



PLAN INTERNATIONAL MYANMAR'S **FLOOD** RESPONSE OVERVIEW

Plan International Myanmar's response to flooding
caused by Cyclone Komen in August, 2015



INTRODUCTION

In the final two weeks of July 2015, Cyclone Komen brought heavy rain to much of Myanmar. Twelve of the country's fourteen states and regions were affected, with flood and landslides temporarily displacing 1.6 million people. The western states of Chin and Rakhine were particularly affected as Chin State experienced massive landslides while much of central and northern Rakhine were badly flooded. Both states, as well as Magwe and Sagaing Regions, were declared "disaster affected zones" by the government. By the time the water receded, 132 people had been killed countrywide.



Children walk past flooded rice paddies after the floods.

Within Rakhine State, the townships of the central Mrauk-U District were the worst affected. Minbya Township, where Plan International has been operating since 2014, was named one of the 20 most affected townships across the country. The total population of the township is approximately 196,000 and the General Administration Department (GAD) estimated that 50% of all households had been affected by the flooding.

The extent of the flooding and destruction it caused meant that the needs of communities upon return were acute. Many families were displaced from their homes for as long as two weeks and returned to find homes damaged or destroyed. Flood waters in some Minbya villages reached 12 feet and destroyed many households' belongings, food stores, farming equipment, and other assets such as livestock or ploughs.

Recently planted paddy fields were also destroyed and community infrastructure ranging from schools and health centres to monasteries and drinking water ponds were damaged. As a result, many communities required immediate emergency assistance of food, drinking water, household use water, and non-food items. Provision of these basic needs was vital to people's survival as the destruction caused by the cyclone meant many communities had lost almost everything—including the

ability to access uncontaminated water or food.

The post-flood challenges faced by communities across affected areas were exacerbated by El Nino, which has brought particularly turbulent weather conditions across Myanmar in 2015/16. The climactic effect has led to a shorter monsoon with accompanying water shortages, and negative effects on crops. As a result, even before Cyclone Komen hit, communities across Rakhine were facing increased vulnerability to shocks such as drought, food insecurity and disease.

Following Cyclone Komen, and in cooperation with fellow INGOs in Sittwe, the UN, and the Rakhine State Government (RSG), Plan International Myanmar took a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance to the most-affected villages in Minbya Township. In the three months following the flooding, over 30,000 people in 55 villages received assistance from Plan International.

This overview documents the assistance provided by Plan International in the aftermath of the flooding. It details the needs of affected villages and the process of assistance delivery across the key sectors of WASH, Food/NFI, Education, and Child Protection.

FLOOD EFFECTS ON MINBYA

Heavy rains and high flood waters caused the total destruction of rice crops in 23 out of 24 communities surveyed by Plan International. As a primary source of income, the loss of rice has been one of the most significant challenges for communities after the floods.

Communities lost both current crops and their seeds, and their paddies were filled with salty water, making them unable to grow anything in the short-term. Unable to repay last year's planting loans, many farmers are unwilling to increase debt burdens even more this year and reported that they would not be able to plant again in 2016. This will have significant effects on people's income and their resilience to shocks throughout 2016—and beyond.



Children play in floodwaters in the aftermath of Cyclone Komen.

EFFECTS ON WASH INFRASTRUCTURE

“If we don’t have enough water, we won’t be able to work. We will spend all our time getting water for washing, cooking and bathing,” - female, Tan Khun Taing village.



A pond that was destroyed by the floods. These are communities’ primary sources of drinking water.

Cyclone Komen significantly affected water access infrastructure, mostly water ponds, across Minbya Township. In assessing WASH access more broadly, however, it is important to note that the extreme poverty of most villages in Minbya meant that little sanitation or hygiene infrastructure existed prior to Cyclone Komen.

All 24 villages assessed immediately after the floods on 5-6 August, 2015 reported they had no functioning latrines. REACH (an organisation established to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid organisations) data indicates that at least 23% of households in villages in Minbya also had no access to sanitation facilities.

Given the limited extent of pre-flood hygiene and sanitation infrastructure, when asked about WASH issues generally, communities most frequently cited a lack of water as the primary problem. Household sanitation supplies such as soap and women’s sanitation supplies were also lost in the flood, but focus groups with all -female participants also cited water access as the key challenge facing women’s hygiene following the flood. Across focus groups, women frequently made the point that they were unable to wash properly in the days and weeks following the flood.

