



# LOCALISATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP: SHIFTING TOWARDS LOCALLY-LED PROGRAMMING IN MYANMAR

PHASE 2 - NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION  
AUGUST 2020



HUMANITARIAN  
ADVISORY GROUP





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover photo: An IDP living in the Bum Tsit Pa camp, who receives food and ration support from Trócaire and KMSS with the funding of HARP-F. Photo: Gyung Dau, 2018

## **About KMSS**

Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) is a faith based social network at the service of the Catholic Church of Myanmar. KMSS is a network of 16 Diocesan Offices and a Yangon-based National Office. The Diocesan Offices play a key role in implementing multi-sectoral programming, while the National Office provides technical support and coordination.

## **About Trócaire**

Trócaire is the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Trócaire is a partner-based organisation that has been working with a range of local partners in Myanmar since 1995, which has included supporting KMSS to deliver humanitarian response to the crisis in Kachin and Northern Shan State.

## **About Humanitarian Advisory Group**

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

# ABBREVIATIONS

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DFID	United Kingdom Department of International Development
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HARP	DFID Burma Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme
HARP-F	HARP Facility
KMSS	Karuna Mission Social Solidarity
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
NSS	Northern Shan State
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

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# FOREWORD

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## KMSS

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I am blessed and honoured to be one of the KMSS senior staffs who is part of the institutional memories of KMSS and Trócaire partnership. Caritas fraternal cooperation/partnership values of “respect, equality, and mutuality” are the keys of the KMSS-Trócaire relationship and the positive experiences of the localization transition journey is founded on those core values. In our “modus operandi” of “way of proceeding”, we not only hearing through our technical ears but also “listening with the heart”. This leads us to the institutional commitment and the leadership wisdom makes this localization vision a reality. I do echo Trócaire’s leadership inspiration of this unique experiences to be the stepping stone of localization for wider humanitarian community. I praise the Lord for guiding KMSS and Trócaire into this new era of relationship. I thank KMSS and Trócaire staffs for their hard work in proving the spirit of solidarity. We are grateful to HARP-F for trusting in KMSS and Trócaire during this 3 year program implementation and remarkably not prescriptive but collaborative throughout this journey of localization. A concrete step taken and still a long way to go. May God bless our path.

### **Dr. Win Tun Kyi**

Director

Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS)

## Trócaire

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Reading this report, I am reminded of the challenge that true commitment to localisation presents. When we embarked on this journey of change with HARP, DFID, KMSS and Trócaire, perhaps we did not know the extent to which this long road toward shifting more power and influence to a national organisation would stretch all of our organisations. I think this report documents the twists and turns of the transition process and provides valuable reflection not just for those of us who were involved, but for other humanitarian organisations interested in seriously making localisation come alive in their work. One quote stands out to me: *‘The partnership between KMSS and Trócaire has sought to demonstrate a potential model for transformation of traditional partnerships and large scale grant management processes.’* As we emerge into a new working relationship with KMSS, I hope that the lessons documented in this report provide a useful set of guideposts for other organisations seeking such a transformation in their partnership.

### **Ashley Proud**

Country Director,

Trócaire Myanmar



*KMSS staff take part in activities during a 3 day strategy workshop organised by Trócaire WASH Advisor in September 2019.  
Photo: Myat Lin Hlaing*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The second year of the Humanitarian Response and Transition to Localisation: Kachin & Northern Shan States project saw Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) take over the grant management responsibility from Trócaire. This was a significant milestone in the partnership journey of the two organisations, who have been working together since 2012. The transition year provided both organisations, and the Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility (HARP-F) with important lessons on managing a process of localisation.

The initial design of the project envisaged that from the third year (2020) onwards, KMSS would become the primary recipient of the grant, with Trócaire becoming a sub-grantee of KMSS. HARP-F decided to bring the transition forward by a year, at the start of 2019. Three months into the transition year, HARP-F directly engaged Trócaire removing their budget from KMSS. This change was made in response to challenges raised by Trócaire. Since April 2019, the engagements of the two organisations with HARP-F have been managed separately, while they continued to collaborate on delivering the agreed project objectives.

There have been positive shifts and developments across this year building on those identified in the initial research phase<sup>1</sup>, however the journey has also had its challenges. Particularly the initial period of the year saw a reduction in engagement between the two organisations, with increased tension emerging. However, the long-standing partnership between KMSS and Trócaire and the interpersonal relationships between the staff of the organisations helped to gradually address and resolve most of these issues. The organisations' shared values as church-based organisations were important in enabling the organisations and staff to work productively together to address these challenges.

Overall, while there were a range of challenges that emerged during the transition phase, the established partnership between KMSS and Trócaire, and their commitment to see through this changeover successfully, helped them to navigate this period. There were several opportunities that could have been leveraged to smooth the process for both implementing partners and the funding partner. However, at the end of the transition year the collaboration has reached a more stable and robust level of partnership between the two organisations, with the lessons learnt in 2019 helping to improve their way of working in 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Localisation Through Partnership: Shifting Towards Locally-Led Programming In Myanmar – Phase 1: The Partnership Journey – August 2019



## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

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### KEY FINDING 1 – THE TRANSITION PROCESS PRESENTED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT WERE MANAGED THROUGH CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AND ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS



#### Key successes:

- Long-standing partnership and common values helped to navigate challenging periods of the transition
- Commitment from HARP-F, KMSS and Trócaire staff to work through emerging issues in order to progress the project and localisation work was crucial
- Re-focusing of priorities by the national office as KMSS settled into the role helped to improve collaboration



