

Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) COVID-19 Response Evaluation



source: www.irrawaddy.com

Submitted by Myint Awng Seng¹, Sharon Low and Philip Visser

September 2021

¹ Pseudonym

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	D
Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	E
Executive Summary.....	F
Section 1 - Background and Purpose	1
1.1 Country context.....	1
1.2. Impact of COVID-19 on Myanmar.....	1
1.3 Evaluation of the HARP-F COVID-19 response.....	3
1.4 Objectives of the evaluation.....	4
1.5. Methodology and approach.....	6
1.6. Limitations	7
1.7. Structure of the report	8
2.1 Activation of the response	9
2.2 Coordination & the cluster system.....	10
2.3 Communication.....	10
2.4 Localisation.....	11
2.5 Flow of funding.....	12
2.6 Monitoring & mediation with FCDO	13
2.7 Planning for the Future	14
Section 3 – Reflections & Recommendations.....	15
3.1 Strengthen and consolidate partnerships.....	15
3.2 Diversify activities	16
3.3 Establish practical guidelines for public health communication	17
3.4 Create a robust ecosystem for localisation.....	17
3.5 Focus on capacity building & training in an evolving crisis	18
3.6 Re-evaluate accountability.....	19
3.7 Develop a logical framework for monitoring & reporting.....	19
3.8 Sustain an intermediary role	20
3.9 Expand co-ordination & collaboration.....	20
3.10 Establish strategic regional advisory teams	21
3.11 Clarify duty of care	22
Section 4 – Conclusion	23

Annex A - Terms of Reference i

Annex B - Guiding Interview Questions iv

Annex C- List of Documents Reviewed vi

Annex D - People Interviewed x

Annex E - Further remarks on key findings..... xi

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to thank the Humanitarian and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) team, and in particular, Eva Rose Cullinan (Evaluation Coordinator), Andrew Wilson (former Head of Quality, Impact and Learning) and Toby Sexton (Director - Knowledge, Impact and Legacy) for their professional cooperation and for entrusting us with this assignment.

We would further like to thank the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and HARP-F's partners who supported this evaluation by setting aside time to share their insights and experiences working on the COVID-19 response.

This evaluation report is a product of the views and perspectives of various stakeholders interviewed and documentation made available to the evaluation team. The results and conclusions presented in this report represent the evaluation team's analysis of respondents' views and perceptions, and do not necessarily represent those of HARP-F or FCDO.

With thanks,
Evaluation Team

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBOs	Community Based Organisations
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HARP-F	Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
iNGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPs	Implementing Partners
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sports
NLD	National League for Democracy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PSEA	Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Health
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive Summary

Launched in 2016, the Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) is the principal pillar of the UK's humanitarian assistance in Myanmar. It is responsible for disbursing and managing £61 million in grants² to organisations meeting the needs of people affected by conflict and natural disasters in Myanmar.

In February 2020, HARP-F drafted a COVID-19 response plan and started implementing specific support through their partners to support communities affected by the pandemic. This was prior to the government of Myanmar formally confirming the first case of COVID-19 on 23 March 2020.³

The HARP-F COVID-19 portfolio currently consists of 26 local and international NGOs providing goods and services valued at approximately £5 million to targeted populations in Rakhine State, Kachin State, northern Shan State (NSS), Chin State, southeast Myanmar and the Thai border area.⁴ HARP-F has focused their response to the pandemic by:

- i. working with partners to ensure that critical humanitarian assistance continues to be delivered safely and responsibly;
- ii. modifying existing grant agreements to enable grantees to focus on COVID-19 mitigation and preparedness; and
- iii. providing new grants to meet humanitarian needs during the pandemic.

In 2021, the COVID-19 response continued but it became more complicated following the military coup of 1 February. The post-coup operating context reset relationships between civil society and government and changed the external foreign policy and aid calculations of donor governments. Humanitarian support, including the COVID-19 response, is being reformulated to cope in a much more restricted operating environment.

An evaluation was commissioned to review HARP-F's COVID-19 response with a two-fold objective:

- i. elicit learning and make salient recommendations; and

² <https://www.crownagents.com/procurement-notice/humanitarian-and-resilience-programme-harp-facility-programming-in-hard-to-reach-areas/#:~:text=In%20its%20role%20as%20a%20funding%20mechanism%2C%20the,affected%20by%20conflict%20and%20natural%20disasters%20in%20Myanma>

³ As of 30 August 2021, the reported death toll attributed to COVID-19 is 15,287 persons with 395,883 persons recorded as being affected by the virus. Refer to <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/myanmar/> (accessed on 10 September 2021).

⁴ Evaluation Terms of Reference

- ii. use the findings, lessons and recommendations to strengthen best practices across the larger humanitarian community.

The evaluation reviewed core documentation provided by HARP-F and conducted interviews with grantees⁵, HARP-F staff and FCDO officials.

Below are the select key findings and recommendations.

Key Findings

Activation of the response

HARP-F's activation of its response to a swiftly evolving public-health crisis by mobilising existing grantees was relevant, being designed around community-based initiatives as well as the capacities and needs of CSOs. The multi-stakeholder approach was also both logical and effective. Furthermore, HARP-F's response was able to be implemented quickly as it was based principally upon quality relationships with pre-existing grantees. Responses to COVID-19 could be kick-started rapidly due to the strength of these existing partnerships as well as the use of localised networks enabling the deployment of existing funds already in partner bank accounts.

Coordination & the cluster system

HARP-F ensured coordination amongst grantees by use of the cluster-coordination system. The majority of grantees were not direct implementors but instead worked with local organisations. HARP-F's coordination with both grantees and local organisations in the communities helped to obtain greater credibility and broaden the scope of what the response could achieve. Timely coordination with all stakeholders both within and beyond communities is key to ensure relevance. Multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral dialogue can further strengthen coordination and enhance the broadening of knowledge.

Communication

Quality working relationships, promptness and the use of informal communication channels engendered quick decision making. The "partnership relationships" between HARP-F and grantees promoted informality, the open flow of information and effective communication. Grantees would often refer to themselves as "partners" which suggests a relationship closer than that of a traditional relationship between donor and grantee. High staff turn-over at HARP-F in the early days concerned grantees but subsequent stability and introduction of focal persons was welcomed.

⁵ The term "grantees" is used for purposes of reporting. During interviews "grantees" often referred to themselves as "partners", indicating a closer relationship. This aspect is addressed in the report itself as an important factor in the response.

Duty of care

Duty of care has become more vital given the additional stress on staff and resilience required from communities. COVID-19 introduced a layer of uncertainty, change in patterns of work, an overload of information and restrictions on movement. This places additional emphasis on staff wellbeing. Communities had to draw on individual, social and cultural resources to sustain themselves.

Localisation

HARP-F's localisation processes prior to and during the pandemic enhanced the response. Small organisations received mentorship and organisation development support. One such organisation in Rakhine State started their own project in early 2019 after being incubated. They independently received a project amendment and non-cost extension funds after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar. Mentorship and organisation development support such as this was planned during the inception of HARP-F and before COVID-19. This example shows the relevance of working with existing partners to accentuate success

Non-traditional networks of volunteers were utilised and progress was made in strengthening the capacity of these different groups and networks in the project areas. The delivery models selected by HARP-F utilising these informal networks functioned effectively and enhanced the delivery of aid and material to areas with restricted access. However, using such networks does raise policy and practical questions pertaining to risk, fund transfer modalities and reporting formats. A locally based focal person can play an important linking role with such local structures.

Flow of funding

Flow of funding was prompt. Most grantees were complimentary about HARP-F's flexibility and resourcefulness, even after the coup when transferring funds became more difficult.

Monitoring and mediation with FCDO

Monitoring is becoming more locally-led. Grantees also acknowledged HARP-F's intermediary role between them and FCDO as valuable. Partners were provided with access to a big picture analysis and overview without having to use up additional resources and time, allowing them to focus on delivery on the ground.

Planning for the Future

Planning for the future is uncertain but greater localisation is expected.

Recommendations

Strengthen and consolidate partnerships

HARP-F should develop a partnership consolidation process to further empower grantees. Funding procedures could also be simplified.

A mix of formal and informal communication can continue to be used, enabling more real-time information and decisions on funding.

Diversify activities

Expand coverage of activities and build upon existing partnerships.

Additionally, to provide continuity and sustained support, several partners reasoned that the work on COVID-19 responses should be integrated with current programming and mainstreamed.

Establish practical guidelines for public health communication

The promotion of behavioural change in communities should be sustained so to combat the `infodemic` – an onslaught of information, some inaccurate, much confusing – to help people make informed decisions and reduce mental strain. Humanitarian actors need to establish practical guidelines for public health and risk communication that is accessible, reliable, actionable and inclusive.

Create a robust ecosystem for localisation

It is important to understand that `localisation` is not merely prioritising funding to more local groups. Instead, it is about rebalancing the humanitarian system to ensure greater recognition and support is given to local actors. This therefore requires not just a change in system, but a change in mindset.

Besides being an intermediary for accountability of funds, HARP-F's grantees are already taking on field responsibilities and ownership of this particular response. This can be expanded upon. It is recommended to create an ecosystem based upon shared values and a common vision. This can incorporate building the capacity of local grantees and increasing the scope of shared accountability within the localization framework. The creation of such an ecosystem will demand a balance between task-shifting (for access to inaccessible areas) towards responsibility sharing (co-building operational models and systems between grantees and IPs.)

Focus on capacity building and training in an evolving crisis

Deliver to grantees and IPs additional training on diverse topics.

Re-evaluate accountability

The current crises have led local organisations with strong financial systems and proven track records to ask donors to consider unrestricted funds to enable them to respond faster. This places stress on people and systems. It is recommended to conduct a broad-based conversation to address expectations within the confines of financial compliance with the goal of aligning accountability, monitoring and governance systems.

Develop a logical framework for monitoring & reporting

Develop a simplified logical framework as a guide for collective monitoring and reporting. It is important to have a shared understanding of outputs and outcomes, for example, “capacity development progress.”

