOs had a dual role of technical support and grant management of the partners. This meant LNGOs were reluctant to be transparent with them due to concerns of monitoring by the INGO.

Despite several years and different forms of support from international protection agencies, local protection organisations still had a high level of technical dependency for project implementation. Due to the nature of protection interventions, as a service provided to beneficiaries, rather than an item that is distributed, it is almost impossible to maintain a project without high quality staff. However, staff retention for local protection organisations was a challenge as many found it difficult to keep staff members once a certain level of skills and experience had been achieved. In addition, local partners were unable to provide long term growth and learning opportunities to skilled staff nor competitive benefit packages. Therefore, local organisations rely on the international protection organisations to fill technical capacity gaps within their humanitarian protection projects.

### **HARP-Facility Approach**

HARP-F understood that contextualisation in localisation is important for sustainability, hence the role of HARP-F when partnering with local organisations, was adapted to ensure it fit with the unique situations of Myanmar and the partner organisation. As part of the HARP-F localisation agenda an enabling grant scheme was established to upskill the competencies of local humanitarian organisations in various sectors. Funding to local organisations was coupled with capacity enhancement in technical, organisational and administration. In designing how capacity enhancement would be provided HARP-F, established the role of TAs separately to other capacity enhancement activities. Mentorship from TAs supported the partners to deliver humanitarian projects according to their vision and gain technical knowledge while concurrently building organisational strength through additional capacity enhancement activities delivered by the HARP-F capacity enhancement team along with other teams in HARP-F.

During the process of selecting enabling grant partners HARP-F regional programmes team identified two local organisations, Pyoe and Grip Hands, that worked in protection and could benefit from HARP-F support, specifically technical assistance. As initial proposals submitted by the organisations were unsuccessful due to lack of clarity in the project purpose and implementation plans the HARP-F Kachin regional team organised several workshops and meetings with the protection organisations to re-develop their proposals with a short-term international child protection consultant. This was the initial stage in supporting these local organisations to secure HARP-F funding. Based on this experience the regional team raised to the HARP-F senior management team the need for a protection TA so that Pyoe and Grip hands would continue to develop technical capacity during project implementation. Unlike other sectors where technical expertise was provided to partners, for Kachin protection partners a national TA was recruited and seconded to the partner's offices to work more closely with partners as part of their teams rather than from HARP-F's head or regional offices. Throughout the grant period HARP-F supported the TA through regular check-ins to hear progress and provide guidance to the TA in overcoming challenges and barriers to progress, however, partners and the TA had full autonomy to direct how and in what ways technical support was provided to the partners.

## **Working with Local Protection Partners**

Through initial discussions with Pyoe and Grip Hands various areas for capacity enhancement were identified. These included project technical review and design, implementation support, including project management and staff recruitment and wellbeing as well as support for building stronger relationships with donors and INGOs and improved participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

Technical review assessments provided an early opportunity for partners to learn through working together with the TA to understand every phase of the project. By working with the TA on project amendment submissions the burden on HARP-F grants and programmes teams was reduced when reviewing amendments. Partners also gained confidence, as less clarifications and feedback were necessary between HARP-F and the partners. This type of support went beyond HARP-F's project and was provided by the TA throughout the partnership, with the TA providing technical inputs during proposal development for various funders, including other donors and INGOs. The continuous support in this area aimed to contribute to the local organisations' sustainability by aiding them to secure further funding.

Based on the capacities of the organisations and the gaps in knowledge a training package was developed and delivered to staff. This training covered children's rights, child protection in emergency contexts, children rights associated with armed conflicts, six grave violations against children monitoring and reporting mechanism, basic psychosocial support, and child friendly space and mental health and psychosocial support programming. The training package was developed with the support of the TA, however, is owned by Pyoe creating ownership over the work and acted as a motivational factor for the partner's team.

The TA provided a series of training using the developed training package applying teaching techniques such as training of trainer sessions, practical examples, group assignments and individual presentations on key topics. The training was delivered with the aim that the team could replicate the training to provide training to field colleagues. Once training by the TA was completed, training plans were then developed with partner staff and the TA accompanied the partners' training team during field training sessions. This gave the opportunity for on the job coaching and mentoring by the TA and provided the necessary support for the partners' team to lead the training. For constant improvement the TA conducted daily training evaluations and led individual and group review sessions to provide feedback based on the TA's observation of the team's competencies throughout the training. The TA was able to easily coordinate such sessions and plan training schedules due to the physical proximity of the TA to the partner's teams. This meant rectification of issues and refinement of training techniques and style could be completed quickly and efficiently, without delay to the training plan or interruption to the organisation's other activities.