#### Key challenges:

- Decision by HARP-F to bring forward the transition by a year led to a difficult transition
- Removal of Trócaire as a sub-grantee of KMSS on short notice (at the request of Trócaire), led to a sense of mistrust and impacted on constructive relationship dynamics
- Increasing workload for KMSS in early 2019 reduced the level of coordination and collaboration in the initial months
- Feelings of higher expectations to perform and the need to exhibit their capacity also contributed to a reduction in engagement by KMSS

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### KEY FINDING 2 – DFID AND HARP-F PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING THE LOCALISATION PROCESS



#### Key successes:

- The continued commitment of DFID and HARP-F to supporting localisation was essential
- HARP-F recognising the importance of the project increased their management and support to the project, and to KMSS



#### Key challenges:

- Bringing forward the transition timeline by one year with limited consultations, reduced the opportunity for partners to adequately adapt to their new roles
- Change in how Trócaire were engaged within a short time of KMSS becoming the main grant recipient impacted the collaboration efforts between the organisations
- Better transition planning and capacity assessment could have helped to avoid removing the Trócaire grant from KMSS
- Ensuring adequate planning and ongoing support to facilitate the incremental change process to facilitate smooth transition

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### **KEY FINDING 3 – ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSONNEL CHANGES CONTRIBUTED TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE PARTNERSHIP**



#### **Key successes:**

- Established inter-personal relationships were important in working through challenges
- New staff brought in alternative viewpoints and ideas to help improve collaboration
- Commitment from strategic/leadership levels were important in ensuring ongoing engagement
- Regular engagement helped in building up a more collaborative mindset at the technical level



#### **Key challenges:**

- Staff changes resulted in loss of institutional knowledge, and required time to build up trust with new counterparts
- Staff changes at HARP-F required effort from implementing partners to reengage, and changed HARP-F's approach to managing the localisation process
- Initial difficult engagements at the leadership level had a flow on effect to the technical collaboration

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### **KEY FINDING 4 – CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT HELPED DEVELOP A COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR CAPACITY BUILDING**



#### **Key successes:**

- Jointly developed plans for MEAL and WASH support helped to set up a more structured approach to capacity building
- The HARP-F grants team became more involved in supporting KMSS to meet operational and financial requirements
- The combination of KMSS's organisational experience and Trócaire's ability to remain flexible was important in working through the transition period



#### **Key challenges:**

- Initial gaps in communication and confusion over how capacity building support could be best utilised
- Mutual capacity assessments did not take place and there were delays in partners negotiating jointly agreed capacity strengthening plans
- Inadequate planning for ongoing support on operational and project management support to KMSS in 2019

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### **KEY FINDING 5 – CHANGE IN GRANT MANAGEMENT, FUNDING ALLOCATIONS AND ITS BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS**



#### **Key successes:**

- Technical support model between Trócaire and KMSS opened up more funding for Trócaire (including from HARP-F)
- Increased positioning and bargaining power for KMSS to increase direct funding



#### **Key challenges:**

- Ambiguity on budget and resource allocation reduced collaboration on capacity building

# INTRODUCTION

Progress on localisation since the World Humanitarian Summit commitments on localisation, including the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change commitments in 2016, has been slow due to the inability of the sector to move beyond some long-standing challenges, including fair access to direct funding and more power in decision making.<sup>2</sup> To realise the full potential of locally led humanitarian response, changes in traditional ways of working are required from all partners, including donors, international organisations and national organisations.

The partnership between KMSS and Trócaire has sought to demonstrate a potential model for transformation of traditional partnership and

large-scale grant management processes. In 2019 (the second year of the three-year duration), KMSS became the direct recipient of grant funding for the Humanitarian Response and Transition to Localisation: Kachin & Northern Shan States project, funded by DFID through HARP-F. This transition took place 1 year earlier than originally planned, and this was a decision made by HARP-F. While there were numerous challenges, the two organisations, supported by HARP-F, have been able to make significant progress in shifting traditional ways of working to further support localisation commitments. This report examines the key successes and challenges, as well as learnings that are emerging from this period of transition.

## About the partnership

Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) is a faith based social network at the service of the Catholic Church of Myanmar. Trócaire is the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland and is a partner-based organisation. Trócaire and KMSS have been working together to respond to the crisis in Kachin and Northern Shan State (NSS) since 2012.

The UK government established the Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme (HARP) in response to commitments made under the Grand Bargain. In designing HARP, DFID took a different approach to humanitarian assistance in Myanmar, including an explicit focus on localisation. Under the HARP Facility (HARP-F), a significant proportion of grantees are local organisations; these partners receive tailored support focused on capacity-building and organizational development, in line with Grand Bargain commitments and the principles of localisation. HARP-F directly funds Trócaire and KMSS under this localisation project.



*Elderly IDP, who relies on food and cash support received from Trócaire and KMSS through HARP-F funding as she lives in the Lana Zup Ja camp. Photo: Yawng Htang, 2018*

<sup>2</sup> ODI (2020)–[Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020](#)

# About the Research

## Scope

Trócaire and KMSS are conducting a multi-year research study to understand and document the successes and challenges associated with the localisation journey in their partnership in Kachin and NSS. Delivered in three phases, the first phase focused on the internal partnership journey, the reflections and experiences of each partner and the shifts during the collaboration<sup>3</sup>. Phases two and three of the research will analyse the impacts

associated with the transition towards localisation, with a focus on the outcomes of the projects.

The second of three, this report focuses on 2019 where KMSS took over primary responsibility for managing the DFID-HARP grant. The report also looks to capture successes, challenges and lessons emerging from how the two partners have delivered the project within their transitioned roles.