Sustain an intermediary role

Intermediaries are nimble and can act as a fixer for the grantees and IPs to lobby with the authorities as well as define, drive and deliver humanitarian support on time and to intended crisis-affected persons. An intermediary function is therefore important and should be retained if or when HARP-F’s contract ends.

Expand coordination & collaboration

Field presence should be increased, working groups set-up and multi-stakeholder dialogue further supported. Inter-sectoral collaboration should be increased, particularly between HARP-F and entities that have a mandate to advocate for humanitarian policies at the international level such as UNHCR and the Red Cross.

Establish strategic regional advisory teams

Establish strategic regional advisory teams to undertake periodic missions. There should be adequate mechanisms to include CSOs and those working among ethnic populations and in conflict zones. This can help reduce tensions among stakeholders and build confidence in development agencies by using transition compacts and mutual accountability frameworks.

Clarify duty of care

Some local / smaller CSOs / CBOs interpret duty of care to include donors and related intermediaries engaging with the authorities on their behalf. It is vital that what duty of care does and does not include is clarified and communicated.

Section 1 - Background and Purpose

This section provides a brief background to the purpose of this evaluation as formulated in the Terms of Reference (TOR) and understood by the evaluation team and outlines the structure of the final report.

1.1 Country context

According to the UN, approximately 3 million people in Myanmar need humanitarian assistance and protection services.⁶ Myanmar saw a slow spread of COVID-19 when the virus was first detected in the country in March 2020. However at the time of writing the virus was spreading rapidly with over 376,000 people infected by August 2021. At this point, Myanmar was recording 2,000 new cases each day, although this number is believed to be an undercount.⁷

Since the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Myanmar on 23 March 2020,⁸ the outbreak tested the systems and staff capacities of HARP-F. As a funding entity, HARP-F had to ensure a guaranteed fund flow to its grantees, coordinate with other agencies to ensure complementarity at different levels, and rethink its relationships and communication with subcontracted implementing partners (IPs). HARP-F, together with its grantees and partners, mobilised to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states, with a focus on communities living in rural areas, IDP centres and places of detention throughout the country. In parallel, HARP-F swiftly developed a specific response to address the needs of the population particularly exposed to the risks of COVID-19, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), returning migrants and people deprived of freedom of movement. HARP-F adopted flexible approaches and supported efforts to mitigate community suffering. The major challenges it faced included facilitating learning sessions for grantees (instead of one-to-one),⁹ access to resources and uncertainty given the rapidly changing conditions.

1.2. Impact of COVID-19 on Myanmar

During the first wave of the pandemic from late March to early August 2020, Myanmar officially recorded around 360 cases and six deaths. Early in the crisis, the government implemented

⁶ Refer to <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-snapshot-august-2021>

⁷ Refer to <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/between-covid-and-the-coup-a-humanitarian-emergency-is-underway-in-myanmar/> (Accessed on August 25, 2021)

⁸ Refer to <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/myanmar/> (Accessed on August 7, 2021).

⁹ Grantees mentioned that they met together once, arranged by HARP-F. Mostly, however, it was informal one-on-one.

measures to contain the virus. Just as these measures began to be eased, the country was hit by a major second wave in mid-August 2020. Daily cases increased from less than 10 per day in early August to over 1,000 per day in mid-October. By 9 November 2020, Myanmar had recorded more than 61,975 cases and 14,376 deaths,¹⁰ the third highest number of fatalities in Southeast Asia. This wave overwhelmed Myanmar's inadequate and understaffed health infrastructure.¹¹ As of 26 August 2021, Myanmar had reported 380,879 cases and 14,737 deaths.¹² Although officially recorded cases of COVID-19 in Myanmar were lower than its western neighbours, the social and economic effects were significant given the externally oriented economy, uneven social safety nets and fragile healthcare system.

The NLD government's rations programme for the most vulnerable populations, implemented during the Thingyan festival of April 2020, excluded many due to inconsistent information between different departments. From school closures to disruptions, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to impact the most vulnerable children and youth in Myanmar disproportionately, exacerbating existing educational inequalities.

Displaced people are living in overcrowded camps and camp-like settings in various parts of Myanmar. Non-displaced persons in remote areas face similar challenges: high population density and limited access to hygiene materials, safe water and sanitation services. These conditions significantly increased the risk of COVID-19 spreading rapidly

Myanmar provides labour to neighbouring countries, particularly China and Thailand. Business closures in those countries resulted in job losses among migrant workers, especially construction and domestic workers. Consequently, remittances have declined which contribute an estimated 44.0% of household income and 4.3% of GDP on average,¹³ with significant impact on household income in non-poor households.¹⁴ Domestically, with restrictions on travel to contain the spread of COVID-19, many people complained about: the drop in prices for farm produce; lack of access to regular markets; loss of employment; and the scarcity of food, hygiene items and medicine.

Continued political-civil strife further complicates the situation. During the early phase of the pandemic response, the conflict between the Myanmar military and insurgents added complexity. The government cut internet access to nine townships due to concerns that it was being used to

¹⁰ Refer to <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/myanmar/> (Accessed on 13 September 2021).

¹¹ Refer to <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/12/01/myanmars-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/> (accessed on 10 September 2021).

¹² Refer to *Myanmar: WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard With Vaccination Data*. (2021). Accessed on 27 August 2021, from <https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/mm>

¹³ Refer to "Myanmar remittances - International Growth Centre." <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Akee-and-Kapur-2017-Final-report.pdf>. (Accessed on 30 August 2021).

¹⁴ Refer to Diao, X. and K. Mahrt (2020), 'Assessing the Impact on Household Incomes and Poverty of Declines in Remittances Due to COVID-19', Myanmar SSP Policy Note, No. 6. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/133752/filename/133963.pdf>

inflare clashes.¹⁵ This had a damaging effect as access to the internet and telecommunication channels is necessary to raise COVID-19 awareness and propagate preventive measures. At the same time, access and movement of international humanitarian actors to and within the conflict-affected communities decreased, which meant projects and interventions had to be led by local CSOs.

Longstanding and on-going armed conflicts restrict access for testing and recording cases and deaths and coordinating between different health entities involved in the pandemic response. The military coup of 1 February 2021 added another layer of complexity and immediately halted cooperation with the ad hoc government.

Like almost every country in the world, Myanmar's COVID-19 response was uneven as the authorities tried to balance economic necessity with social distancing. This resulted in variable levels of enforcement and compliance as people had to balance their need to generate an income with stay at home orders, curfews and other restrictions. Lost income worsens the economic situation which, in turn, heightens the potential for social conflict. The pandemic also highlighted political fragmentation and ethnic divides. Much of the nation's population in borderlands and rural areas has limited access to government healthcare and assistance, relying instead on the Community-Based Health Organisations (CBHOs) and Ethnic Health Organisations (EHOs). As such, conflict, along with pandemic-related restrictions on cross-border movement and trade, poses a significant challenge for communities along Myanmar's mountainous periphery.

However, COVID-19 also presented opportunities to reflect on and improve humanitarian practice, empower community organisations and strengthen local capacities. This evaluation attempts to contribute some thoughts on what was learned from the HARP-F COVID-19 response and what more could be considered for implementation.

1.3 Evaluation of the HARP-F COVID-19 response

Towards the end of 2020, HARP-F commissioned a study to review its COVID-19 response (Annex A), against the stated ambition of "being a flexible and adaptive fund, able to adjust and respond quickly to contextual and operational changes". A two-pronged focus was framed:

- i) A review of HARP-F's response to the crisis, with specific attention on what was learned. The pandemic brought unique challenges and for both FCDO and HARP-F, it is

¹⁵ Refer to "Myanmar Again Cuts Rakhine State's Internet | Human Rights Watch." 5 February 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/05/myanmar-again-cuts-rakhine-states-internet>. (Accessed August 30, 2021).

important to capture lessons from these unique circumstances and apply it to future programming.

- ii) Use the findings and lessons to strengthen best practices across the humanitarian community. The decades-long military rule and consequent foreign policy stand-off from many countries have restricted aid modalities. The possibility of a more democratic dispensation offers scope for expansion and, therefore, both international agencies and local CSOs need a steep learning curve with, perhaps, an emphasis on how international agencies relate to local partners.

This initial assignment was framed as a real time evaluation. However, it was halted due to the political crisis following the coup in February 2021. In response to the evolving political situation, the evaluation methodology and approach were modified to ensure confidentiality and security of all those participating and contributing. The evaluation team reworked and resubmitted a draft Inception Report in May 2021 (available as a separate document) that was discussed with FCDO and HARP-F. The methodology was adjusted and simplified in recognition of logistical challenges and personal safety precautions. The timeframe also became more flexible given the loss of momentum and the shift in focus of many stakeholders. The evaluation resumed in earnest in mid-June 2021 with a series of interviews with grantees with the intention of completion in September 2021.

1.4 Objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation was designed with the objective:

- i) to identify lessons learned and assess the fitness of existing HARP-F systems and procedures, and
- ii) to reflect on how these lessons could be applied to future humanitarian work.

In doing so, a distinction was made between what HARP-F is accountable for and what it wants to learn. The Inception Report suggested five areas of inquiry. A set of questions were formulated for each area to guide the objections of the evaluation as outlined above. A summary of the line of inquiry is provided below.

Evaluation Inquiry	Key Questions
<p>Reflect and learn: Reflect on existing implementation and identify areas for improvement. Assess the relevance and appropriateness of the activities being undertaken by HARP-F grantees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did HARP-F adopt measures to minimise the negative effects of the pandemic, specifically related to (a) health, (b) conflict & security, (c) food security & livelihoods, and (d) resilience? • Is HARP-F's COVID-19 response appropriate to support the strategic evolution from exploration / trust-building to ceasefire and peace process?
<p>Identify lessons from experience: Draw key learnings that can be applied to 1) existing responses or 2) future emergencies by examining both the activities being undertaken by grantees and HARP-F's COVID-19 response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the COVID-19 interventions supported by HARP-F grounded in sound contextual understanding based on (a) preparedness, (b) mitigation and (c) safe continuity of humanitarian programming? • To what extent did the interventions benefit marginalised and vulnerable groups within (a) IDPs in camp and camp-like settings, (b) conflict-affected people, and (c) difficult to reach populations?
<p>HARP-F flexibility & adaptability: Assess speed & responsiveness of HARP-F in terms of its flexibility and adaptiveness to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically decision making, resource allocation and money flows.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the effectiveness and efficiency of resource allocation at sub-national level?
<p>Assess the model: Review to what extent the HARP-F fund management & support model contributes to FCDO's capacity for responsive humanitarian programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did HARP-F's modality of governance and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and learning contribute to FCDO's capacity for responsive humanitarian programming? • Is there evidence of an integrated learning and adaptive management approach to program implementation, including innovations?
<p>Duty of care: Assess HARP-F approach to ensure duty of care to grantees and IPs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were capacities and / or resilience strengthened at the individual and organisational level, taking into consideration contributing factors and constraints?

