

Report

**MYANMAR'S CHALLENGING
CONTEXT: CASH ASSISTANCE
THROUGH LOCAL PARTNERS AS AN
INNOVATIVE SOLUTION AND TO
STRENGTHEN THEIR TECHNICAL
COORDINATION ROLES AT THE
SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL**

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Myanmar's challenging context: Cash assistance through local partners as an innovative solution and to strengthen their technical coordination roles at the sub-national level

Authors Sridevi Srinivasan, UNFPA, ssrinivasan@unfpa.org
Eri Taniguchi, UNFPA, taniguchi@unfpa.org
Soe Moe Kyaw, UNFPA, skyaw@unfpa.org
Alice Golay, UNFPA, golay@unfpa.org
Tomoko Kurokawa, UNFPA, kurokawa@unfpa.org



Geographical coverage

Myanmar: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Rakhine, Shan, Mon, Ayeyarwaddy, Bago, Sagaing, Thanintharyi, Yangon, Mandalay, Magway, Naypyitaw.



Actors and Stakeholders

Australia (DFAT) is the donor for direct civil society organization (CSO) grants. UN Population Agency (UNFPA) Myanmar is partnering with over 20 women-led organizations and civil society organizations (WLOs/CSOs) for the delivery of its programmes, including for cash and voucher assistance (CVA) components, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and dignity kits distribution.

UNFPA has helped increase the capacity of these national partners, and through encouragement and support, has stimulated the WLOs/CSOs' increased engagement and participation at the sub-national level. More specifically, UNFPA through its leadership role in the GBV Sub-Cluster has ensured inclusion and participation of these local partners and others at the sub-national level meetings.



People of Concern

- UNFPA supports interventions that target women and girls from the ages of 15 years old. This includes GBV survivors, and women with specific vulnerabilities such as pregnant women, women with disabilities, the elderly, etc. both in rural and urban areas.
- UNFPA has partnered with over 20 WLOs/CSOs to reach the most vulnerable women and girls, and other vulnerable persons, across the country in light of COVID-19 and political crises.
- Cash transfers as a modality of assistance may also indirectly benefit the wider community as it is reinjected into the local economy.



Gender

- UNFPA's programmes target vulnerable women and girls, including GBV survivors, adolescents and youth, people with disabilities and older persons. Programmes and intended outcomes are tailored for these target groups.

This good practice was identified and documented through a template developed on the basis of the [2021 IASC Guidance on Localization](#), which aims at supporting efforts to strengthen the meaningful participation, representation, and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors (L/NAs) within IASC humanitarian coordination structures. Its objective is to share knowledge and inspire progress and positive change regarding the meaningful participation of local actors in Humanitarian Coordination platforms. The original draft of this good practice template was developed by the [KORE \(Knowledge Platform for Emergencies and Resilience\) team](#) in the Office of Emergencies and Resilience of the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#) and was tailored to the needs of this IASC initiative.



Context

- Since the beginning of 2021, in the wake of the military coup, like others, the UNFPA country office in Myanmar has faced an increasingly challenging operational reality. In a fast-evolving context, UNFPA had to find innovative solutions to ensure the provision of cash assistance to the vulnerable women and girls it serves.
- Over the past two years, the overall banking crisis has made transfers and access to cash difficult. Liquidity issues have led to restrictions on the number of transactions that can be conducted by banks each day, causing implementation delays and leaving international partners dependent upon cash agents who charge high fees in order to access cash for programming. Special waivers have had to be approved to allow for these fees in order to ensure partner access to cash for programming. These challenges are routinely discussed in the national Cash Working Group, of which UNFPA is a member. Updates on any new assessment or solutions found to address liquidity issues and other challenges are shared between all the actors doing CVA activities in the country.
- Despite the ongoing banking and liquidity crisis in Myanmar, CVA remained the preferred option of assistance by beneficiaries. With the deteriorating security and humanitarian access situation, the UNFPA team is constantly reviewing the situation and finding means to ensure that the delivery of CVA can continue. Operational dexterity has proven critical in this operating environment.