### RESEARCH PHASE 1:

The partnership journey from 2012-2018



### RESEARCH PHASE 2:

The localisation transition in 2019



### RESEARCH PHASE 3:

Outcomes from the transition process at the end of 2020

## Research questions

The overarching research questions are presented below (sub-questions are contained in Appendix 2).

1. What was the partnership journey and localisation process for Trócaire and KMSS to date?
2. How has the partnership transitioned to support KMSS' leadership of the project?
3. What are the outcomes of this localisation transition process for project participants?



*De-sludging training taking place in Bhamo (July 2020). Photo: Myat Lin Hlaing*

<sup>3</sup> Localisation Through Partnership: Shifting Towards Locally-Led Programming In Myanmar – Phase 1: The Partnership Journey – August 2019





## Methodology

A primarily qualitative mixed methods approach was used for the research. The research process drew information from key informant interviews, relevant project documentation and additional data provided by partners. While the first phase primarily looked at the internal partnership dynamics, the second phase integrated the perspectives and input of the donor. As DFID has articulated that localisation is an important driver for the HARP Facility, their perspectives on the progress made in the Trócaire–KMSS partnership have been important in understanding the key successes and challenges of the transition year.

Primary data collection engaged staff involved in managing the partnership, capacity building and programming, as well as senior leadership from KMSS, Trócaire and HARP-F. Findings from this process were triangulated with information collated through a document review.

## Limitations

While the research was able to engage with respondents from Trócaire, KMSS and HARP-F, some of the limitations in conducting the research are outlined below.

**Remote data collection:** COVID-19 pandemic conditions and enactment of global travel restrictions meant that in-country data collection in Myanmar was not possible. Data collection processes were carried out remotely. While all planned interviews were completed, the remote data collection process does create some limitations on observing respondent reactions and potential for raising follow up questions.

**Limited number of interviews:** For the purpose of the research, only relevant respondents who were directly involved in partnership and localisation management were engaged for KIIs from KMSS, Trócaire and DFID-HARP. Due to the nature of the report, data collection from project beneficiaries was not carried out.



# THE PARTNERSHIP JOURNEY

This timeline shows key events in the evolution of the partnership.

The following key is used to categorise the key events:



y 2011

- Conflict breaks out in Kachin State, resulting in large-scale displacement.

y 2012

- Escalation of conflict in Northern Shan State, causing further displacement.
- First phase of DFID funding to a joint KMSS-Trócaire response to the crisis in Kachin and Northern Shan State. The partnership predates 2012 (2006), but is solidified with the DFID funding.
- KMSS leads implementation, with technical support from Trócaire. Trócaire holds contract with DFID.

y 2013

- Annual funding continues for response. Trócaire holds contract.

- Capacity strengthening support to KMSS occurs across period with training, technical support, development of systems and processes and mentoring.

y 2015

- KMSS becomes a regular and active cluster member in local level cluster system, supported by Trócaire.

- KMSS adopts a more decentralised organisational structure, enabling individual dioceses to manage donor funding directly.

y 2016

- Consortium formed with DRC, Trócaire and KMSS. Trócaire holds contract with DFID.
- KMSS develops first Humanitarian Strategy for both Kachin and Shan contexts, supported by Trócaire.

- World Humanitarian Summit. Both partners sign Charter for Change.
- DFID HARP Facility (HARP-F) design and inception phase.



## y 2017

- KMSS joins consortium Steering Committee.
- JAN: Grant for 2017 provided by HARP. Grant provided to Trócaire as primary grant holder.
- JUL: KMSS and Trócaire commence design of HARP-F delivery grant proposal for 2018-21.
- JUL: KMSS and Trócaire hold workshops to discuss proposal and localisation transition process.
- AUG: Capacity Building Framework negotiated for transition process.
- SEP: Three day joint KMSS-Trócaire HARP-F proposal development workshop.
- SEP: Trócaire and KMSS submit proposal to HARP-F.
- OCT-NOV: Proposal feedback and negotiations with HARP-F.
- DEC: HARP-F 2018 grant agreement signed by Trócaire.

## y 2018

- HARP-F grant starts - three year funding for humanitarian response in Kachin and NSS. First year of grant funds managed by Trócaire.
- KMSS and Trócaire hold inception workshop.
- Trócaire appoints a Localisation Coordinator to oversee the transition and capacity strengthening process. KMSS TASK team members and Accountability and Learning Officers start.
- KMSS contract Best Solutions Accounting to strengthen financial management within the Diocesan Offices.
- Joint KMSS-Trócaire workshop on developing Standard Operating Procedures. KMSS supported to lead this process going forward.
- First quarterly learning and reflection workshop is conducted; second quarterly workshop conducted jointly.
- Trócaire and KMSS hold a series of workshops and trainings on technical areas (WASH, EFSL, MEAL) and grant management/cross cutting areas (project management, financial management, budget revision, protection mainstreaming, disability and inclusion).
- HARP-F awards KMSS separate rapid response funding funds to support many of the newly displaced population in Kachin and Shan states.
- KMSS with Trócaire's support produce their first monthly M&E report for the project.
- Trócaire supports KMSS with the revision of the program budget.
- KMSS leads quarterly learning and reflection workshop in Myitkyina.

## y 2019

- JAN: KMSS becomes primary grant holder for the HARP-F response grant.
- JAN: HARP-F grants three month costed extension to enable development of next phase of the project.
- JAN - Mar: KMSS receives funding directly for the project, including component for Trócaire
- APR: KMSS (supported by Trócaire) begins implementation of next phase of the project for 21-month period till DEC 2020.
- APR: HARP-F directly engages Trócaire for their component of work and they are no longer a sub-grantee under KMSS.
- APR: KMSS continues to receive direct funding (except for Trócaire component of work).
- MAY: Trócaire and KMSS joint workshop to develop M&E plan for project.
- SEP: HARP-F increases budget for Trócaire to include additional WASH and MEAL support to other HARP partners, using the same modality as with KMSS.
- NOV: Trócaire and KMSS (with input from WASH and MEAL Advisors of HARP-F) jointly develop WASH and MEAL capacity strengthening plans to guide capacity building till December 2020.