In preparation for project implementation HARP-F's TA developed a series of localised tools to support the installation of the child protection case management system in the partner organisations. In consultation with Pyoe and Grip hands HARP-F's TA contextualised the existing national child protection case management tools and ensured that tools were fit with existing capacity of partner organisations. Once drafted both the national tools and the localised tools were presented to senior staff of the partner organisations. This gave the partners the opportunity to discuss the differences and similarities of the

tools internally and with the TA as well as the advantages and disadvantage of using the tools in the field. Based on these discussions the partners decided which tools, localised or national, they prefer to apply in their project. Both partners decided to apply the localised case management tools and database system in their child protection case management systems.

Child protection case management was a new component for both organisations, it is also a highly sensitive thematic area to provide beneficiary services in, therefore specific training, skill development and experience on child protection case management was required for both organisations. A basic training was conducted, and the TA assigned what level of personnel should manage each case risk level based on the case management competencies assessment results. This was to mitigate any potential risks and ensure competencies of the staff matched their responsibilities.

The TA also supported project implementation, including project management, staff recruitment and staff well-being. However, by design, HARP-F's approach separated administration and technical capacity enhancement of local partners, therefore the TA provided only recommendations and technical feedback in the areas of administrative needs such as reporting. Where overlap occurred with administrative responsibilities, for example in recruitment, the TA focused on the technical inputs that could be provided as it is very important for partners to recruit qualified staff. As such the TA helped to develop technical protection questions for recruitment of staff and sat on the interview panel to support the partners in making informed decisions in recruitment of program staff. This support ensured that the right team were in place in these organisations to achieve the results of the project.

During project implementation the TA provided ongoing training activities on the case management tools and other relevant aspects of the project. Further on the job training was provided in case management through the application of case management, coaching and supervision of how different types of cases such as child forced recruitment, early marriage, neglect, sexual abuse, and rape are handled. Individual case management coaching sessions were held where individual cases were reviewed, and action points agreed upon under the close supervision. Roleplays were also utilised prior to case managers meeting beneficiaries to practice specific case risk levels, competencies, and scenarios with the protection staff. This ongoing support was vital, though the TA found it difficult to provide on the job coaching equally to both local partners. This was due to delays in approval of the final project design for Grip Hands which left less time to implement their project under the supervision of the TA.

The TA provided staff wellbeing support as well as coaching which contributed to a close working relationship between the TA and project staff. Staff well-being support is an important aspect of working in the protection sector because of the nature of the job and the stressful context. The TA arranged informal conversations with individual staff to listen to their difficulties and provide counselling as necessary. Furthermore, the TA highlighted the key issues of staff wellbeing with supervisors and the management of the partner organisations. This supported line managers and management to consider staff wellbeing and take necessary action in a timely manner when needed. However, in some cases, particularly relating to decision making on protection cases, confusion emerged over the TA's role and meant some staff relied on the TA for advice and mentorship over their line managers. This was challenging for the TA and is discussed further in the lessons learnt section.

A key aim of HARP-F's localisation approach was to improve participation of local actors in coordination mechanisms to provide local actors a platform for influencing the direction of humanitarian response in their communities. Through the TA's connections and experiences HARP-F supported Pyoe and Grip Hands to increase their network with other INGOs and UN Agencies through participation in the humanitarian coordination mechanisms. The TA arranged technical consultations with partners before they met with other protection donors aiming to provide additional capacity and confidence for participation in discussions. The TA also actively encouraged participation during cluster meetings by supporting the partners to speak up and contribute through presentations to share their experiences and knowledge in the sector.

### **Achievements of the Partners' Projects**

While the HARP-F localisation approach has similarities to other organisations in terms of providing funding and capacity enhancement while supporting participation and better coordination led by local actors, HARP-F expanded on these areas in a unique way with their local protection partners as demonstrated above. These unique aspects alongside more traditional approaches led to key project and localisation achievements.

Through having a national TA relationship between the local organisation staff and TA was strong. Language and culture are similar between the TA and the local organisation allowing for strong connections to be formed. This also enabled the TA to work closely beside the organisation throughout implementation. Partners' staff were more confident with the TA physically beside them when they went to the field to provide trainings and protection services to the beneficiaries. HARP-F's TA was integrated with the whole partners' team throughout from preparatory capacity development to project implementation, allowing ongoing improvement of the team to be possible.