1.5. Methodology and approach

The evaluation was designed to obtain information and data from the two main informant groups i.e. HARP-F and grantees. Given the specific focus to assess HARP-F's response and adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic, the methodology aimed to:

- i) source answers through a review of HARP-F documentation, and
- ii) to understand grantee perspectives through interviews.

This dual approach enabled the evaluation team to understand how each stakeholder group responded to the onset and continuation of the pandemic and how projects were adjusted and implemented. It also helped develop a comparative review to determine gaps between views held by grantees and how HARP-F documented its own response.

A set of questions (Annex B) was formulated to guide the interviews and ensure consistency, assess the speed and adaptability of the response objectively, and determine gaps in different perspectives.

Documentation review.¹⁶ A range of documents including publicly available government report and grey literature, as well as reports and documentation provided by HARP-F, were reviewed. Annex C provides a list of documents reviewed. HARP-F's internal documents provided insight into the original rationale (late 2015) for creating the facility, the intentions and directions for the 2018-2020 plan, and the rationale for the current 18-month extension. They also offered details on COVID-19 response time, decision-making, resource distribution and areas reached. Different 'Situation Reports' provided informed updates on concerns, progress made, decision-making processes and coordination. During preparatory conversations with the evaluation team, HARP-F staff felt that their responses were quicker and more coherent than those of other humanitarian agencies and fund facilities.¹⁷ In addition, a few sources were reviewed for comparative information on the COVID-19 pandemic as well as on the progress of the peace process and the

¹⁶ Periodic reports published by the Ministry of Health, Republic of the Union of Myanmar were reviewed. Refer to <https://mohs.gov.mm/Main/content/publication/2019-ncov>

¹⁷ We would like to note that context and conflict analysis of Myanmar and COVID-19 are published by different organisations and are readily available online. The Briefing Notes from the Asia Foundation, ReliefWeb articles and reports and updates from several UN Agencies and Red Cross were very useful. These affirmed the HARP-F analysis and gave a more varied perspective. Webpages of several government agencies were reviewed to understand their actions and framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. For COVID-19 tracking, the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) published a daily 'Surveillance Dashboard' with the official numbers and other details of the pandemic in Myanmar. While grantees expressed appreciation for not being overwhelmed with tedious paperwork, this also meant somewhat limited documentation / data available for this review. That said, the evaluation team was able to get sufficient background and understanding of operational decision-making, especially at the onset of the pandemic. The HARP-F Situational Reports (SitReps) provided an electronic paper trail of activation and progress as seen from the facility's perspective.

November 2020 elections. After 1 February 2021, documents and newspapers were tracked so to keep abreast of the evolving context.¹⁸

Key respondent interviews. HARP-F coordination staff provided the evaluation team with a list of grantee stakeholders based on who they thought would be most helpful and appropriate in relation to funding received. The evaluation team offered a few suggestions based on their understanding of the situation and localities. A final list was agreed upon and HARP-F coordination staff connected the evaluation team with each organisation individually. This communication also served to inform the grantees of the evaluation, connect the grantees with the evaluation team and request that they make themselves available for interviews. Upon completion of the interviews, HARP-F was provided with a summary of the same as part of the requirements of the evaluation.

From 9 to 6 June 2021, 14 online interviews were conducted via Skype with grantee partners. Of these, nine were from INGOs and five were from local CSOs. Staff from various partner organisations were very cooperative and responded to the questions with candour and openness. For the purpose of reference and analysis, the interviews were recorded on Skype with the participants permission.¹⁹ As part of the evaluation, the team also interviewed FCDO personnel.

Reflecting on preliminary findings with the HARP-F team. At the conclusion of the interviews and desk reviews, the evaluation team compiled and presented the initial findings to the HARP-F staff directly involved with the grantees. Participants provided comments and further inputs that have been incorporated at relevant sections in this report. Annex D provides the schedule of the interviews.

1.6. Limitations

Several unexpected events and circumstances placed limitations upon the evaluation process. For the purposes of reporting, 'limitations' refers to those affecting the methodology and, therefore, the findings and lessons.

Firstly, given the time and travel constraints, this evaluation is unable to propose a robust study design to build on HARP-F's institutional knowledge. The evaluation was designed to engage participatory methods to gather broad-based evidence. The evaluation was restricted to immediate partners and not local CSOs as the coup of 1 February added a layer of security

¹⁸ Refer to Frontier Myanmar, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/>

¹⁹ However, these recordings are no longer available as they get deleted after 30 days.

concerns and logistical challenges. This meant that certain claims by partners (for instance, on the speed of fund transfers) could not be verified.

In several instances, persons interviewed had joined their organisations only recently and therefore did not have direct experience or memory of working with HARP-F during the early response period. This limited the discussion to some extent. In one instance, an organisation was a new partner and was not part of the initial response.

Limited documentation and reporting on the COVID-19 response led by HARP-F as well as inconsistent quality of the literature on COVID-19 effects in Myanmar also limited the evaluation. Due to time and resource constraints, no actors and donors working in the same areas were interviewed to compare their COVID-19 response and strategy.

Due to security concerns, in addition to COVID-19 movement restrictions, access was limited in some areas, particularly when internet bandwidth was restricted.

As participants were selected by HARP-F, responses might reflect socially desirable and hawthorn bias.²⁰ The qualitative emphasis of the study means that findings are not representative of the entire project.

1.7. Structure of the report

This report aims to capture the design, sequence, findings, analysis and lessons associated with HARP-F's COVID-19 response. It also offers selected reflections and recommendations for consideration. The structure of the report follows this quest.

An Executive Summary precedes the main body, to provide an overview of the report. **Section 1** outlines the background and purpose, briefly touching upon the impact of the 1 February coup and restates the objectives. It also describes the methodology, with details of the two main data-gathering methods: documentation review and grantee interviews. A short section on limitations is provided to help the reader understand the challenges faced by the evaluation. **Section 2** describes the key findings. These are organised into seven sections: Activation of the response; Coordination & the cluster system; Communication; Localisation; Flow of funding; Monitoring and mediation with FCDO, and; Planning for the future. **Section 3** outlines recommendations and **Section 4** provides a conclusion to this report. This is followed by Annexes A to E.

²⁰ The process where human subjects of an experiment change their behaviour, simply because they are being studied. It is very difficult to eliminate these inbuilt biases as a factor in the design.

Section 2 – Key Findings

The key findings of this report are presented in seven sections: Activation of the response; Coordination & the cluster system; Communication; Localisation; Flow of funding; Monitoring and mediation with FCDO, and; Planning for the future.

2.1 Activation of the response

HARP-F's response was designed around community-based capacity and needs, emphasizing a multi-stakeholder approach. A shared sense of urgency, pre-existing networks, quality relationships, flexibility and use of digital technologies contributed to the speedy and relevant activation or repurposing of partnerships.

Almost all the grantees involved in the COVID-19 response had an existing relationship with HARP-F before the onset of the pandemic in Myanmar. This meant that HARP-F's COVID-19 response was added and integrated into existing projects and fund allocations. The budgets of some grantees were re-allocated because their projects were underspent due to COVID-19 restrictions and changes in the programming context. Others received top-up funding to expand to new geographical areas. All those interviewed agreed HARP-F was proactive in communicating and integrating the COVID-19 response into existing channels.

The channelling of funds to grantees was principally determined by HARP-F's existing partnerships and the trust held in specific grantees. That being said, it is noted that the channelling of funds was also influenced by the perceived vulnerability of certain populations and by the gaps and specific needs indicated by grantees.

HARP-F's response commenced by targeting three main groups:

- i) IDPs living in camps and camp-like settings;
- ii) Conflict-affected and hard-to-reach populations such as stateless persons in Rakhine State, Chin State, Kachin State, northern Shan State and the south-eastern border area; and
- iii) Newly displaced persons and those trapped in destinations due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

During interviews, grantees recalled being engaged with HARP-F in March before most other agencies had raised the alarm. *SitRep no1*, of 18 March 2020, highlighted early mobilisation,

mentioning action was initiated in mid-February with daily Crisis Management Team (CMT) meetings being conducted. It was expressed by grantees that this swiftness of response was new and different to their experience with HARP-F prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar.

One grantee operating in Kachin State and northern Shan State said:

“HARP usually takes months to discuss, to negotiate and to finalise project proposals prior to COVID-19. So, when COVID-19 started, we were able to sign the agreement within a month. I was surprised and amazed.”

2.2 Coordination & the cluster system

HARP-F attempted to ensure there was efficient coordination between its grantees with most grantees participating in the cluster-coordination system at both national and sub-national levels.

However some smaller NGOs were not involved in cluster discussions partly due to their locality. For example, a HARP-F grantee based in the non-Sittwe region was not in the cluster system and therefore not fully informed. The organisation was included in the COVID-19 response as they received a non-cost extension. However, by the time of implementation, most had already been completed by government providers.

The majority of HARP-F grantees are not direct implementers. They typically work with several local organisations i.e. sub-grantees with an in-depth understanding of the evolving situation. These local organisations led the coordination with the local authorities to acquire permits and access to camps and locations. For instance, in Rakhine State, one organisation provides protection services directly through their programme staff due to the highly technical and sensitive nature of the work.

It should be noted that the level to which HARP-F grantees and sub-grantees coordinate with state level authorities has lessened since the coup.