Implementation and objective

- To overcome the operational hurdles it faced in partnering with some of its regular international NGO (INGO) partners, and to ensure the continued delivery of CVA, in 2021 the UNFPA Myanmar country office launched an expression of interest for grants to local WLOs/CSOs. Several of the WLOs/CSOs deliver cash assistance to small numbers of beneficiaries as part of their programming.
- UNFPA Myanmar has worked to strengthen the WLOs/CSOs capacity to do so, in a comprehensive approach, including orientation on CVA alongside capacity building on more traditional aspects of UNFPA programming. This is critical given the significant need to shift toward more localized approaches in Myanmar, which has become the core way of working for UNFPA in Myanmar.
- It has ensured the WLOs/CSOs inclusion and active participation in humanitarian meetings at the sub-national level, including through the GBV Sub-Cluster which UNFPA leads, and the SRH and MHPSS working groups, bearing in mind that the CVA done through WLOs/CSOs has GBV response, SRH and MHPSS objectives. UNFPA's work with the WLOs/CSOs fills a gap in the capacity building of these partners which has also been supported by other international actors.



Methodological approach

Methodological approach: UNFPA launched an expression of interest for grants to local WLOs/CSOs and identified all of those with similar engagement, mandates, and great acceptance and coverage at the community level. UNFPA had previously collaborated with many of them as part of its WLOs/CSOs capacity building approach where it was helping them grow. Thus, the grant modality was a natural next step to start working with them as formal implementing partners. Based on the fact that it provides a more localized solution, that the partnership works well and that time and resources have been invested into it from both the UNFPA and the WLOs/CSOs sides, the partnership is now a long-term one.

Needs assessments: The partnership is anchored in UNFPA's usual programme objectives which are the prevention and response to GBV and ensuring continued access to and availability of SRH programming.

For women and girls facing GBV, UNFPA's approach of integrating cash assistance in GBV case management is a personalized response to individual needs. It can be lifesaving, removing financial barriers to accessing care, and it can be key to recovery by getting GBV survivors back on their feet, helping them on a path to economic independence and preventing relapse into negative coping mechanisms. UNFPA provides CVA for women and girls to access health facilities for quality life-saving SRH care, including emergency obstetrics and new-born care,

access to antenatal and postnatal care as well as delivering in medical facilities, for the clinical management of rape, and access to HIV/STI treatments. The CVA helps address needs that can be both life-saving and ensures the wellbeing and SRH needs of women, adolescents and youth.

Accordingly, with these objectives, UNFPA works with local WLOs/CSOs to ensure CVA can be delivered to remote areas within the country. By providing cash assistance to vulnerable women and girls. UNFPA and the local WLO/CSOs shift the power to them. They are free to make their own choices about their health and safety, thus enabling a more dignified way of humanitarian assistance.

Activities to support the local actors and capacity strengthening: In this particular approach, when it comes to programme design and implementation, UNFPA has built a balanced relationship where much of the decision-making on priorities, and on implementation, remains with the WLOs/CSOs. UNFPA supports them to ensure standardisation and cross-fertilization in the provision of CVA across the different local WLOs/CSOs. This is done by having regular consultations with the WLOs/CSOs and through the sustained identification of best practices. UNFPA Myanmar has adapted the UNFPA global CVA guidelines and tools for its WLOs/CSOs partners and provided various sessions of capacity building to them in Burmese, reaching more than 100 participants from more than 50 different local organizations with a range of capacity and experience. UNFPA Myanmar staff, as well as Asia Pacific regional staff, stay fully available to identify capacity-building gaps and support the WLO/CSO partners with further technical support and capacity building, as per their needs.

Resourcing: The UNFPA partnership with WLOs/CSOs is based on a direct grant modality with specific funding being linked to capacity building to ensure these partners can grow to eventually obtain the status of formal implementing partners of the humanitarian and development community in Myanmar.

Preparedness, response and humanitarian-development-peace collaboration: UNFPA's investment in the capacity building of the WLOs/CSOs it works with, and the WLOs/CSOs' commitment and willingness to improve programme quality and standardisation, means that these valuable local partners may gradually gain more capacity and be able to support more humanitarian and development actors in programming with CVA and beyond. They are also increasingly engaged, through UNFPA's encouragement and capacity building, in coordination fora at the sub-national level in the specific areas of GBV, SRH and MHPSS, including on the integration of CVA within these programme areas.