## **14** Localisation through partnership



# KEY FINDINGS: NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION PHASE

Shifting the role of direct grant recipient means shifting power. For Trócaire this meant that after seven years of directly being engaged by the donor as part of their work with KMSS, they would now be engaged through KMSS. For KMSS it meant that they were now expected to manage the engagement of Trócaire as a sub-grantee in addition to their on-going implementation. While in principle both organisations were committed to the transition process, in practice the process proved to be challenging. There weren't many examples or lessons from the humanitarian sector on similar transition processes, and institutionally both KMSS and Trócaire were entering a new phase of their partnership. Although there were transition and capacity building plans in place, practical implementation proved to be a challenge in the first half of the year.

"There weren't a lot of lessons or processes to draw from at the time when we began this transition work. Overall KMSS and Trócaire have really learned a lot from this experience."<sup>4</sup>

This section explores the key successes and challenges of the transition phase during 2019, when KMSS became the primary grant recipient of the Humanitarian Response and Transition to Localisation: Kachin & Northern Shan States project.

## KEY FINDING 1 – THE TRANSITION PROCESS PRESENTED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT WERE MANAGED THROUGH CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AND ESTABLISHED PARTNERSHIPS



### Key successes:

- Long-standing partnership and common values helped to navigate challenging periods of the transition
- Commitment from HARP-F, KMSS and Trócaire staff to work through emerging issues in order to progress the project and localisation work was crucial
- Re-focusing of priorities by the national office as KMSS settled into the role helped to improve collaboration



### Key challenges:

- Decision by HARP-F to bring forward the transition by a year led to a difficult transition
- Removal of Trócaire as a sub-grantee of KMSS on short notice (at the request of Trócaire), led to a sense of mistrust and impacted on constructive relationship dynamics
- Increasing workload for KMSS in early 2019 reduced the level of coordination and collaboration in the initial months
- Feelings of higher expectations to perform and the need to exhibit their capacity also contributed to a reduction in engagement by KMSS



The transition year – especially the initial six months – was a challenging period for HARP-F, KMSS and Trócaire. The decision by HARP-F to bring the transition forward by a year, and the request from Trócaire for HARP to directly re-contract Trócaire – with limited consultation with KMSS – three months into KMSS becoming the direct grant recipient (further discussed under key finding 2), resulted in creating a sense of mistrust between KMSS and Trócaire, and made it more difficult for the transition process from a partnership point of view.<sup>5</sup>

“It was not an easy transition.”<sup>6</sup>

A notable reduction from 2018 in the coordination and collaboration between KMSS and Trócaire took place during the initial period of 2019 which was both a cause and a result of the challenges faced during the initial months. This was in part due to the increased workload and planning that KMSS had to undertake initially.<sup>7</sup> In previous projects and in 2018 under the current project, KMSS were mainly focused on project implementation. After taking over the grant management in 2019, the increased accountability burden of ensuring compliance and managing financial tracking and reporting, increased the workload for the KMSS national office.<sup>8</sup> Managing the three diocesan offices after the handover also required some adjustment on the part of the national office.<sup>9</sup> These challenges contributed to KMSS’s initial increased focus on implementation, and reduced engagement with Trócaire.

“Both teams were under a lot of pressure. KMSS had three jobs: to deliver the work; receive capacity building; and take more responsibility on grant management.”<sup>10</sup>

Changes to the engagement model, especially between KMSS and Trócaire that had been

in place since 2012, also required a significant shift in organisational attitudes and practices. This included clearly identifying the role each organisation and its staff members played, and how their interactions with their counterparts had to change.

As they settled into the role, the national office was able to re-prioritise their responsibilities, focusing on compliance, coordination and quality control.<sup>11</sup> This also helped with improving their ability to better work with Trócaire in coordinating technical support. The national office was supported by both Trócaire and HARP-F in working through these requirements.<sup>12</sup> While this was a challenge initially, the ongoing learning enabled KMSS to put in a more robust structure with the national office taking more upward accountability to the donor.

“KMSS has always been focusing on the implementation and on the beneficiaries. There has not been enough time spent on reflection, learning and improvement.”<sup>13</sup>

As this transition in grant management was seen as one of the first projects in the country to practically demonstrate localisation, there was added pressure on KMSS to demonstrate their ability to deliver the project and operate independently.<sup>14</sup> This contributed to the reduction in their engagement on capacity building with Trócaire, who were trying to clearly define how their technical support and capacity building could be integrated with KMSS priorities at the time. For example, sharing of KMSS progress updates, which were used by Trócaire technical specialists to track progress and identify support needs, was discontinued.<sup>15</sup> This created a challenge in coordinating an effective capacity building process. Gradual progress on this issue was reached with more direct engagement between technical staff. For both MEAL and WASH capacity building,

5 Interview 2

6 Interview 1

7 Trócaire Narrative Report Q1 2019

8 Interviews 2, 7, 8

9 Interview 4, 7

10 Interview 9

11 Interview 4, 8

12 Interviews 3, 9

13 Interview 4

14 Interview 8





Trócaire and KMSS worked together to put in place relevant plans, which also outlined their capacity strengthening approach.<sup>16</sup>

“In 2018 we were like one team. At the beginning of 2019 this was not the case. It felt like the partnership was not there. After the capacity building framework was put in place, and lot of engagement, by the end of the year, it felt like we were back to being a team.”<sup>17</sup>

However, the effort put in by staff from KMSS and Trócaire to continuously engage and ensure productive working relationships at all levels was important in managing the ongoing partnership.