2.3 Communication

Generally, it was perceived that HARP-F's communication including discussions in regard to the transfer of funds based on project amendments was “very quick”, flexible and responsive, even after the coup. “Informal discussions and decision-making” prior to formal paperwork reduced

time-consuming administrative processes and enabled continued flow of funds and project implementation.

Most grantees see HARP-F as a partner and not just as a donor. This had a direct and positive impact on the working relationship, decision-making and communication flow. HARP-F used “informal” decision making to reduce the bureaucratic process and accelerate an open flow of information. Grantees appreciated the use of informal chat message platforms or quick phone calls to find solutions. HARP-F staff would respond to questions within days to affirm their unofficial / informal decision. A - sometimes lengthy - paper process would then ensue. However in general, interviewees remarked that compared to other donors, HARP-F’s “paper requirements” were less onerous and time consuming.

HARP-F had weekly or biweekly check-ins with grantees to update the response matrix, understand latest developments and provide resources depending on emerging needs.

HARP-F appointed a focal person for each geographical area to closely monitor the situation and promptly understand emerging needs. The appointment of these focal persons helped to build trust and was seen as a success by the grantees. Interviews revealed that solid leadership, clear delegation of tasks, cooperative environment and teamwork, and effective communication capacities of different personnel at HARP-F combined to deliver good quality results and encouraged communities to participate.

A few grantees expressed that initially the high turnover of key HARP-F staff was a concern. Several mentioned that it was good when it stabilised and they had one person to communicate with.

Generally, interviewees expressed that HARP-F staff understand the context of Myanmar and various political complexities, including the dynamic of EHO / EAOs and other local actors, and that context sensitive and timely support was delivered. However, it should be noted that one INGO expressed frustration that HARP-F “did not understand our situation.”

2.4 Localisation

HARP-F’s continued efforts in `localisation processes` enhanced its response and allowed grantees to stretch their resources and strengthened their ability to help the most vulnerable.

Since 2016, national and international humanitarian actors have faced increasing challenges in accessing affected people in non-government-controlled areas of Kachin State and northern Shan

State. HARP-F has been aware of the challenges and began making policy and structural changes prior to the onset of the pandemic. When the pandemic and later the coup put further restrictions on travel, HARP-F were well placed to activate a support system made up of non-traditional partners and networks of volunteers.²¹

The advantage of such volunteer networks is access to and an intimate knowledge of the communities they work and often live in. Working with local organisations that have local information proved to be very useful for advocacy and awareness raising efforts. For example, a grantee has been working with a food delivery aid group who has a robust database on hard-to-reach populations and refugees living outside camps. By utilising this database, this grantee was able to piggyback on food delivery and include information materials on COVID-19 and the availability of health facilities.

However it was often the case that such networks had no prior experience of managing external, institutional funds and commonly operated with ad hoc donations. It is not clear if these local organisations were able to clearly communicate the needs of the communities or if they simply adapted to fit into the standard narrative and budget for the COVID-19 response as sub-contracted IPs.

2.5 Flow of funding

All interviewees expressed appreciation that HARP-F had provided the total or close to the total amount of funds requested. In some cases, HARP-F was the only partner who provided humanitarian assistance to projects for a period longer than one year, which gave the grantees stability and the ability to plan for the future.

Grantees expressed satisfaction with HARP-F's flexibility and quick decision making in shifting priorities and thereby allowing grantees to swiftly use available project funds to procure COVID-19 items in the evolving context. Many said that HARP-F fund transfers were never a problem and typically took no longer than five days. Some iNGOs started to use their own resources before HARP-F had transferred the funds, as they had full confidence that the funds would arrive promptly.

The importance of such partner-friendly modalities increased after the coup when transferring funds became more difficult due to internet and banking sector disruption. HARP-F has been

²¹ Smaller, often informal and community-based organisations

flexible in allowing the use of money agents and non-traditional payment channels on a case-by-case basis so to ensure the flow of funds to partners. Subsequently, many grantees have built relationships with suppliers who worked with non-traditional online payment channels. Charges may be higher when using such channels, but it helps to avoid the delays of going through the banking system or attempting to withdraw cash.

However the flow of funds has not been uninterrupted. At some point after the coup, funds transferred by HARP-F to a local NGO in Bamaw were seized by the Central Bank of Myanmar. The NGO has expressed that they would like HARP-F to assist in securing the release of these funds, but to their knowledge HARP-F has no capacity or willingness to help them liaise with the authorities. The amount is quite considerable, understood to be about 50 per cent of the NGOs annual budget.

There has also been disruption to the delivery of supplies. In Paletwa, a town in southern Chin State where all supplies come through Rakhine State, suppliers are reluctant to deliver the supplies from Rakhine due to the risk of attack when on the river. There are further challenges for those in Paletwa due to internet blackouts. Communication and information sharing is often delayed for two days as it is necessary to travel to the next town to access the internet.

2.6 Monitoring & mediation with FCDO

The monitoring focus is becoming more locally led with remote guidance from the HARP-F's INGO grantees. In some cases, monitoring staff are now hired at the sub-national level instead of the national level. Local staff from local organisations acting as implementers leads to strong coordination and response planning, an example of which is the Joint Strategic Team response planning.

All grantees provide weekly and monthly updates with clear needs and responses to the HARP-F team. The timeliness of HARP-F coordination with FCDO is appreciated by the grantees. The paperwork needed by HARP-F, compared with MHF, is a "relief". Only one organisation said they want a direct relationship with FCDO, while other grantees appreciated HARP-F acting as a "middleman" or "mediator" between them and FCDO. Two principal reasons emerged:

- i) They see HARP-F as better placed and able to manage FCDO's administrative requirements;

- ii) HARP-F periodically informed partners of the ‘bigger picture’ and provided technical support when required. This wider contextual understanding supported their strategic decisions and allowed them to focus on delivering services and project implementation.

HARP-F also provided access to their complaint mechanism, strengthening community empowerment and working towards the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiaries.

2.7 Planning for the Future

The future approach on localisation is to shift from working with big local CSOs to working with smaller non-traditional networks when responding to emergencies including armed conflict and continuing outbreaks of COVID-19.

None of those interviewed knew how to prepare for the future. Many believe the new COVID-19 hotspots will not be in the border regions but instead in crowded urban areas. Most think they should integrate COVID-19 response with a focus on prevention measures into current and future programming.

Section 3 – Reflections & Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of systems and placed additional demands on the humanitarian community to work together and improve processes. The challenges forced HARP-F to put into practice its “flexible and adaptive” system and thereby offered an unrivalled chance for learning and improvement. This evaluation is a small building block towards that.

The evaluation team is mindful that HARP-F partners work in highly conflict sensitive areas and therefore understand the challenges, particularly regarding timely disbursement of resources and technical advice to grantees.

The following pages summarise recommendations based upon our key findings of HARP-F’s COVID-19 response.

3.1 Strengthen and consolidate partnerships

Linked Findings

- HARP-F’s COVID-19 response to mobilise existing grantees is relevant.
- Quality working relationships between grantees and HARP-F contributed to quick mobilising and response
- HARP-F’s COVID-19 response was seen as flexible and adaptable to local conditions.
- Interviewees emphasized the value and support for a mixed of informal and formal communication approach had enabled more real-time information and decisions on funding, work, and overall sustainable impact of the assistance delivered.

Recommendation

Strengthen the inner fabric, efficiency and effectiveness of HARP-F’s partnerships through a structured institutional development process.

HARP-F should consider developing a partnership consolidation process as a step towards further empowering the grantees. This approach will require HARP-F and its grantees to reflect on their overall goals as well as their respective roles and responsibilities.

HARP-F could further explore ways to simplify funding procedures such as in the negotiation of agreements and the disbursement of funding including budget flexibility and simplified due diligence and risk management processes.

The mixture of formal and informal communication channels was appreciated by grantees as it sped up decision-making and allowed for an effective flow of information. Communication appropriate to the situation should be continued to be used in the future of the emergency response. However it should be noted that restrictions on movement and assembly as well as the urgency to disseminate critical information might require slightly nuanced strategies in the days to come.

3.2 Diversify activities

Linked Findings

- HARP-F generated and demonstrated a fast process of partnership creation with grantees.
- Delivery models selected by HARP-F functioned effectively in an uncertain environment.
- Across every sphere, from health to economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated in Myanmar. To provide continuity and sustained support, several partners reasoned that the work on COVID-19 responses should be integrated with current programming and mainstreamed.

Recommendation

Delivery models should include local knowledge. A structured approach to engagement with subnational and local institutions should be encouraged.

HARP-F's engagement in COVID-19 response must be progressively diversified by expanded coverage of activities. Additional activities could be added to a select number of grantees to improve impact on crisis-affected households e.g. a diverse range of packages, access to micro-credit for farming ... etc.

Ensure that HARP-F's current M&E includes an element to 'learn from concrete examples' and consider how these can be applied in other locations.

Continue to build upon existing partnerships and tactfully allow operational flexibility in resource allocation and implementation.

Furthermore, it is recommended to mainstream and retain the COVID-19 response as part of the overall future programming, so to guard against the gains made in the past year being rolled back.

3.3 Establish practical guidelines for public health communication

Linked Findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic requires sustainable behaviour change to mitigate the impact of the virus.
- The pandemic has led to an 'infodemic': an overabundance of information - much of it complicated, some of it inaccurate - making it hard for people to make informed decisions and increasing mental strain and exhaustion.

Recommendation

Humanitarian actors need to establish practical guidelines for public health and risk communication that is accessible, reliable, actionable and inclusive. The guidelines should support the well-being of local communities and facilitate sustainable behaviour change.

3.4 Create a robust ecosystem for localisation

Linked Findings

- Localisation has enhanced HARP-F's COVID-19 response.

Recommendation

It is important to recognise that localisation is not merely prioritising funding support to more local groups. Instead, it is the creation of a more balanced humanitarian system where the role of local

and external groups is valued and supported. Above and beyond a change to the system, this requires a change in mindset.

