

# building resilient communities



## Disaster Risk Reduction in Myanmar

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Disasters cause immense damage and loss to life, livelihoods and property. They negatively impact on the development progress of the country as well as make people more vulnerable to future disasters. People who are poor, and particularly women, elderly, children, and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to hazards and disasters exacerbate their vulnerability.

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland South-East Asia. It is vulnerable to various types of hazards. A long coastal region exposes the country to cyclones, and tropical storms/storm surges. Rainfall-induced flooding is a recurring phenomenon across the country. The entire country is also at risk from earthquakes, droughts, and fires, while the country's hilly regions are also exposed to landslide risks.

Right: Map detailing path of Cyclone Nargis, ActionAid Myanmar



Far right: DRR training in Bogale, ActionAid Myanmar

Cyclone Nargis was the worst and most devastating natural disaster in the recent history of Myanmar. The loss caused by Nargis was unprecedented, especially in the Delta region. The cyclone affected some 2.4 million people with 84,537 dead and 53,836 people missing<sup>1</sup>. The devastation incurred revealed a lack of information, awareness and preparedness, and indicated the need for the development and implementation of a comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programme.

The Government of Myanmar, in particular the National Disaster Preparedness Central Committee and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, have been involved in the cyclone response and welcomed the cooperation of local and International NGOs, UN agencies and other organizations.

ActionAid, through its partners has been working in Myanmar since 1999 and was one of the first organizations to respond to this disaster. ActionAid,

## Disaster Risk Reduction:

The conceptual framework views DRR as integral to development processes and includes actions:

- to minimize vulnerabilities and risks to disasters
- to prevent the possibility of severe disaster impacts
- to mitigate and prepare for the adverse impacts of disasters
- to build capacity of the communities to reduce the risk of disasters

through its partners have been able to reach out to over 120,000 people in more than 410 villages through various forms of support and aid. ActionAid is committed to reducing people's risk to disasters by understanding and placing their vulnerability at the centre of its work. Addressing people's vulnerability is critical to building the community's resilience to future disasters.

In addition to the relief provided through our response programme, a pilot initiative on DRR has been undertaken in thirteen villages in the areas of Pyapon. ActionAid's approach to DRR is to facilitate affected local communities to analyze their vulnerabilities, their resources and capacities, as well as prepare action plans that will reduce their risk to disasters.



In its Disaster Risk Reduction initiative, ActionAid is also partnering with various actors in Disaster Risk Reduction in Myanmar including local NGOs Mingalar Myanmar, and Knowledge and Dedication for National Building (KDN); Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and UNDP.

<sup>1</sup> Post Nargis Joint Assessment – Report by the Tripartite Core Group: July 2008



Top Right and Bottom Right: Village mapping by community, ActionAid Myanmar

A fellow is a person with leadership potential who is prepared to work in challenging circumstances and is committed to working for grass-roots development. ActionAid Myanmar provides intensive training to strengthen fellows' capacity to facilitate community development.

Right: Community engaged in Participatory Vulnerability Analysis Process, ActionAid Myanmar

Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) is a systematic process that involves vulnerable communities and other stakeholders in an in-depth examination of their vulnerabilities and capacities and at the same time motivates them to take disaster risk reduction actions.

## Process of Disaster Risk Reduction

### 1. Training of Fellows and Interns

A comprehensive training on various development issues and approaches is given to young people who are selected from cyclone affected areas. These trained 'fellows' will engage and live with the community for the implementation of the Participatory Vulnerability Analysis and DRR process.

### 2. Awareness Generation

Helping communities understand the need to prepare themselves for future hazards and ways to decrease their vulnerability are some of the themes for awareness generation. These awareness generation activities also try to help communities learn from their experience and help them prepare for future disasters. Dissemination of information through discussions, leaflets, brochures and drama is part of the strategy for awareness generation.



### 3. Participatory Vulnerability Analysis

Communities then participate in an intensive process where they identify the vulnerable places, people and time periods through various participatory tools such as resource and social maps, timelines and seasonality map. They analyze the various causes that lead to this vulnerability. This helps the poor and excluded families to prepare family level recovery plans which will be linked to diverse resources of different actors in the Nargis Cyclone response programme.

### 4. Community Based Disaster Reduction Plan

After analyzing their situation, the community will focus on developing a multi-level and multi-sector plan for preparing, mitigating and preventing disasters. The objective for planning is to reduce the vulnerability of poor and excluded families and build



their capacity to reduce the risk of disasters. The Community Based Disaster Plan has two aspects-family level recovery plan and the village level DRR plan which focuses on different sectors which are integral to their community life such education, health, shelter, livelihood, communication and transportation.

### 5. Formation and Training of Village Task Force Teams

Communities typically suggest that teams be formed in their village which would help them respond more effectively and efficiently to disasters. These village teams would be given training on various skills such as first aid as well as search and rescue methods. Using traditional knowledge and practices combined with scientific reasoning, the training will help the teams to approach disaster response in a more effective manner. ActionAid will collaborate with other agencies to impart this training to the communities.

### 6. Disaster Risk Reduction Measures

Through this participatory process, communities are able to suggest various measures which could reduce their risk to future disasters. Raising the plinth level of houses, raising the height of the banks around the pond (village's water source) and agricultural fields, construction of lookout tower, strengthening of embankments and formation of Disaster Management committees are some of the ideas mentioned by communities.



## Disaster Risk Reduction Moving forward:

- Scale up the DRR programme to cover 30 villages in cyclone affected areas.
- Capacity building of government officials in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and UNDP on Participatory methodologies and DRR.
- Promote the good practices of communities that have reduced their risk to disasters with key stakeholders in Disaster Management.



ActionAid is an international anti-poverty agency whose aim is to fight poverty worldwide. Formed in 1972, for over 30 years we have been growing and expanding to where we are today - helping over 13 million of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged people in 42 countries worldwide.



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