Key staff from both organisations recognised that there was a need to work with each other in order to resolve any issues that emerged.<sup>18</sup> This included engagement both at a technical (MEAL and WASH) level as well as a managerial/executive level.

As documented in the first report, both KMSS and Trócaire as part of the Catholic church-based network of organisations, and as part of the Caritas family, share a common value structure. These common values, combined with belonging to the same network of organisations, was an important factor that also helped them work through some of the emerging challenges.<sup>19</sup>

“Whatever the disagreement, we always tried to reconcile. We are part of the Caritas family, we are part of the church, so we can't say no to each other”<sup>20</sup>



Training on household water treatment processes taking place in Bhamo during December, 2019. Photo: Myat Lin Hlaing

16 Trócaire Narrative Report Q2 2019, KMSS Narrative Report Q2 2019, Trócaire Narrative Report Q3 2019

17 Interview 7

18 Interviews 1, 2, 8

19 Interviews 2, 6

20 Interview 2

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## KEY FINDING 2 – DFID AND HARP-F PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING THE LOCALISATION PROCESS



### Key successes:

- The continued commitment of DFID and HARP-F to supporting localisation was essential
- HARP-F recognising the importance of the project increased their management and support to the project, and to KMSS



### Key challenges:

- Bringing forward the transition timeline by one year with limited consultations, reduced the opportunity for partners to adequately adapt to their new roles
- Change in how Trócaire were engaged within a short time of KMSS becoming the main grant recipient impacted the collaboration efforts between the organisations
- Better transition planning and capacity assessment could have helped to avoid removing the Trócaire grant from KMSS
- Ensuring adequate planning and ongoing support to facilitate the incremental change process to facilitate smooth transition

While both KMSS and Trócaire were committed to localisation, the most critical component that progressed the transition process was the commitment from the donor. The continued support of DFID and HARP-F was important in driving the localisation process. While the initial project design had proposed to transition the direct funding to KMSS as of 2020, in early 2018, it was decided by DFID and HARP-F to move forward this process by a year to 2019. As HARP-F agreed to a shorter timeframe than initially discussed, both KMSS and Trócaire were required to make adjustments to their plans which had been designed for a longer transition.<sup>21</sup>

While both KMSS and Trócaire were committed to localisation, the most critical component that progressed the transition process was the commitment from the donor. The continued support of DFID and HARP-F was important in driving the localisation process. While the initial project design had proposed to transition the direct funding to KMSS as of 2020, in early 2018, it was decided by DFID and HARP-F to move forward this process by a year to 2019. As HARP-F agreed to a shorter timeframe than initially discussed, both KMSS and Trócaire were required to make adjustments to their plans which had been designed for a longer transition.

The decision to change the engagement so quickly also indicates that the transition process could have been better planned and managed from all parties.

One of the likely outcomes of the decision was that the one-year period (2018) set out to prepare KMSS for taking over, may not have been sufficient or was not used efficiently to complete all essential capacity building. A more stringent transition plan that was better funded with a realistic staggered timeframe could have reduced the stress on the organisations and not required reversal on how Trócaire was engaged. Furthermore, the transition process could have been better linked to a capacity assessment at the end of 2018 to ensure DFID and HARP-F were confident that all essential processes and skills were in place for smooth transition. This also highlights that the process of localisation takes time and is incremental, and while donors play an important role in catalysing the process, they need to recognise the need to plan and fund this process long-term.

Across 2019 HARP-F strengthened its role in supporting the transition process. Recognising the importance of the project, HARP-F assigned one of their senior most staff to oversee the project and to work closely with the two organisations to provide the support they needed.<sup>22</sup> They also increased their support to KMSS (in areas such as grant management and reporting) to ensure they had the required support to work through the initial challenging period of becoming the primary grant recipient.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interview 1, 2, 9

<sup>22</sup> Interview 9



“There was a recognition from HARP and DFID that this was an important and delicate process and thought it would need more oversight.”<sup>24</sup>

## MANAGING PARTNERS SEPARATELY

As the two organisations are now directly contracted by HARP-F, it reduced the formal accountability they have towards each other. Due to the separate engagements, meetings with HARP-F also took place separately with each partner. This meant that key challenges and updates were less likely to be shared openly, and partners did not have visibility on what each other was communicating with the donor. Whilst it is important to conduct meetings separately to discuss items specific to each organisation, joint meetings and updates could have been used to encourage open information sharing as a means of reducing ambiguity and friction in the initial period.

HARP-F has made progress in working with both organisations to facilitate their collaboration. For example, initially HARP-F separately raised with the organisations the need to prepare a common capacity building framework, which did not progress for a number of reasons, including lack of consensus. However, with HARP-F setting a deadline, and facilitating the engagement, the two organisations were able to develop a common framework through consultation and collaboration.