Results and impact

What was initially a temporary measure to overcome a challenge in working with international partners within the current political context, became a rooted way of working for UNFPA Myanmar, who since 2021, expanded its number of WLOs/CSOs partners. This innovative approach is unique in the region for UNFPA cash assistance, and has the additional impact of strengthening the role of local actors who work very closely with affected communities on CVA.

The uninterrupted delivery of CVA and the fact that it is implemented through local actors who are deeply embedded within the local communities, and with whom targeted women and girls are very familiar and comfortable, has a direct impact on beneficiaries. "I feel secure and empowered that I have money in my hand for hospitalisation and safe delivery", said Esther, a 28-year-old UNFPA/WLO beneficiary from Kachin, Myanmar. Community-based and market-based delivery mechanisms are fast and economical means of delivering products (e.g., to manage menstrual health and hygiene) and should continue to be used as an approach for humanitarian interventions.

There is increased engagement and participation of CSOs at the sub-national level due to UNFPA Myanmar's strong field presence and encouragement. UNFPA, through its leadership role in the cluster, has ensured inclusion of local CSOs by providing translation and interpretation services and encouraging their participation at sub-national level meetings. Some of the CSOs are also part of the Peer Support Group (MHPSS). UNFPA's technical support to CSOs fills a critical gap in the current context where urgent lifesaving GBV, MHPSS,

and SRHR needs are growing by the day. The skills and capacity around cash assistance as integrated within these different programme objectives is another great addition for the wider community.

In addition, one of local NGO partners, Myanmar Positive Group, is taking leadership roles and its network brings together over 165 self-help groups (SHGs) of Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV) from all areas across Myanmar as well as maintaining strong partnerships with eight community networks of key populations and PLHIV.



Sustainability

This innovative approach for the delivery of CVA is unique for UNFPA both regionally and globally. UNFPA is gradually increasing and consolidating its CVA portfolio across its GBV and SRH programmes, in which it provides tailored support to women and girls in need. UNFPA will continue to invest in impactful partnerships with local actors, including in CVA, as most of the programmes rely on local capacity. This directly contributes to the global and regional localization agenda. The more active role of WLOs/CSOs in sub-national coordination fora like the GBV Sub-Cluster, including to discuss cash assistance, is a lasting effect for the whole humanitarian community.



Replicability and upscaling

- UNFPA has increased its approach in Myanmar, and through regular knowledge sharing and cross-regional dialogue, has socialized it with other country offices in the region and globally, where this approach could be replicated.
- Given the strong commitment of these WLOs/CSOs to improve the quality of their CVA skills and expertise, to strengthen their programming quality and to standardize their processes, UNFPA's support aims to have the WLOs/CSO's qualify as formal implementing partners of other humanitarian actors.
- The national Cash Working Group (CWG) trained and transmitted basic CVA training knowledge to CSOs, especially in Rakhine State, who are implementing CVA programmes. UNFPA contributed to the national CWG training of trainers to CSOs with a session on GBV risk mitigation in CVA.
- Localization in Myanmar has accelerated as the operational space is shrinking and the scale of humanitarian distress requires more agile and local responses. Various other agencies are also supporting WROs/WLOs/CSOs (including UN Women and United Nations Office for Project Services or UNOPS) but UNFPA's technical support to CSOs in mandate areas fills a critical gap in a situation where lifesaving GBV, MHPSS and SRHR needs for affected women and girls, and other vulnerable groups, are growing by the day.
- CSOs still need continuous substantive inputs in technical areas, in integrated programming and overall, in organizational development. With the new organization registration law looming over their heads, the CSOs and local networks work under the radar and maintain a low profile as they deliver services and support communities.



Key learning

The political and economic crisis in Myanmar, which has created severe operational challenges for humanitarian organizations, has a silver lining in that it has prompted UNFPA to accelerate its localization approach, and its readiness to shift more responsibility and more decision-making towards the WLOs/CSOs who have now become sustainable partners for UNFPA's programming, and hopefully for the broader community, whether for CVA or beyond.



Contact details

- Sridevi Srinivasan, Programme Manager, Women and Girls First Programme, ssrinivasan@unfpa.org