It is recommended to create an ecosystem for localisation based upon shared values and a common vision. This might include developing non-project-based finance and support tools focused on building the capacities and increasing the visibility of local grantees. HARP-F could also consider increasing the scope of shared accountability within the localization framework by broadening the partnership-based localisation demands from task-shifting (for access to inaccessible areas) towards responsibility-sharing (co-building operational models and systems between grantees and IPs). In this way, in addition to being an intermediary for accountability of funds, grantees are also taking on field responsibilities and ownership of this particular response. This has already been seen to some extent in the COVID-19 monitoring / coordination efforts, when additional monitoring staff were hired to work at the sub-national level to provide stronger support for their IPs.

Localisation modalities should be understood and extended with clarity of purpose and policy. In future, the role of the iNGO is likely to be much more restricted. Therefore it would be helpful to find a new governance and accountability framework for intermediaries to partner directly with local groups. This shift also places renewed focus on the role of intermediary organisations / staff as liaison between the partner and donor.

The creation of such a robust eco-system for localisation will require HARP-F to fast-track capacity development and the evolution of systems to accommodate local realities. These changes in support of localisation must be reflected in HARP-F strategies, work plan and activities. If successful, such an ecosystem has the potential to inform future humanitarian aid packaging, modalities, information flow and coordination.

3.5 Focus on capacity building & training in an evolving crisis

Recommendation

It is recommended to equip and resource grantees and IPs to meet the challenges of forming value-added partnerships in an evolving complex humanitarian crisis. Besides adequate funding, current focus on training and capacity building will become even more important to build the resilience of the grantees and IPs. Demand for additional training on diverse topics is also likely to increase. Demand is also likely to arise for grantees and IPs to:

- i) conduct context analysis;
- ii) work with individuals and networks based in the area where the work is to be carried out;
- iii) provide equitable access to resources addressing the impact of emergency or COVID-19 in this case; and lastly,
- iv) be able to relate to the different authorities within the same area so not to be caught between the polarising divides of society.

3.6 Re-evaluate accountability

Linked Findings

- Pressure emerging from day-to-day realities have led local organisations to ask donors to consider unrestricted funds to enable them to respond faster. Such considerations impact the partnership arrangements as well as raise questions of accountability.

Recommendation

Conduct a broad-based conversation to address expectations within the confines of financial compliance with the goal of aligning accountability, monitoring and governance systems.

3.7 Develop a logical framework for monitoring & reporting

Linked Findings

- Progress has been made in strengthening the capacities of different groups and networks in project areas, including ethnic regions. However it is important to have a shared understanding of outputs and outcomes eg. capacity development progress.

Recommendation

Develop a simplified logical framework as a guide for collective measurement and reporting. A logical framework as part of humanitarian response could be perceived as challenging in an emergency but a simplified framework would be helpful to guide the collective measurement and reporting. Otherwise, interpretation of success and outcomes will vary.

A logical framework links with an M&E and reporting system to support core activities, develop internal policies and programmes and track progress. Such systems should ideally be linked to generate an evidence-based approach to knowledge building.

3.8 Sustain an intermediary role

Linked Findings

- HARP-F's intermediary role was acknowledged as valuable.

Recommendation

An empowered intermediary function in a complex political setting like Myanmar is important and should be retained if or when HARP-F's contract ends.

Advocating for better inclusion of local grantees in the humanitarian work is one important intermediary role. Intermediaries are nimble and able to act as fixers on behalf of grantees and IPs in lobbying the authorities. They also have the capacity to empower local groups to define, drive and deliver humanitarian support on time and to intended crisis-affected persons.

3.9 Expand co-ordination & collaboration

Linked Findings

- Coordination between partners and with communities helped to obtain greater credibility and broaden the scope of what the response could achieve.
- Multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral dialogue can further strengthen coordination and enhance broader knowledge on COVID-19 and broader humanitarian issues.

Recommendation

Field presence should gradually increase to meet growing demands for support and to make a sustainable impact with local grantees and communities.

Encourage and support setting-up regional level working groups led by experienced local leaders. Collaborative working relationships based on information sharing and joint approaches to address

issues will help HARP-F and its partners systematically engage with the development community and community leaders.

Further support for multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral dialogue as part of project processes will broaden knowledge capacities and skills on COVID-19 and humanitarian work generally. It could include policy advocacy, preventing the spread of the virus and protecting livelihood opportunities.

Encourage stronger coordination and joint efforts between development, humanitarian and local civil society entities to work on IDP and refugee related issues. These issues might include access to public health facilities and livelihood opportunities. Such collaboration will encourage adoption of good practices and flexible responses to operational needs while generating synergies.

The programme focus should be aligned with policy concerns. For the foreseeable future, humanitarian actors in Myanmar will continue to focus on humanitarian work and building local capacities together with support for the transitional process and multi-stakeholder dialogue. In doing so, they should reinforce a rights-based approach with programming that integrates gender equality and conflict sensitivity. There needs to be stronger coordination between HARP-F and entities that have a mandate to advocate for humanitarian policies at the international level, for example UNHCR and the Red Cross. This will help create joint programming and beneficial synergies.

3.10 Establish strategic regional advisory teams

Recommendation

A strong group of technical advisors and international and national professionals working in regional advisory teams can undertake periodic missions. These could yield an overview on the status of public health, local development and governance issues as well as highlight areas that need the attention of donors and iNGOs. The group should have adequate mechanisms to include CSOs and those working among ethnic populations and in conflict zones. Sub-groups of ethnic groups can be established to develop synergies between development, humanitarian and peace-building work. This can help reduce tensions among the stakeholders and build confidence in development agencies by using transition compacts and mutual accountability frameworks

3.11 Clarify duty of care

Linked Findings

- At present there is no (public) visibility of number (and names) of IPs per grantees nor their geographical coverage at both fund facility or donor level – be it on public domain like webpage or internal documents like project spreadsheet
- Duty of care has become more urgent given the additional stress on staff and the increased resilience required from communities.

Recommendation

Advancing duty of care and protecting change makers is a necessity. COVID-19 has complicated an already-complex humanitarian crisis and intensified needs. Border closures and internal movement restrictions have necessitated the implementation of remote management structures, resulting in pared-down or modified humanitarian programming. In this regard, ‘duty of care’, in its broader definition, is employers’ legal, financial and moral obligations towards employees to ensure their safety, health and wellbeing. Against this context and moving forward, a set of standard policies and procedures are required to promote duty of care principles.

Some local / smaller CSOs / CBOs interpret that the duty of care of donors and / or related intermediaries includes engaging with the de facto authorities on their behalf, as it is believed to be risky for the CSOs / CBOs to engage themselves in case they are regarded as being anti-coup. It is thus important for donors and related intermediaries to clarify exactly what their duty of care does and does not include.

Section 4 – Conclusion

Despite the challenge of responding to a rapidly evolving crisis, the evaluation found that HARP-F was quick and efficient in launching its operational response, ahead of both the humanitarian community at large and the Myanmar government. This quick response was accomplished by reaching out and working with existing grantees to redirect funding, request proposals and put mechanisms in place to reach vulnerable communities.

Interviews highlighted the importance of having staff on the ground during the crisis. A key challenge faced was retaining physical presence, especially when mobility was curtailed. Online communication and reporting modalities offered some compensation and reassurance but could not match the value of being on the ground.

The evaluation highlights several points to consider, both practical and policy related. The shift towards localisation stands out as a key factor in ongoing and future humanitarian response. It is recognised that due to conflict in Myanmar and the restrictions in place due to COVID-19, access will be severely limited. This necessitates a shift to both empower and work with volunteer organisations and networks that fall outside the usual parameters of donor funding. Reaching and serving marginalised communities through more localised access mechanisms will require new mindsets, policies and perhaps a higher appetite for risk.

A final point of reflection and practical consideration refers to the role HARP-F played as an intermediary structure. The evaluation confirmed the value of having structural capacity to provide big-picture contextual analysis while managing the administrative requirements of the donor. The phasing out of HARP-F will leave a gap and create uncertainty. FCDO is aware of this and is putting measures in place to give partners confidence and ensure continuity.

The military coup of 1 February added complexity to an already overburdened humanitarian community. The resultant realignment of foreign policy and donor support and withdrawal from cooperation with the government, demands a higher level of information flow and coordination between humanitarian actors and an even more informed political and contextual acuity.

Annex A - Terms of Reference

Background and context

HARP-F is the principal pillar of the UK's humanitarian assistance in Myanmar. Launched in 2016, HARP-F acts as both a grant funding mechanism and a knowledge platform for FCDO and the wider humanitarian community. In its role as a funding mechanism, HARP-F is responsible for distributing and managing £61 million in grants to organisations meeting the needs of people affected by conflict and natural disasters in Myanmar. As a knowledge platform, HARP-F provides technical and capacity development support to local and international humanitarian organisations, provides research and contextual analyses to support better understanding of the humanitarian context in Myanmar, and promotes learning on effective humanitarian response through generation of evidence from its grant portfolio.

Since March 2020, HARP-F has worked with grantees to ensure the continuity of its humanitarian response as well as pivoting to focus on prevention and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has involved:

- working with partners to ensure that critical humanitarian assistance continues to be delivered in a safe and responsible manner;
- modifying existing grant agreements to enable grantees to adapt their response to focus on COVID-19 mitigation and preparedness, and;
- providing new grants to meet key needs related to humanitarian needs and COVID-19 response during the pandemic.

HARP-F's COVID-19 portfolio currently consists of 26 local and international NGOs providing goods and services valued at approximately £5 million to targeted populations in Rakhine State, Kachin State, northern Shan State, Chin State, southeast Myanmar and the Thai border area.

Evaluation objectives and target audience

The aim of the real time evaluation is to assess the relevance, timeliness and appropriateness of HARP's COVID-19 response. Specifically, the real time evaluation is expected to:

-

- inform forward looking reflection on current implementation and identify areas for improvement by assessing the relevance and appropriateness of the range of activities being undertaken by HARP-F grantees;
- capture any key learning that can be applied to the existing response or to future emergencies by examining both the range of activities being undertaken by grantees and the actions taken by HARP-F to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- assess the speed and responsiveness of HARP-F in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- examine the extent to which HARP-F fund management / support model contributes to FCDO's capacity for responsive humanitarian programming, and;
- assess HARP-F's approach to ensuring duty of care to grantees and IPs.