### KEY FINDING 3 – ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSONNEL CHANGES CONTRIBUTED TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE PARTNERSHIP



#### Key successes:

- Established inter-personal relationships were important in working through challenges
- New staff brought in alternative viewpoints and ideas to help improve collaboration
- Commitment from strategic/leadership levels were important in ensuring ongoing engagement
- Regular engagement helped in building up a more collaborative mindset at the technical level



#### Key challenges:

- Staff changes resulted in loss of institutional knowledge, and required time to build up trust with new counterparts
- Staff changes at HARP-F required effort from implementing partners to reengage, and changed HARP-F's approach to managing the localisation process
- Initial difficult engagements at the leadership level had a flow on effect to the technical collaboration

A collaborative process of transition that changes and challenges traditional ways of working in partnership requires trust. Trust is commonly built through longstanding relationships between

staff, sharing institutional knowledge and history. The relationship between KMSS and Trócaire as organisations during the transition phase was shaped by the personal engagement between

<sup>24</sup> Interview 8





IDPs pass through COVID prevention post set up in the Ja Yang Camp. Photo: Yawng Htang /Relief Action Network for IDP and Refugee (RANIR), 2020

different team members involved. The complex transition planning process as well as changing over of financial control placed a large workload on those involved from both organisations<sup>25</sup>. This also had an impact on the interpersonal relationships among key staff between organisations. Established personal relationships, and the experience in working with each other for a number of years enabled them to work through these challenges.

“In some instances, there was some tension among the teams. It was to be expected as it was a time of change for everyone.”<sup>26</sup>

Supporting the transition processes at the strategic and leadership levels of the organisations had different dynamics compared to the operational and programming levels. For example, while the strategic and leadership levels worked through some of the more difficult discussions on the transition, they were also more committed ensuring the partnership continued to improve. This was also the case in the first year and manifested more prominently during the initial period of second year, and particularly when funding/ resourcing became the focus of

discussion. The initial engagement between the technical and programme teams from Trócaire and KMSS was also affected by the tone set at the strategic and leadership levels. However, as these teams engaged more regularly on the ground focusing on technical issues, the engagement process became more efficient.<sup>27</sup>

There were a number staff changes that took place at organisational and donor level in 2019. Changes in personnel had both negative and positive connotations in relation to the transition period. The change in personnel naturally led to the loss of institutional knowledge within the respective organisations. This meant that time taken to re-engage and build trust with the new staff slowed down the progress on some of the ongoing activities. Similarly, changes in staff from the donor (HARP-F) also meant that the organisations had to invest time in engaging their respective focal points and getting them up to speed on the project activities.<sup>28</sup>

New staff within the organisations also supported the transition process by bringing in new knowledge and skills, and a different viewpoint. These changes also helped to bring in fresh perspectives and reboot some of the engagements that may have been strained. Staff changes at HARP-F also resulted in a change in approach to supporting the localisation process.<sup>29</sup>

25 Interview 1, 2  
 26 Interview 2  
 27 Interview 3  
 28 Interviews 3, 7  
 29 Interview 9

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## KEY FINDING 4 – CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT HELPED DEVELOP A COLLABORATIVE MODEL FOR CAPACITY BUILDING



### Key successes:

- Jointly developed plans for MEAL and WASH support helped to set up a more structured approach to capacity building
- The HARP-F grants team became more involved in supporting KMSS to meet operational and financial requirements
- The combination of KMSS's organisational experience and Trócaire's ability to remain flexible was important in working through the transition period



### Key challenges:

- Initial gaps in communication and confusion over how capacity building support could be best utilised
- Mutual capacity assessments did not take place and there were delays in partners negotiating jointly agreed capacity strengthening plans
- Inadequate planning for ongoing support on operational and project management support to KMSS in 2019

Setting up co-designed capacity building and technical support plans is important for increasing engagement from the partners involved. There were initial challenges in negotiating capacity strengthening plans, and even confusion over how best to utilise the technical capacity support on offer. But the teams had reached a more robust collaboration arrangement by the end of 2019. This was mainly due to the technical teams from the two organisations working together to develop MEAL and WASH plans (with input from HARP-F MEAL and WASH advisors) – including how the capacity building for each area work would progress.<sup>30</sup> This enabled a more structured engagement from the technical teams. While joint meetings to track progress and identify issues did not always take place as planned, when conducted, they proved to be key forums to increase collaboration and planning.<sup>31</sup>

There was no mutual capacity assessment process undertaken between KMSS and Trócaire. And a gap in communication by both organisations on expectations was noted when initially planning capacity support.<sup>32</sup> This included Trócaire staff not being kept in the loop on ongoing activities and decisions, as well as regular check-in meetings not

taking place as planned.<sup>33</sup> KMSS staff, especially those in the field, expected accompaniment support instead of classroom trainings which were initially utilised more. Trócaire staff felt that they were not being adequately engaged to plan training by KMSS, and that requests often came at short notice.<sup>34</sup> With reductions to their budget in 2019, Trócaire technical specialists also had limited time available to provide accompaniment support to the level expected by KMSS.<sup>35</sup> Continued engagement and discussion between teams has helped to resolve this issue and the training work is now more aligned with expectations of both parties.

“The transition process may not have been perfect, but this process is a challenge for any organisation.”<sup>36</sup>

While there was positive engagement on technical capacity building (MEAL and WASH), there was room to increase capacity building on areas relating to project management and operational management.<sup>37</sup> As captured in the first report,

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30 Trócaire Narrative Report Q2 2019, KMSS Narrative Report Q2 2019, Trócaire Narrative Report Q3 2019

31 Interview 5

32 Interviews 4, 5, 7

33 Interview 5, 7

34 Interviews 5, 8

35 Interview 7

36 Interview 7

37 Interview 2, 3

there was already a significant investment to support KMSS in preparing for the transition in 2018, including KMSS engaging a local accounting firm to support financial training. Nevertheless, it was noted that KMSS required further support to improve their grant and financial management in 2019.<sup>38</sup> There are instances of such support being provided by Trócaire. For example, the Trócaire finance team supported the KMSS finance team to improve their understanding of grant management, especially in relation to managing exchange gains and losses.<sup>39</sup> However, provisions for operational capacity building do not seem to have been sufficiently planned for in 2019. Although notably the HARP-F grant teams were more involved in supporting KMSS through this process and ensuring KMSS were complying with HARP-F requirements.<sup>40</sup>