Water access is a frequent concern across much of Rakhine state, but the effects of Komen have greatly increased the severity of these problems. Villagers generally rely on a number of water ponds (2-8 depending on village size), which often run low during the dry season (March-June) in normal years. Following the flooding, 22 villages, or over 90% of villages assessed by Plan International, reported insufficient water, both for drinking and for general household use.

All water ponds in the villages in the field research were flooded, and the water was contaminated. In the immediate aftermath of the flooding no villages reported access to water purification tablets and only six villages reported boiling water, in large part due to a lack of firewood.

EFFECTS ON ACCESS TO FOOD

“We lost all our rice stores and paddies. Many cattle were lost also,” - male, Chin Seik Village

Plan International’s needs assessment found that 12 villages had less than one week of food stocks immediately after the floods, reflecting the significant loss of food storage during the flood, and a further eight villages had less than two weeks of food stores. Focus groups reported that all food stocks beyond what they had carried with them to higher ground had been destroyed. For households with the ability to buy food, access to markets was extremely limited in the weeks following the flood, due to high river levels and the large number of boats that had been destroyed.

Equipment used to improve or supplement access to food was also damaged or destroyed, including seed stores, boats and fishing nets, and cattle/oxen.

Access to Food and Water Still Critical After the Floods

“All houses in our village were flooded so we ran away to the mountains. The water was already at the top of our house, so we couldn’t have stayed there much longer. We were so surprised, the waves were the highest we have ever seen in our village. This flood was really strong and the small boat had no resistance.”

“When we were travelling by boat (to higher ground) some people fell in the water, but others were able to rescue them. We lost everything in the flood. When we left we couldn’t bring anything, we just had the clothes on our bodies.”

Hla May and Ma Sann Win are two mothers who escaped from Chin Seik village during the floods and spent 6 nights at a crowded monastery on a nearby mountain. Their village has just one boat which meant that there was no room for them to take food and water with them when they left.

With limited food and water at the monastery, Hla May and Ma Sann Win returned home while the flood waters were still high in search of food and to assess the damage to their houses.

“We had 2 big ponds but during the floods they were destroyed. The government and Plan International cleaned them. Now we have less and less water and it will only last 1 more month.”

Access to clean water remains a concern for members of Chin Seik village. They are relying on one pond for everything – drinking, washing and cooking – but with the rainy season still months away, this water will not be enough.

The lack of water is also impacting on health and nutrition. “Diarrhea is the biggest health problem because we don’t have clean water. We aren’t boiling it,” said Hla May.

“When we returned to our houses we couldn’t eat anything. We were really struggling. We could find rice but we didn’t have any water to cook it. We tried to cook with salty river water. It was very dirty and muddy but we had no choice,” Ma Sann Win explains.

Members of Chin Seik village are aware of the importance of being better prepared for floods during the next monsoon season. They would like to buy additional boats that can transport them to safety and store rice seeds high in their houses, so they can recover from flooding more quickly in the future.

EFFECTS ON NON-FOOD ITEMS (NFIS) AND SHELTER

Damage to homes occurred in varying levels across Minbya Township. In some villages, all homes were damaged along with a significant percentage of homes that were destroyed. REACH reported 15% of homes were destroyed in its assessment. Repair and rebuilding appears varied across villages, dependent on household income and access to borrowed money.

All households surveyed in Plan International's rapid needs assessment reported an almost total loss of possessions, including items such as cooking equipment, clothing and footwear.

A number of households reported being able to save 'one cooking pot and one plate' by taking these items with them to higher ground, while others were able to store a few valuables in the ceiling of their homes. However, the lack of warning about the flood meant households were forced to leave their home rapidly and abandon most of their possessions.



Houses were left damaged and totally destroyed by the floods.

EFFECTS ON EDUCATION

Across Minyba Township schools were damaged and destroyed leaving students without safe spaces to learn and interrupting their education for several months while schools were cleaned and repaired. Teaching and learning materials were also lost and desks, chairs and books floated away.

Plan International estimates that 10% of government-built brick schools and 50% of wooden temporary learning spaces were damaged. The REACH Initiative found the flood's impact on education infrastructure to be even higher, reporting that 75% of all school buildings were damaged.

Following the flooding, communities reported that village schools remained closed for between one and two months. Even in cases where school buildings themselves were not damaged, they were inundated with mud requiring a significant amount of contributed community labour to restore. In addition, many schools lost much if not all of their school supplies and furniture. For example, in Taw Tan village the school had only 5 benches left. Teacher hostels, often poorly constructed buildings to begin with, were damaged.