The evaluation findings will be used internally by HARP-F and FCDO to make course corrections where relevant, to improve future responses and externally to promote learning on responsive humanitarian programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach and methodology

Given travel restrictions and access constraints, the evaluation will be conducted remotely using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods proposed by the evaluator. At a minimum, it is expected that the evaluator(s) will:

- review relevant literature from HARP-F, FCDO, grantees and peer agencies;
- conduct in-depth interviews with key staff from HARP-F, FCDO, grantees and peer agencies;
- survey grantees to gather relevant feedback and to develop a quantitative analysis of what is being done where.
- The evaluator(s) may also wish to conduct remote workshops.

Timeline and deliverables

The consultancy is expected to start as soon as possible and last between one and two months. A rough outline of the anticipated timeline is presented below together with the expected deliverables.

Inception phase (1-2 weeks)

- Desk review of programme documentation and existing data
- Break evaluation objectives into specific evaluation questions
- Propose data collection methods and data sources to be used for addressing each evaluation question.
- Detailed work-plan developed by consultant and agreed on with HARP-F.

DELIVERABLE 1: Submission of Inception Report

- Data collection and analysis phase (4-5 weeks)
- Implement independent data collection
- At the end of the data collection phase, preliminary findings and conclusions will be presented to HARP-F.

DELIVERABLE 2: Compile raw data in electronic format

DELIVERABLE 3: Presentation of preliminary findings to relevant staff

Reporting phase (2 weeks). The final report should:

- Provide a comprehensive analysis of compiled data
- Provide findings and recommendations that respond to the evaluation objectives
- Be circulated to HARP-F for review and comment before finalisation
- Incorporate feedback from HARP-F staff as relevant.

DELIVERABLE 4: Submission of draft report for review

DELIVERABLE 5: Submission of final report and annexes (with HARP-F sign-off)

Evaluation team composition and required competencies:

- Proven experience conducting real time evaluations and demonstrated expertise in both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods
- Strong qualitative and quantitative data analysis skills
- Knowledge of humanitarian programming and emergency response
- Familiarity with the Myanmar context and ability to communicate cross-culturally
- Excellent report writing skills in English.

Annex B - Guiding Interview Questions

This annex describes key touchpoints to enable the evaluation team to gain insight from key informants of all the stakeholders. Underneath a set of provisional questions to be finalised with input from HARP-F key staff.

Touchpoint 1: Activation

- When did your organisation initiate discussion on COVID-19 response? Who initiated the discussion? How was the decision made and how to respond? What was the substance / finances allocated to the response?
- Was there any specific reason for responding in the states or the sector? Your rationale for responding?
- As COVID-19 pandemic is an emergency, how did your organisation decide on available sources of funding for the response? Were the donors proactive in this regard? How did negotiation with donors take place?
- Was your organization part of the coordination group before the planning for the COVID-19 response was initiated? Or did your organization get involved in coordination after funding was allocated?

Touchpoint 2: Response planning

- When and how did your organisation start interacting with HARP-F for your COVID-19 response? Describe what the experience was like? How long did it take to come to key decisions?
- How long did it take for HARP-F to make decisions that impacted your ability to act? Was the interaction with HARP-F different for this response compared to previous ones? Was there a focal person or was it through different sectoral leads?
- How did HARP-F decide on the priorities for COVID-19 response? Were they flexible and / or realistic with their priorities?
- How many implementing partners (IPs) are your organisation working with in the states? How many of them are through HARP-Fs funding? What were their priority areas pre-COVID-19?
- How many of your IPs are part of the COVID-19 response? How did the planning start? Were their COVID-19 responses to the pandemic proactive or reactive? What is your experience working with them on a real-time emergency?
-

- How were the decisions taken to decide on targeted populations and types of activities for COVID-19 response by you and IPs? Were the decisions as expected? If not, why not?

Touchpoint 3: Flow of funds

- How much funds did you receive for COVID-19 response? Did it match what you asked for? What proportion of funds came from HARP-F?
- How long did it take for you to receive the funds? What was the turnaround for you to transfer the funds to IPs? Is documentation available to be reviewed?

Touchpoint 4: Project implementation and monitoring

- How quickly were you and your IPs able to operationalise the response from the time you started planning? How easy or difficult was it to procure project supplies in a nearby town? Did you have problems with withdrawal of money from the bank? Were suppliers able to use a bank account? Provide other examples to illustrate.
- In your perspective, what did you observe or know to have changed in the communities you work with due to this COVID-19 response? Did anything change for the IPs and the way they operate?
- Can you recall specific challenges during implementation? What were they and how did you or your IPs resolve them?
- Were there any monitoring documents for this COVID-19 response? Can you provide us with a copy?
- In retrospect, would you have done anything differently with regards to your COVID-19 response?

Touchpoint 5: Future

- Is the COVID-19 response still on-going? If no, why not? If yes, how?
- What are the plans for the next 6 to 12 months? What will be the focus of your programming?
- What effects of COVID-19 do you see and expect to see in the states? What are your plans to address what you see or anticipate?
- With this response, do you see any changes in community resilience / empowerment? Why or why not? If you could change the programme design, what would you like to change to see sustainable impact and increased resilience for future emergencies?

Annex C- List of Documents Reviewed

The list of documents below was reviewed and / or used during the drafting of the report.

HARP-F Internal documents

- 2018 -2020 HARP FACILITY ACTION PLAN
- Business Case for Burma Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme (HARP), 2015,
- HARP-F COVID Response, Summary Document, no date
- Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F), 2021-22 Extension – Technical and Budget Narrative, June 2020
- SitReps for the period of response over the course of 2020.

Government

COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) Acute Respiratory Disease, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Surveillance Dashboard (Myanmar),
<https://mohs.gov.mm/Main/content/publication/2019-ncov>

The 2019 Inter-censal Survey, The Union Report, Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, December 2020,
https://www.dop.gov.mm/sites/dop.gov.mm/files/publication_docs/ics_report_eng_7012021.pdf

COVID-19 Context and Conflict Analysis

Analysis: Arakan Army - A Powerful New Threat to the Tatmadaw, The Irrawaddy, 8 January 2019,
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/analysis-arakan-army-powerful-new-threat-tatmadaw.html>

Another Tatmadaw ceasefire declaration leaves Arakan in apparent exclusion, BNI Multimedia Group, 2 December 2020, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/another-tatmadaw-ceasefire-declaration-leaves-arakan-apparent-exclusion>

Armed conflicts escalate and resurgence of COVID-19 after elections, Rakhine State Arakan Humanitarian Coordination Team (AHCT), Rakhine State, The weekly report, November 16 - 20,
<https://www.facebook.com/Rakhine-Ethnics-Congress-250589055466294/photos/pcb.988529395005586/988529028338956/>

COVID-19 lockdown in Myanmar exposes precarious position of LGBTQI population, UN News, 11 July 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1067941>

Human Rights Watch Statement: Impacts of Covid-19 on Internally Displaced People in Myanmar, Human Rights Watch, 10 December 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/human-rights-watch-statement-impacts-covid-19-internally-displaced-people-myanmar#>

International Crisis Group, Myanmar: A Violent Push to Shake Up Ceasefire Negotiations, Briefing no 158, Asia, 24 September 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b158-myanmar-violent-push-shake-ceasefire-negotiations>

International Crisis Group, Conflict, Health Cooperation and COVID-19 in Myanmar, Briefing No 161, Asia, 19 May 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b161-conflict-health-cooperation-and-covid-19-myanmar>

Kyaw Hsan Hlaing and Emily Fishbein, For Those Displaced in Myanmar's Rakhine State, COVID Adds Another Layer of Fear, Pulitzer Center, 8 September 2020, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/those-displaced-myanmars-rakhine-state-covid-adds-another-layer-fear>

Kyi Kyi Seinn, The Coronavirus Challenges Myanmar's Transition: Can a country facing conflict and COVID move quickly enough to organize a vital election? United States Institute for Peace, 26 May, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/05/coronavirus-challenges-myanmars-transition>

Michael, Hart, COVID-19 Is Just the Latest Setback in Myanmar's Troubled Peace Process, 8 June 2020, World Politics Review, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28822/covid-19-is-just-the-latest-setback-in-the-troubled-myanmar-peace-process>

Myanmar: Displacement Camps Are COVID-19 Tinderboxes: Lift Restrictions on Movement, Health Care, Internet, Aid, Human Rights Watch, 30 March 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/30/myanmar-displacement-camps-are-covid-19-tinderboxes#>

OCHA, MYANMAR Humanitarian Update No. 2, 23 December 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20Myanmar%20-%20%20Myanmar%20Humanitarian%20Update%20No%202.pdf>

Sai Wanna, Tatmadaw looks to ceasefire pact with AA after politicians 'release, Myanmar Times, 4 January 2021, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-looks-ceasefire-pact-aa-after-politicians-release.html>

Sai Wanna, Wa records 302 COVID-19 cases, The Myanmar Times, 19 January 2021, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/wa-records-302-covid-19-cases.html>

Shoon Naing, Myanmar receives first batch of COVID-19 vaccines from India, Reuters, January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-myanmar-vaccine-idUSKBN29R0ZS>

Southeast Myanmar Field Report: COVID-19, armed conflict, landmines and sexual violence, January to June 2020, Karen Human Rights Group, 8 September 2020, <https://khrgh.org/2020/09/20-1-f1/southeast-myanmar-field-report-covid-19-armed-conflict-landmines-and-sexual-violence>

The Asia Foundation, COVID-19 and Escalating Conflict: Three Priorities for Rakhine State, COVID-19 and CONFLICT in MYANMAR, BRIEFING PAPER SERIES No. 3, January 2021, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Myanmar-Covid-19-and-Conflict-in-Rakhine-State_EN.pdf

The Asia Foundation, How COVID-19 and conflict intersect in Kachin State, COVID-19 and CONFLICT in MYANMAR BRIEFING PAPER SERIES No. 2, October 2020, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Covid-19-and-Conflict-in-Kachin-State_EN.pdf

USAID, <https://www.cspanalytics.com/analytics/publicdatadashboard/>

Additional Sources

BBC World News, Myanmar, <https://www.bbc.com/burmese/world-55768395>

Coronavirus: DOD Response Timeline, US Dept of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Spotlight/Coronavirus/DOD-Response-Timeline/>

Lawi Weng, Shan State Militia, AA Deny Links Through Lucrative Drug Trade, The Irrawaddy, 29 April 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/shan-state-militia-aa-deny-links-lucrative-drug-trade.html>

The International Emergency Management Society 2014 Annual Conference, 20-23 October 2014, Niigata, Japan Comparative Analysis of Earthquake Emergency Response in China & Japan Based on Timeline—311 Earthquake vs 512 Earthquake, DU Xiaoxia, ZHANG Jun, XU Jianhua, HE Zhuan , LAI Junyan, KIMURA Reo, HAYASHI Haruo, HOSOKAWA Masafumi, SAKURADA Yukihsa, https://www.u-hyogo.ac.jp/shse/rkimura/14TIEMS_Du.pdf

Myanmar: Humanitarian action and COVID-19 response in Rakhine, ICRC, 1 October 2020, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/myanmar-covid-19-response-rakhine>

Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, Myanmar Says Chinese 'COVID-19' Fence Breaches Border Agreement, The Irrawaddy, 23 December 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-says-chinese-covid-19-fence-breaches-border-agreement.html>

Worldometer, COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/myanmar/>

Annex D - People Interviewed

Interviews were conducted from 9 to 16 June 2021 as part of the data gathering process.

