



HOMES & COMMUNITIES

Building Safe Homes and Communities: Myanmar

Vision: Provide housing support directly to conflict-affected internally displaced households through a community-led scaling initiative for voluntary, dignified and meaningful resettlement.



Lasi Bawk Ja (right) and her children were displaced due to armed conflict in Myanmar. The daughter she gave birth to in this camp for internally displaced people is now five years old. Her husband works as a day laborer outside the camp and is saving to buy a plot of land. CRS and our partner KMSS provide support for construction of new homes for families like Lasi Bawk Ja's.

Photo by Naw Din/CRS

Context

The people of Myanmar's Kachin state have experienced internal displacement for more than 13 years due to armed conflict, resulting in a notable decline in communities' access to food, education, health services and basic infrastructure, such as roads, housing, communal spaces, and electricity and water systems.

Having lived in camps for an extended period, internally displaced people began exploring more permanent and meaningful housing solutions. With their savings from daily wages, they bought small plots of land in areas where they felt safe, and asked organizations for support for homes, a water supply, toilet facilities, livelihoods and social services. CRS Myanmar and our Caritas Myanmar partner Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS)—a faith-based social network—have several years of experience providing semi-permanent housing support

to internally displaced households, but this needs to be scaled up into sustainable, high-quality, community-based housing programs. Due to ongoing conflict and natural disasters, the needs are significant, and the opportunity to influence other market and humanitarian actors would enable greater outcomes at scale.

Opportunity

Displaced people are being forced to leave settlement camps and, according to the Durable Solutions Working Group (2023), an average of 600 internally displaced households request resettlement assistance in the northeast of Myanmar annually. However, CRS and our partners have only been able to provide about 100 houses per year. CRS and KMSS have provided housing support directly to conflict-affected internally displaced households with a community-led settlement scaling initiative.



“ We chose the community-led approach because we can design our house as we want and need. We would like to manage the whole process and contribute as much as we can based on our own family’s needs.

Female household head
Nyawng Taw resettlement community, Namti township, Kachin, Myanmar

CRS and KMSS implemented a small pilot community-led house-building initiative in 2019 and have since scaled it up and begun showcasing its advantages to donors and other shelter actors. At the same time, KMSS has aimed to integrate this community-led settlement approach (CLSA) into other projects. Gradually, as CRS and KMSS continue their influence efforts in the clusters, other coordination fora, and working group platforms, the approach is gaining recognition and will be replicated in the housing programs of other shelter actors.

KMSS is gradually strengthening its capacity in shelter and settlement, enabling it to take a key leadership role in the shelter cluster coordination platforms at the state level, thereby enhancing the localization of humanitarian systems. Also, learning from this pilot scaling initiative, a community-led shelter and settlement training of trainers (ToT) curriculum has been developed and

staff are being trained to provide technical assistance to the whole KMSS network and other agencies.

The community-led approach is people-centered, and adheres to principals of collaboration, transparency and empowerment, with an ultimate goal of voluntary, dignified and meaningful resettlement. Local authorities, clusters and other shelter actors have registered an interest in its adoption and replication to scale up the innovation and good practice that CRS and KMSS have shared. This is crucial as registration challenges and the ongoing conflict have reduced the presence and operations of organizations, while the humanitarian needs of displaced communities continue to grow. By promoting a community-led approach, KMSS—a leading NGO in Myanmar—has the opportunity to extend its impact by influencing the technical guidance of sectoral working groups and other shelter actors on the ground.

CRS and partner response

Objectives

CRS is working in the northern part of Myanmar where KMSS offices in Myitkyina and Banmaw are well-positioned for the humanitarian and development efforts. More than 500 people are directly benefiting from this effort, and 50 partner staff will benefit from CRS technical support. An estimated 4,000 people in Kachin State will also benefit indirectly through the adoption of the approach by other agencies, including local authorities.

KMSS plans to develop shelter standard operating procedures nationwide. A number of other humanitarian organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, have committed to applying CLSA in their interventions.

Other humanitarian actors and authorities have observed the impact of this approach through evidence-based documents and on-site demonstrations by CRS, KMSS Banmaw and KMSS Myitkyina. As a result, they have committed to or expressed an interest in adopting the model in their own interventions. All the necessary technical materials are in place and both KMSS offices have trained staff.

Given this momentum and the available resources, CRS and KMSS plan to scale up the approach to broader networks, funding platforms and coordination structures with the aim of achieving systemic change within the next five years.

To do this, CRS and KMSS plan to establish a dedicated technical support unit or team responsible for advocating across KMSS’ networks, representing the approach on all relevant platforms, continuing documentation efforts, sharing insights at forums, and supporting other organizations who wish to adopt the model. The current effort, with \$400,000 in CRS private seed funding, has some challenges: delays in implementation, internet and mobile connectivity issues, and travel restrictions due to political instability. Thus, additional follow-up funding will be required to sustain and expand these efforts.

Siblings Khant Phone Kyew (left) and Myat Theigi Khin in their family’s temporary housing.

Photo by Jennifer Hardy





Homes & Communities Strategic Change Platform

As a part of its Vision 2030 agency strategy, CRS has undertaken a transformational shift from a focus on shelter and settlement—the building of roofs and walls—to homes and communities, the foundation on which life rests. CRS is committed to achieving transformational systems-level change to reach 10 million people affected by crisis and enable them to live in safe and dignified homes and communities through its two-pronged approach:

- Expanding CRS programming reach
- Bringing about systems-level change

Activities

- Continuing evidence-based presentation of CLSA to other humanitarian agencies, government departments, local civil society organizations and communities.
- Conducting capacity-building workshops for staff and community leaders on CLSA.
- Sharing evidence-based learning with the UNHCR, on its request.
- Demonstrating housing construction of 100 households using CLSA through visits by humanitarian agencies and authorities.
- Continuing documentation of milestones throughout the CLSA scaling process.

Looking ahead

CRS commits to supporting our key strategic partner KMSS to sustain the scaling vision in the long term through technical backstopping, to ensure communities receive sustained assistance. The 2023-2025 period has been designated for demonstration, advocacy and resource mobilization, while exit strategy implementation will occur in 2025-2026.

Working in partnership

Partnership and coordination with all relevant stakeholders—such as the UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, cluster members, working group members, local authorities, community and religious leaders, and other local humanitarian actors—is crucial to all phases of the resettlement processes to facilitate a comprehensive, systematic, effective,

efficient and qualitative resettlement program that results in internally displaced communities living in dignified and durable homes in resilient communities.

KMSS is one of a few local organizations that can access the hardest-to-reach areas during conflicts and disasters because of its established parish networks and local acceptance and trust. KMSS is serving as chair for the local humanitarian network and has recently taken a leadership role in the shelter cluster in Kachin and Chin states. The organization is a member of the core joint strategy team responding to emergencies in Northern Shan state, and has taken on leadership roles in humanitarian coordination networks and become a local technical resource hub for other organizations. CRS is accompanying KMSS in implementing safe and dignified emergency response programming.

CRS in Myanmar

CRS has worked in Myanmar for more than a decade in partnership with Karuna Mission Social Solidarity, serving vulnerable communities with agriculture, nutrition, food security, shelter, and water and sanitation programming. CRS supports KMSS emergency responses to conflict-related and natural disasters across the country and works to strengthen the capacity of KMSS and other local partners to implement development programs.

In recent years, CRS has worked with funding from the multi-donor Livelihoods and Food Security Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Start Fund, Growing Hope Globally, and other private donors. CRS also provides technical backstopping to KMSS on a variety of UN-funded projects. Localization and partner capacity strengthening are key strategic priorities for CRS Myanmar.