Seconding the TA to partner offices during the TA's contract resulted in positive outcomes. First, it created an opened relationship and enhanced timely responses to the partner's needs. Secondly, improved knowledge of the organisation by the TA enabled better planning and coordination of activities across the partner organisation. For example, the TA was able to conduct training more easily and quickly as they are aware of the organisation and staff schedules. Third, it allowed more opportunities to provide hands-on coaching and mentoring to the partners' teams. As well as advice and support that directly relates to day-to-day challenges as they emerge. This supports project quality as the advisor can monitor and step in to improve quality in a timely manner. Lastly, through secondment the TA was provided with support from HARP-F. This meant challenges faced were able to be raised informally and formally through the regular communication between HARP-F regional and programmes teams and the TA. This provided additional expertise and support to the TA and in turn to the local partners.

Through dedicated technical support imbedded at partner offices increased their knowledge and experience in applying practices that comply to child protection technical standards. Prior to the HARP-F project, both partners didn't have standard operating procedures for case management. Both organisations lacked the tools, systems, child safeguarding policies and training curriculum for staff to implement child protection projects to a high quality. With the support of the TA, Pyoe was able to develop such resources and have continued using them in their organisation as best practice even after

the end of HARP-F technical support. While delays in project approval for Grip Hands resulted in them not having the opportunity to develop organisation specific standard operating procedures for case management Grip Hands has been able to increase knowledge on case management and handling through the TA's close supervision and support. Both partners recognised that without the support of the TA, they wouldn't have been able to achieve a high-quality protection project complying to the optimal standards in the sector.

Knowledge for both organisations increased in child protection and the capacities of the teams to manage cases improved. Partners recognised these improvements as their greatest achievement during implementation of the HARP-F funded project. Prior to HARP-F, both partners couldn't or didn't handle case management and referred cases to other agencies and/or service providers. Through implementation of the HARP-F project the organisations gained experience in case handling and management. This in turn increased the self-confidence of the organisations to handle child protection cases including high risks cases. For example, one partner supported a survivor from immediate assistance up until the conclusion of the court trial. The partner was able to support the survivor throughout the process by linking up with other legal service providers. This type of case would have been referred to an INGO or other service provider previously by the partner. Another example of high-risk cases that were successfully handled by the local partner organisation are the release of recruited children by armed groups. These cases are typically managed only by experienced INGOs or service providers, however, Pyoe and Grip Hands were able to take on this role as a small local organisation using the systems and knowledge provided by the HARP-F TA.

The projects implemented by Pyoe and Grip Hands reached 5,158 and 3,172 beneficiaries respectively. These results were achieved through the support of the TA. In addition, the projects increased community awareness of child protection and safeguarding. Community-based child working groups were established by the partners in their respective communities. These groups actively worked throughout project implementation and have also continued beyond the HARP-F project. The communities are still communicating with partners and sharing information related to protection cases, asking for the advice and further links to relevant service providers. This increased community participation is a key aim of localisation, contributing to the participation revolution as well as ensuring protection of vulnerable populations with quality ongoing service provision.

Prior to the HARP-F grant both local partners engaged less in international protection cluster coordination mechanisms. This was seen by the TA to steadily increase as the TA worked with these partners. Through consistent encouragement and support from HARP-F's TA, partners gained confidence to engage more in the protection network. Both local partners first started participating in the Protection Working Group in the middle of the project timeline, once some capacity support had been provided and before project implementation began. This timeframe gave the partners more confidence to engage and provided important opportunities for the organisations to engage and coordinate with other protection actors during project implementation. Through working more closely with protection actors like UNICEF for case management and referrals the local organisations gained recognition among INGOs, UN agencies and donors as organisations who focus on the child protection. Consequently, donors and INGO have taken better notice providing further funding opportunities while also increasing their network.



Through the establishment of an independent TA who has autonomy to support the local partner organisations as needed the TA was able to go beyond supporting in areas only relating to the HARP-F project but also support the organisations in securing future funding. Through project reviews and advice on submissions by the TA, combined with increased network through participation in coordination mechanisms, Pyoe and Grip Hand secured funding from other INGOs while HARP-F was partnering and working with them.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Through the experience of the TA, local partner organisations and HARP-F some lessons learnt have been identified. These lessons learnt consider the achievements of the HARP-F localisation approach in the protection sector and reflect on where challenges arose and/or improvements can be achieved.

Dependency on the TA, for responsibilities beyond technical support, developed among partner staff according to the TA. While seconding the TA to partner offices provided multiple benefits, one draw-back was how the position became integrated within the partner team structure. By knowing an advisor is available for problem solving some staff relied on this as first action rather than last resort. In addition, despite the TA not having any management role in the partner organisation or administrative role in HARP-F, staff members relied on the advisor for every issue, including non-technical. This put a strain on the TA and created a challenging environment, were the TA had to continually encourage staff to go to their own managers with such issues. To overcome this challenge the TA raised staff concerns directly with managers and supported the managers to problem solve. The manager was then able to advise junior staff members without the TA which supported the formation of direct communication channels between managers and staff.