A teacher and his students stand in one of the hundreds of schools that were damaged by the floods.

CHILD PROTECTION

As children were particularly vulnerable to the effects of the flooding in Rakhine State, this led to the worsening of existing protection concerns and the appearance of new protection concerns and risks. Many children were distressed from the traumatic experience of the floods and long boat journeys to evacuation centres.

Others were forced to rapidly evacuate their homes and spend up to two weeks living in the open on a hillside. With limited livelihood opportunities and soaring commodity prices in the aftermath of the floods, children were forced to increasingly engage in labour to support their families. The usual play areas of children became unsafe and posed increased health concerns.

While some children were separated from their families for a short period after the floods, communities reported this was not a widespread issue and that most children were quickly reunited with their families.

Children Still Experiencing Trauma After the Floods

After evacuating from their homes, many during the night, children and their parents travelled in crowded boats and in rough water to higher ground.

For children, this experience has been traumatic and parents say their children are still showing signs of shock about their experience.

“In the flood we didn’t care if we died or not. Our children were our first priority. Mothers and children clung to each other and they went on the boats first,” said Ma Nu Sein from Chin Seik village. “The children were very scared in the rain and we tried to cover them.”

“Our children have been having nightmares since the floods. They are very worried and don’t want to go outside alone. We are very sad for the children. There was no food for them. They always want to stay with their parents. There was a lot of heavy rain and wind and they didn’t feel safe,” explains Nwe Nwe Moe from Min Hpu village.

Plan International's child protection staff visited flood-affected communities and discussed the importance of protecting children both immediately after the floods and on a long-term basis.

"Plan International came and talked to us about child protection and how to take care of the children's health. They explained that we shouldn't shout at the children or hit them. They also gave food to the children. They told us how to clean our water and sang songs with the children about how to wash their hands," explains Nwe Nwe Moe from Min Hpu village.

"The children have become very sensitive now. If it's going to rain or if there will be a high tide they stay at home and don't want to go out. This is new for them. Heavy rains make them frightened," said Thein Ye.



A mother and her baby just days after they returned home after the floods.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE RESPONSE



Early distributions of clean drinking water in Minbya Township.

Following the flooding, Plan International staff identified a number of villages in Minbya Township, most located on the banks of the Lemyo River that required urgent assistance. Selecting target villages for humanitarian assistance was done hand in hand with the Minbya Township Administrator (TA) who provided a list of villages that were most severely affected by the flooding.

Plan International's humanitarian assistance response was further informed by a Plan International-led rapid needs assessment (RNA) and OCHA data on flood affectedness. The data from the coordinated RNA (supported by Relief International, UNICEF, Action Against Hunger, and a CBO) aligned with OCHA's, Plan International's and the TA's data and observations. This process provided the target villages that would receive NFI and water assistance. Further sector RNAs (one in Education in Emergencies, one focused on Child Protection in Emergencies, and one for WASH facilities) provided additional need-based targeting information.

Minbya Township was selected due to the high proportion of affected communities (OCHA listed it as one of the two hardest-hit townships), remoteness, a lack of existing assistance from other organizations, and Plan International's existing operations in the township. Other potential townships, including Kyauk Phyu, Kyauk Taw, and Mrauk U, were determined to be better served by Plan International's partners such as Relief International as they had larger existing presence in these areas.

Within each village, assistance was universally distributed. Food, NFI kits, water and water purification were provided regardless of household wealth or other indicators.

Plan International was one of the early responders in Minbya and in all villages was the only INGO provider. Plan International staff began distributions 5 –7 days after communities returned to their homes. Civil society groups, both from Rakhine and other parts of Myanmar, were the quickest to respond, bringing food supplies and drinking water.

WASH ASSISTANCE

After the floods, Plan International provided WASH assistance to 27 villages, including 124 rain water collection systems. Plan International's partner Better Life Organisation held 42 hygiene promotion and disease prevention awareness sessions, restored 11 ponds and distributed hygiene kits and water purification tablets to 5,142 households.

“Better Life Organisation and Plan International came to clean the pond water and now we can drink it. We guess we will have enough to last until rainy season,” - female, Taw Tan village.

“We only have one water pond now and it is already not enough water. We cannot use the others (two ponds). In a normal year all three ponds are low. So we will not have enough water for hot season,” - male, Chan Seik village.