List of Organisations

No	Date	Time	Organisation
1	Wednesday, 9 June	1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m.	Loi Yang Bum (LCD)
2	Thursday, 10 June	12 noon - 1.30 p.m.	Health Poverty Action (HPA)
3	Thursday, 10 June	1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m.	Karuna Metta Social Service (KMSS)
4	Thursday, 10 June	3 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Center for Social Integrity (CSI)
5	Friday, 11 June	1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m.	MA-UK
6	Friday, 11 June	3 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Metta Development Foundation
7	Monday 14 June	12 noon – 1.30 p.m.	Mercy Corp
8	Monday 14 June	3 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	TGH
9	Tuesday, 15 June	12 noon – 1.30 p.m.	Community Partners International (CPI)
10	Tuesday, 15 June	1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m.	Youth Strength Association (YSA)
11	Tuesday, 15 June	3 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Action Aid Myanmar (AAM)
12	Wednesday, 16 June	12 noon – 1.30 p.m.	The Border Consortium (TBC)
13	Wednesday, 16 June	1.30 p.m. - 3 p.m.	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
14	Wednesday, 16 June	3 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Danish and Norwegian Church Aid (DCA, NCA)

Annex E - Further remarks on key findings

In assessing and understanding key outcomes and impacts, it is important to highlight the salient features of HARP-F and its work with grantees. Firstly, the response was designed to address a rapidly evolving public health crisis. Secondly, the project's intervention strategies were based on a structured stakeholder analysis and constructed around local community initiatives. Lastly, it emphasised communications, multi-stakeholder dialogue and inter- and cross-sectoral engagement.

This annex outlines further remarks on key findings split into Relevance; Efficiency; Effectiveness; Impact of the response; Governance & monitoring; Integrated learning, capacities & resilience, and; Gender lens in programming.

Relevance

- **Within the context of the COVID-19 response, HARP-F's approach is considered sufficiently broad.** The project's overall development objectives were clearly stated and the project design had a logical causal chain to attain desired outcomes including specific activities and implementation arrangements with grantees. The first objective of building capacities was developed from the proven approach used in policy dialogue, local consultations and online open-access communication.
- **Proposed intervention strategies focused not only on increased capacities, but also on processes that would help build dialogue and trust, especially in addressing COVID-19 related issues and development of inclusive policies and programmes.** Evidence suggests that partner contributions in policy advocacy and awareness raising on COVID-19 are widely recognised and that partner engagement is gaining prominence and is viewed as relevant.

Given the limited information available on the effects of the pandemic in respective areas, this evaluation is not able to attribute the achievements of HARP-F's COVID-19 response and its grantees directly. However, activities indicate progress in achieving outcomes related to awareness building and aid delivery. Therefore, at present, achievements are

primarily at the interim output level. High-level outputs and outcomes are likely to be accomplished only in 2022–23, depending on the political evolution.

- **Quality working relationships between grantees and HARP-F contributed to quick mobilisation and response.** The COVID-19 response required a set of skills such as agility, adaptability and effective communication skills. The “partnership relationships” between HARP-F and grantees promoted informality, open flow of information and effective communication, all contributing to more efficient decision making.

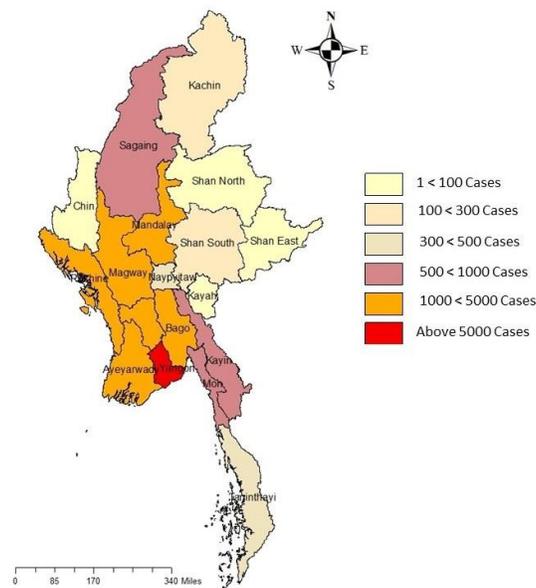
Grantees expressed appreciation for HARP-F facilitating access to information on market prices and market access, delivery of chain risk map, distribution point access and COVID-19 awareness raising.

Worth noting is the existing:

- clarity of roles among staff and grantees, and
- capacity of staff to respond swiftly in terms of support to the grantees.

- Figure 1 shows that the regions engaged by HARP-F that had less than 500 cases were: Kachin State, northern Shan State and Chin State. Kayin State had more than 500 cases and Rakhine State had more than 1,000.

Figure 1 COVID-19 cases by regions



Source: Ministry of Health and Sports, Myanmar, Note: Data as of 20 November 2020

Table 1 Allocation of funding by States / Regions

States/Regions	Allocated Funding (£)	Allocation as per cent of Total
“Rakhine”	1,989,581	38.8%
“Kachin/Northern Shan”	1,630,258	31.8%
“Thai Border”	400,000	7.8%
“Southeast/Northern Shan”	373,462	7.3%
“Chin”	260,656	5.1%
“Myanmar”	170,464	3.3%
“Southeast”	152,745	3.0%
“Rakhine/Southeast”	149,879	2.9%

Sources: HARP-F database (August 2021)

Despite sustained efforts, some information provided was not disaggregated. For example, for a few grantees, it was not indicated whether funding was for two states or for ‘Myanmar’. This may have impacted the quality of analysis and understanding of needs in terms of the COVID-19 response at this stage.

Efficiency

- HARP-F’s COVID-19 response efforts centred on using existing partnerships to collectively design and implement an effective program.** This resulted in HARP-F being able to work with grantees early on to identify the most critical humanitarian needs, plan responses and determine the budgets needed to address them. It was able to build on partner strengths, mobilise localised networks and use existing funds in partner’s bank accounts. By building on existing partnerships and tactfully allowing operational flexibility in resource allocation, HARP-F generated and demonstrated fast mobilisation. In future, this approach can also facilitate innovative ways of creating and delivering solutions to efficient humanitarian aid.
- Travel restrictions imposed on existing grantees also meant that HARP-F had to seek out new partnerships with community volunteer groups with access to specific areas.** For example, in Chin State and new emergency areas, the grantees had to look for volunteer networks.

- **Trust in COVID-19 messaging is facilitated by communities' confidence in IPs.** At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar, there was ignorance about the possible impact of COVID-19 due to the large quantity of information shared over social media – some accurate and some not. It is challenging for any single actor to transmit reliable information without enormous effort to rise above the noise. However, working through IPs with strong presence in the areas helped to install trust in the pandemic messaging.

Progress has been made in strengthening the capacities of different groups and networks in project areas, including ethnic areas, to provide humanitarian response.

- **The early operationalising of HARP-F's COVID-19 response was an important step in the overall response and made a significant impact in the targeted areas.** The ready-made operational plan, cash availability and dissemination of essential protective materials are concrete examples that show the level of preparedness.
- **Workflow arrangements and procedures, including timely disbursement of funds and pace of implementation, were set but conformity was challenging.**²² Within HARP-F, workflows arise organically and evolve. Therefore it is important that the whole system is coherent and functions in tandem. HARP-F workflow arrangements have improved over time, indicating better workflow with better coordination, collaboration and communication. Grantees expressed that the swift process of project negotiation within one month and funds received within five days after a request was made were new and refreshing as the experience was different prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar. A timeframe of five business days was mentioned.²³ They in turn claim to transfer funds to their local partners / implementing groups within two days.²⁴
- **Creating a flexible framework for future application.** HARP-F's role in creating a nimble, flexible, solutions-driven humanitarian sector prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic is important. Its flexibility is critical to the progress made. Example shared are HARP-F's willingness to absorb agent fees²⁵ whenever banking facilities were limited and its quickness in adapting existing projects to include awareness-raising working groups to help with, for example, COVID-19 preventive measures and stockpiling of essential items. As an

²² Workflow, loosely defined, is the set of tasks—grouped chronologically into processes—and the set of people or resources needed for those tasks, that are necessary to accomplish a given goal. The system consists amongst others of HARP-Fs internal procedures; its analytical abilities; commitment and motivation of staff; FCDO provided resources to HARP-F

²³ During interviews grantees claimed that they transferred funds within one to two days to their local implementing partners after it was received from HARP-F. Again, this evaluation is unable to verify this claim as it was not possible to interview implementing partners or do the survey as initially planned.

²⁴ This point was noted by the grantees during the interview. The evaluation team didn't have access to HARP-F records to independently verify it. One partner gave their records (Word document) but didn't include the bank slip. In general we understood that there is no delay in funds transfer.