While changeover of the direct grant management required a steeper learning curve than ideal, the organisational experience and resilience of both Trócaire and KMSS enabled them to work through this challenging time with the support of HARP-F.<sup>42</sup> With KMSS already working with a number of other donors and international organisations, this experience increased their resilience to the changes that came about in 2019. Trócaire’s experience in working with KMSS since 2012, and their willingness to remain flexible with the changing context also allowed them to work through emerging challenges. In a long-standing partnership such as that between KMSS and Trócaire, Trócaire staff are better placed to provide nuanced and relevant capacity support than external partners as they understand how KMSS operates and their technical needs.<sup>43</sup>

“Localisation shouldn’t be just about technical capacity building (like WASH and MEAL). It should be about system building. More operational capacity building is needed for projects such as this.”<sup>41</sup>

“It shows the strength of the organisations that they have been able to come through all these challenges.”<sup>44</sup>

## KEY FINDING 5 — CHANGE IN GRANT MANAGEMENT, FUNDING ALLOCATIONS AND ITS BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS



### Key successes:

- Technical support model between Trócaire and KMSS opened up more funding for Trócaire (including from HARP-F)
- Increased positioning and bargaining power for KMSS to increase direct funding



### Key challenges:

- Ambiguity on budget and resource allocation reduced collaboration on capacity building

The change in the primary recipient role of the grant had implications for both organisations. For Trócaire especially, as the grant management

component was transferred to KMSS, it resulted in a reduction in the number of staff at the organisation – either directly on-board for the

38 Interview 3, 4, 9

39 Interviews 2, 4

40 Interview 9

41 Interview 3

42 Interviews 2, 3

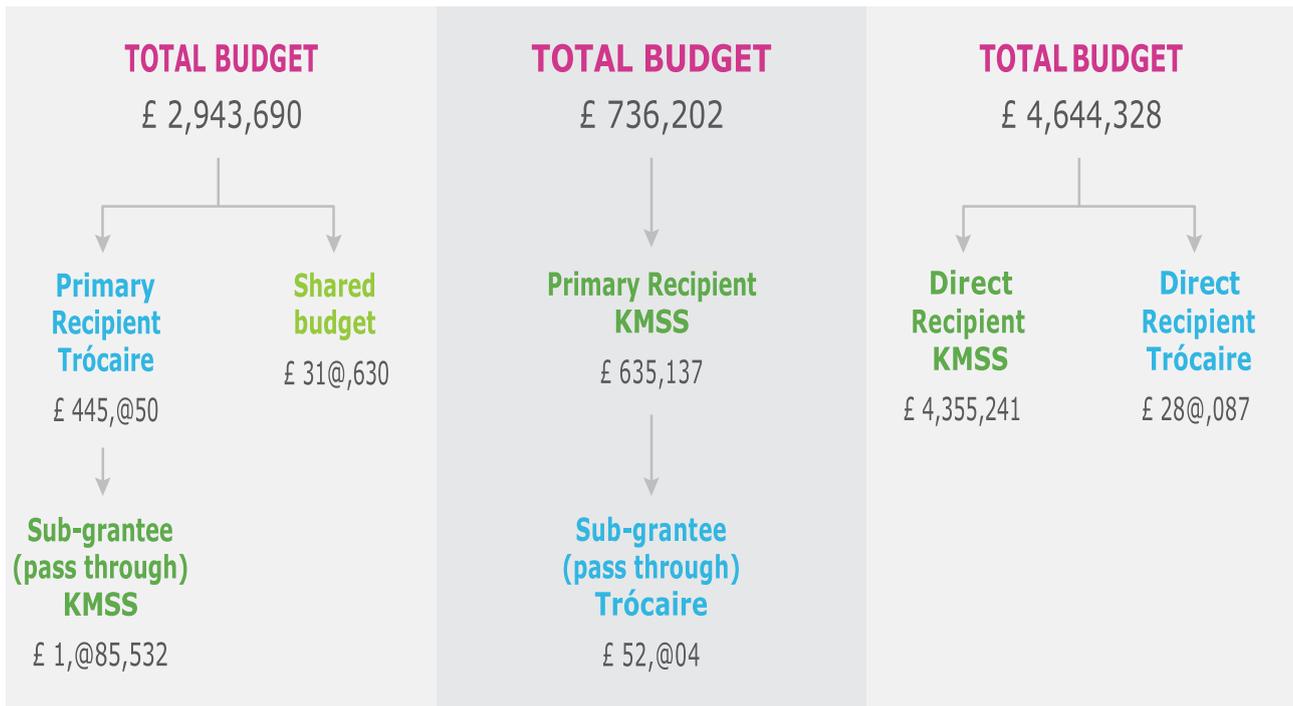
43 Interviews 5, 6

44 Interview 9

2018

JAN-MAR 2019

APR 2019 - DEC 2020



project or those supported through the fee component that was received by the organisation.<sup>45</sup> KMSS also looked to consolidate the staff structure they had put in place in 2018, but was also impacted with staff changes that took place during the year.<sup>46</sup>

The new technical capacity building approach used in the project has also opened up more opportunities for Trócaire.<sup>47</sup> For example, under this modality, Trócaire has been further engaged by HARP-F to provide similar technical support work for a number of local and international recipients of HARP-F grants.<sup>48</sup>

When KMSS took over management of the grant, this was also an opportunity both for KMSS and Trócaire to present the progress they have made in relation to localisation. The opportunity helped to elevate the profile of KMSS with donors and within their local networks as well. For KMSS, the ability to demonstrate direct grant management was important to boost their profile in engaging with donors for more direct funding.<sup>49</sup>

Both parties being unclear of what was included in each other's budget was a challenge for collaboration. For Trócaire technical specialists it was important to know where the gaps and shortfalls were in implementation, in order to provide more focused support. For KMSS it was difficult not knowing what training components had been planned to be covered under Trócaire. With the contracts and donor engagement being managed separately, inadequate visibility and agreement on resource availability likely contributed to confusion over how to maximise capacity building support.