The timeframe of the projects did not allow ample time for securing additional long-term funding. While both organisations received some short-term funding, gaps between the end of HARP-F and securing additional funding created a challenge. This gap resulted in some key qualified staff leaving the organisations. In addition, the project time frame meant that the grant ended right when Pyoe and Grip Hands were growing adding to the challenge of a funding gap.

The timeframe of the project also impacted the support provided to each partner. Due to delays in approval by HARP-F for the revised project plan for Grip Hands, the project capacity enhancement phase had to overlap with project implementation giving less time for Grip Hands to practice and develop their knowledge in a training setting. The TA was also unable to provide as much hands-on coaching and mentoring during Grip Hand's project implementation. This was noticeable in comparison to Pyoe who received more time for capacity enhancement in advance of project implementation and was able to achieve more during its project.

While partners gained knowledge and improved their skills and experience in case management using best practices and localised tools, both organisations faced challenges in showcasing the value of the localised tools to sector leaders. Child Protection cluster actors continue to rely on national protection case management tools and database systems for project implementation, while Pyoe and Grip Hands opted to develop localised tools. The localised tools complement the national tools however do not align

exactly and therefore Pyoe and Grip Hands have been asked to use the national tools and database system despite their capacities and knowledge being in the localised tools. However, the localisation tools utilised by Pyoe and Grip Hands were designed to better suit the operating context of the local organisations and have enabled both organisations to gain experience of case management and database systems. Through their increased participation in protection cluster meetings Pyoe and Grip Hands need to continue to advocate for the use of localised tools that fit to the operating context of the organisations.

As discussed previously HARP-F protection TA was only responsible for the capacity enhancement of the technical capabilities of the partner organisations. HARP-F provided additional capacity enhancement through the capacity enhancement team to multiple local organisations. These supports included organisational development such as financial policies and practices, logistical tools, and other organisational administration support. Improvement in these areas were not in line with those of the technical capacities of the local protection organisations resulting in uneven capacity enhancement for the organisations.

While multiple achievements were made in relation to localisation and HARP-F's approach, communicating these achievements were difficult in regular reporting as results frameworks continued to rely on indicators that related mostly to the project implementation for beneficiaries. This has meant that localisation achievements are not fully recognised. Equally monitoring of the localisation approach and its achievements by HARP-F and the TA is difficult without indicators to report on.

## **Recommendations**

- 1: It is challenging for local organisations to hire and keep qualified and experienced staff; this directly links to funding security; staff benefit packages, and the well-being of staff support systems. Therefore, it is recommended for donors and intermediaries to provide core funding to partners and technical support beyond project implementation but also for securing additional funding.
- 2: HARP-Facility's experience with Pyoe and Grip Hands proved that the secondment of technical advisors with a role distinct from administrative support to local organisations is beneficial. This approach creates a transparent and conducive working environment for local organisations and provides supports fit for the context and needs of the local partner. It is recommended that HARP-F's approach is applied by intermediaries when partnering with local organisations. This approach can also be applied beyond the protection sector in other humanitarian sector responses.
- 3: Confusion between the role of the HARP-F TA and the project manager of the local organisation is one of the key areas that need to be addressed. For organisations applying HARP-F's approach, it is important to have clear roles and responsibilities set out in advance of the partnership. These should be clearly communicated to team members throughout the project period.
- 4: Localisation indicators and achievements should be captured as part of the project results framework. Currently MEAL systems prioritise the monitoring of project implementation related indicators such as beneficiaries' numbers, case completion etc. To improve the measurement of localisation achievements donors and intermediaries should integrate localisation and partnership related indicators into reporting



requirements. This will help systematically monitor the progress and respond as necessary to these goals of the partnership.

5: Multi-year funding is required when applying HARP-F's localisation approach. Short-term partnership does not allow ample time to achieve capacity enhancement, project review and project implementation with support from a TA.

6: As demonstrated above one TA was seconded to two local organisations. It is important to match the needs of the organisations with the TA's available time. This requires assessing the needs in advance and then carefully planning the number of TAs required. To ensure equal distribution of time across multiple partners, TAs should be contracted to spend an equal number of days with each local organisation that can be revised on a need-by-need basis in consultation with the TA, the contracting organisation, and the local organisation.

7: As demonstrated through the challenges faced during the partnership with Grip Hands most capacity building activities should be provided before project implementation. This provides staff the opportunity to practice, role play and develop these skills in the absence of interacting with beneficiaries, which are particularly important in the protection sector due to the personal nature of the work. It is recommended that capacity building activities are approved in advance of the project implementation funding to enable partners to start capacity enhancement followed by project implementation.