²⁵ Informal service payment made to an independent agent to access cash by beneficiaries or local partners where banking facilities do not exist.

intermediary, HARP-F can combine multiple resources and use its partners' social capital not only to design a partnership model quickly, but also to make it viable in practice. HARP-F's work thus remains a vital component of much broader support needed to address short and medium-term humanitarian and development needs. The formal and informal updates from HARP-F concerning market access, learning workshops with beneficiaries and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) are indicative of HARP-F's contributions and kept connections and interactions with different stakeholders intact.

- **HARP-F's iNGO grantees, including some civil society actors, were not direct implementers, but worked with several local sub-grantees.** Roles and responsibilities between different actors and stakeholders were well-defined. Coordination with direct grantees was done at both national and sub-national cluster levels. Health, WASH, protection (GBV and child protection), all had cluster thematic coordination mechanisms. HARP-F doesn't coordinate beyond their grantees, although there was regular information sharing and communication. HARP-F doesn't work directly with the government entities although coordination takes place at state level (pre-coup).

Effectiveness

The evaluation team examined how resources get to recipients who were difficult to access, what was distributed and how much was received by the beneficiaries. 'Effectiveness' was therefore concerned with both the volume of allocation and who benefited from it.

- **Informal networks of volunteers offered access to hard-to-reach communities even in highly restrictive situations.** All interviewed grantee-iNGOs, except one, served as intermediaries,²⁶ partnering local and / or community-based organisations with access to communities but not engaged in direct implementation.²⁷

That said, working directly with local organisations and utilising local capacities requires a strategic rethink of funding guidelines / policies and operational and communication strategies, a recognition of the limitations and strengths of different partners and a willingness to openly engage in information exchange and knowledge sharing. It should be

²⁶ The evaluation team draws attention to the fact that the humanitarian funding system in general needs a mindset shift and a change in Standard Operating Procedures that require a business case for using an intermediary agency, demonstrating how it would add value as opposed to automatically assuming it will. In addition to scalability and effectiveness justifications, part of the case for the intermediary would include demonstrated higher efficiency in funding, contracting, and flexible management of grants compared to direct funding.

²⁷ The exception was in Rakhine where the grantee / partner group had a track record in "protection" reported to be working directly with communities and stakeholders. Protection services were perceived to be best managed by foreign organisations due to the sensitive nature of work.

noted that the risk management approach adopted by HARP-F is a generic framework with no clear articulation on who is bearing what risks in times of emergency.

- **Emergency response requires continuous quick action and sometimes new staff with little background need time to engage confidently with different demands.** It was noted by grantees during interviews that turnover of staff was an issue. HARP-F is aware of this and at the onset of COVID-19, HARP-F made efforts to mitigate the risk while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency.²⁸

A primary condition for successful aid delivery is a continued presence of project personnel at on site to allow regular contact with grantees. Presence of staff on site helps to gradually build mutual trust, give confidence to communities and colleagues, convey solidarity and in turn, provide access to more grassroots information. Posting a HARP-F focal person at the regional offices was a positive step and allowed direct interaction between HARP-F staff and grantees.²⁹

- Partnering with local CSOs / CBOs allows grantees to reach more beneficiaries at the grassroots level.³⁰ These local CBOs can provide assistance in their communities, including within the public health sector as a cadre of trained health workers already exists.

Impact of the response

Impact in the context of this evaluation, meant:

- i) reviewing if HARP-F's governance modalities and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, contributed towards FCDO's capacity for responsive humanitarian programming;
- ii) seeking evidence of an integrated learning and adaptive management approach to programme implementation, and;
- iii) assessing capacity development at individual and organisational levels.

-

²⁸ Emergency preparedness refers to the knowledge and capacity developed by recovery organisations, communities and individuals to anticipate, respond to and recover from the impact of potential, imminent or current hazard events, or emergency situations that call for a humanitarian response. The value of staff continuity is demonstrated by understanding the link to positive response outcomes – the elements that are essential for well-coordinated, quick and effective response operations.

²⁹ Effectiveness is also closely associated with access to information, direct access to HARP-F staff and two-way communication.

³⁰ Issues of access to affected populations has always been a cause for concern and is even more so with the onset of COVID-19. With the new kind of restriction put on the big traditional CSO, there is a growing consensus that many smaller CBOs will do the implementing work

- **Swift and reliable decision-making arrangements prevented implementation interruptions.**³¹ Periodic communication and exchange of information enabled better quality of outcomes. Regular weekly and biweekly check-ins between HARP-F and its partners helped exchange situational updates. HARP-F was able to revise resource needs and understand issues that might have emerged.

Early on, HARP-F and its grantees adopted a communication approach that proved to be valuable. However to improve understanding of the rationale behind the work done by HARP-F and its grantees, a simple, community-friendly communication campaign articulating different aspects of the programme’s work could be created.

Governance and monitoring

- A review of available HARP-F documents and reports indicated that a robust and responsive mechanism is in place to periodically review, analyse, monitor and fine-tune procedures as well as guide grantees.
- Phase 2 of HARP-F’s COVID response plan was triggered on 18 March 2020 at 12 noon, kicking in a predetermined set of actions:
 - i) move to remote working arrangements within and outside Myanmar;
 - ii) map out roles and responsibilities in business continuity to ensure business delivery;
 - iii) develop and disseminate communications protocol for home-based work, and;
 - iv) review cash accessible to HARP-F and ensure availability of emergency cash to support international staff staying in Myanmar.

There is evidence of:

- i) clarity of roles;
- ii) communication with partners to ensure continuation of business activity, and;
- iii) cash availability, reinforcing the impression of organisational readiness.

³¹ It is often said, effective NGO / community leaders know when a decision has to be based on principle and when it should be made pragmatically, on the merits of the case and context. They know that the most time-consuming step in the process is not making the decision but putting it into effect. Unless a decision has degenerated into work, it is not a decision; it is at best a good intention.

- While HARP-F and all partners can reasonably carry out their plans and deliver quality outputs, diverse and increasing demands on them will pose formidable challenges to meeting growing demands for their expertise. Given the political and institutional complexities and poor physical, institutional and internet infrastructure and capacities, sustainability of advocacy work and active participation of different local CBOs / CSOs will be an ongoing concern. These challenges, if not well and effectively anticipated and managed, will negatively impact HARP-F and its partners.

Integrated learning, capacities and resilience

- Over the years, Myanmar's basic humanitarian financing needs have only been met partially, inconsistently and unpredictably.³² The application of commonly agreed evidence-based needs assessment has been slow.³³ In general, the restoration of livelihoods in early recovery has been unaddressed or underfunded by both humanitarian and developmental aid. The flow of timely and adequate funds between different entities is key for humanitarian responses. At its most seamless, it illustrates an adaptive and innovative administrative and management system responsive towards the fast changing and uncertain context of Myanmar.
- In addition to HARP-F, technical support also came from development organisations such as WFP, WHO and other UN and non-UN agencies working in the country. Many grantees were also encouraged to be part of the OCHA coordination cluster system. One grantee considered HARP-F's PSEA support to be particularly crucial.

One INGO reported improved protection for vulnerable people. It was felt that protection services and monitoring of sensitive cases had been strengthened with broader community involvement. This might hold lessons for HARP-F's regular humanitarian response programmes. For example, HARP-F might feasibly use this information to advocate for a more rights-based approach in further implementing or use this information to advocate for funding.

-

³² Refer to (i) Humanitarian needs overview, 2021 published in January 2021 and see https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mmr_humanitarian_needs_overview_2021_final.pdf (accessed on September 12, 2021).and (ii) ODI's report of 2008 'Negotiating access to humanitarian aid in cyclone affected areas of Myanmar and see <https://odihpn.org/magazine/negotiating-humanitarian-access-to-cyclone-affected-areas-of-myanmar-a-review/> (accessed on September 11, 2021).

³³ As post-2009 cyclone experiences showed, due to diverse reasons, humanitarian aid / support tends to arrive on a piece-meal basis.

- **Localisation has been a big part of HARP-F's programming since inception.** HARP-F had initiated calls for smaller local organisations to apply for funding based on innovative funding models. Local partners with more autonomy and decision-making power can respond to specific local circumstances. Due to travel restrictions, it is also noted that greater responsibility was taken on by local staff. In one instance, one iNGO localised the monitoring staff for the project areas. Previously this role was performed by national level staff.

HARP-F grantees based in the non-Sittwe region are not in the cluster system and therefore not fully informed. Bringing them into the coordination and information mechanisms, at whatever level, strengthens the humanitarian system overall and is an important step towards localisation.

Language barriers persist but are dealt with on a need-basis.

Competent and professional staff, reliable and trustworthy partners, and recognition of the role of local networks and volunteers had a positive impact in the HARP-F response. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis combined with the conflict and political turbulence shows that crises last longer and emergencies can become permanent problems. A grantee asserted that public interest is critical for local groups as it helps create a real sense of trust with their partners, including local authorities: "They know that they can count on us, even, and especially, when everything is going wrong." Such a bond makes traditional emergency response plans obsolete.

Gender lens in programming

- **Women, girls, men and boys have specific needs during a crisis.** A common cause for death among women is related to pregnancy and a large proportion of such deaths happen in humanitarian settings. Risks of sexual violence are also different based on gender and gender roles, with an estimated one in five refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings experiencing some form of sexual violence.

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar, women most likely face increased vulnerabilities, not only from the impact of the disease but also from increased risks of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation due to the rise in tension in communities. A strong gendered lens will add significant impact and relevance to the HARP-F COVID-19 response efforts.

During the interviews, most respondents were aware of the importance of maintaining a gender lens in programming and commonly referred to gender aspects in HARP-F's COVID-19 response. Though there is no overall disaggregated data on participation of women, there is a common understanding that more women participating in different activities throughout HARP-F's programme cycle has helped partners to develop and maintain an inclusive approach.³⁴

³⁴ Monitoring reports by the Center for Social Integrity does provide desegregated data for women on certain items like Dignity kits. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HNS22gygijNIB9TYVgTOc-H03x9QYh6j>