45 Interview 1, 8

46 Interview 1, 4

47 Interview 8

48 Interview 8

49 Interviews 1, 2, 8

# OPPORTUNITIES

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Based on the transition period in 2019, the following opportunities and recommendations have been presented for the current and future partnership between KMSS and Trócaire, and potential HARP-F localisation projects.

“Overall, I think it has been a learning experience. Everyone is more committed to localisation now. But everyone has learnt a lot of lessons on how we could have managed or mitigated pain points.”<sup>50</sup>

## Timeframes

- Time and resources invested in the initial negotiations to design the transition timelines and capacity support framework will help reduce effort and resources required later during the transition period. If the planned timelines are to be changed, that also requires a complete revision of the accompanying capacity building framework.

## Capacity strengthening

- Investing in continuous operational capacity building (such as finance and grant management) will be critical in similar projects where project lead roles will be transitioned. Operational capacity building often requires organisational change and transformation, which cannot be managed via a short-term plan or one-off trainings. This requires a wider commitment from all partners involved to invest in and work through the change process.
- For similar projects, operational and management capacity markers should be identified as part of the transition process to determine the scope and speed of the transition.

## Donor engagement

- Donor commitment remains the critical

driver that determines timelines and level of progress in shifting the power through localisation. In supporting localisation, it will also be important for donors to remain committed to appropriately resourcing incremental/ phased transition plans. These plans will need to be based on capacity assessments and include re-assessments at key milestones.

- During the transition planning process, donors will be best placed to include compliance clauses or indicators on partner organisations collaboration to ensure there is mutual accountability. Especially if the two partnerships are managed separately, the donor has a greater responsibility to set up inter-dependent targets, and necessary coordination mechanisms to discuss and monitor progress.
- For separately managed contracts, the donor will also need to facilitate open discussion on the resources that are allocated for each partner in relation to the work they will collaborate on.

## Reporting

- Partner organisations must also commit to more open reporting and information sharing. This will help provide more clarity on the scope covered by each organisation and also the level of support that can be expected.

## Leadership

- The opportunity to transition into the lead role in a project will need to be also reviewed by the local organisation in a pragmatic manner. This is so that they can be clear how their existing capacities match up to the increased level of expectations from the donor, which can help them identify areas they require technical support on.
- Open honest dialogue and discussion is required between partners – especially during difficult times of the transition. This requires leadership and commitment from all partners involved.



# APPENDIX 1: DOCUMENT REVIEW

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HAG, Localisation Through Partnership: Shifting Towards Locally-Led Programming in Myanmar - Phase 1: The Partnership Journey, August 2019

KMSS, Quarterly Progress Report: Q1, April 2019

KMSS, Quarterly Progress Report: Q2, July 2019

KMSS, Quarterly Progress Report: Q3, October 2019

KMSS, Quarterly Progress Report: Q3, January 2020

ODI-Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020, June 2020

Trócaire and KMSS, Draft KMSS-Trócaire Partnership and Ways of Working Agreement, January 2019

Trócaire and KMSS, HARP Capacity enhancement framework, January 2020

Trócaire and KMSS, Hand-over Checklist and Documentation, October 2018

Trócaire, Quarterly Progress Report: Q1, April 2019

Trócaire, Quarterly Progress Report: Q2, August 2019

Trócaire, Quarterly Progress Report: Q3, October 2019

Trócaire, Quarterly Progress Report: Q3, January 2020

Trócaire, Annex G: Transition and Localisation, December 2017

Trócaire, Annex H: Capacity Building Strategy, December 2017

Trócaire, Annex I: Capacity Building Framework, December 2017

# APPENDIX 2: KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO GUIDE RESEARCH

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The following research questions are used to guide the study:

- 1. What was the partnership journey and localisation process for Trócaire and KMSS to date?**
  - a. What were the key events and successes within the partnership journey?
  - b. What were the strengths and challenges in the partnership?
  - c. To what extent did the partnership reflect the dimensions of localisation?<sup>51</sup>
  
- 2. How has the partnership transitioned to support KMSS' leadership of the project?**
  - a. What was the process involved in the transition?
  - b. What aspects worked and what didn't work?
  - c. What learning can be applied more broadly?
  
- 3. What are the outcomes of this localisation transition process for project participants?**
  - a. What concrete changes have occurred as a result of the process for the organisations (KMSS and Trócaire)?
  - b. What are the outcomes for project participants, including communities that the project reached?
  - c. To what extent did the partnership support and enhance KMSS' capacity to take a leadership role in future responses (across areas including organisational, programming, visibility and reputation)?
  - d. How is the partnership recognising, respecting and building on existing processes, tools and approaches (rather than replacing or undermining them)?
  - e. To what extent was the visible role of KMSS in humanitarian action enhanced and supported?

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<sup>51</sup> Drawing from HAG and PIANGO's Measuring Localisation Framework, as well as the START Network's research in this area, these include: Leadership, Capacity, Funding, Coordination and Complementarity, Participation (of communities) and Policy Advocacy and Influence.





**trócaire**

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