Plan International staff distributing buckets and tarps for collecting rainwater after the floods.

Plan International provided three types of WASH assistance in targeted villages—repair of water infrastructure, hygiene kit distribution and water testing. A total of 27 villages received some form of WASH assistance.

In the immediate aftermath of the flooding, Plan International provided 124 rain water collection systems to villages. Water purification tablets, ‘aquatabs’ were distributed to all households to address communities’ immediate needs. In focus group discussions held seven months after the floods, participants cited clean drinking water to be the most valuable distribution provided due to the widespread destruction of fresh water supplies.

Alongside the emergency provision of drinking water, drinking water collection methods, and water purification tablets, Plan International also provided funds for a local partner—Better Life Organisation (BLO) - to restore drinking water ponds in eleven villages.

Refurbishment of the water ponds required contaminated water to be pumped out (in some cases this water was able to be purified and used by villagers), so it could be replaced by rain or river water, making any required repairs to pond embankments or building a fence around ponds. While drinking water ponds are normally filled directly by monsoon rain, villagers reported that following the monsoon period when the river is high, the water is potable.

This resulted in communities having much needed regular access to drinking water, relieving primarily women of the need to collect water from mountain streams that can be 2-3 hours walk away. To cover the maximum number of villages possible, the humanitarian response repaired one pond per village to ensure immediate water needs were met. However, as some villages had up to seven ponds, water shortages have quickly returned. Further, because the river levels have been reduced as Rakhine enters the hot sea-

son, it is no longer possible to 'top up' the ponds.

Alongside fresh water, Plan International also distributed hygiene kits that included soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, diapers, and sanitary napkins for women and girls. In post-emergency contexts, feminine hygiene becomes a particular challenge for women and girls.

As reported above, sanitation infrastructure in the villages visited by the field team were extremely poor and as a result, Cyclone Komen did not significantly worsen sanitation facilities. Plan International's humanitarian response focused on restoring functioning of damaged basic needs and so did not respond to the lack of latrines. However, communities have an ongoing and long-term need for improved sanitation facilities.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Plan International provided food to 54,400 people 44 villages in the 3 months following the floods. In total, 889.982 metric tonnes of food was distributed.

"Plan International gave us rice and oil and salt. It was very necessary; people would have starved without it. We can say the food was lifesaving," - Male, Tan Khun Taing village.

"Really in our hearts it was the food that came that helped us to survive, we didn't care as much about the water, and we could find this ourselves. We couldn't get rice so the food was very important and useful for us," - Female, Tan Khun Taing village.

Following villager's return to their homes, food quickly became a major challenge for all communities. With the destruction of food stores and extremely limited access to buying food (both lack of cash and no access to a market), hunger was a major problem.

Plan International's food response following Cyclone Komen was delivery of WFP food assistance in Minbya. In total, 54,400 people in 44 villages received food assistance over the course of the three months.

Delivery of food assistance was conducted across three rounds and was distributed to all people within the village. Assistance levels were calculated based on the number of people in a household. Each delivery provided a one-month ration of rice, pulses, salt and oil.

"It's really lucky we could survive: Aid Distributions Helping Communities to Recover"

Sixty four year old Mae Ma Chay climbs up to the second floor of her house and points to a mark on the wall that is high above her head. "This is where the water reached," she said. "The boat came and picked us up from my balcony and we all had to climb in. The children were scared and didn't want to get in the boat, but we had to go."

The floods have left watermarks across Minbya Township, on houses, schools and shops. Many are above the first floors of these buildings and show how difficult it has been for communities to salvage any possessions and clean up the mud and water that remained.

Mae Ma Chay says there is a 90 year old woman in this village who said this is the worst flooding she has ever seen.

"When we returned home we ate coconuts. There was no water to cook rice and there were no kitchen sets. Now we have combined our kitchen equipment. We have some big bowls, so we eat out of them together. Before we had enough plates for 6-7 people, but now we only have 3," she said.

"It's really lucky we could survive because the organisations came and gave us food. We remember this very well. After the flood we got dresses, salt, oil, basic food. Almost all of our clothes were lost.

We have to wear 1 dress for a long time. BLO also gave us hygiene kits and containers for water,” explains Aung Nu Phyu.

“We received NFIs and hygiene kits but really in our hearts it was the food that came that helped us too survive, we didn’t care as much about the water, and we could find this ourselves. We couldn’t get rice so the food was very important and useful for us,” said Mae Ma Chay.

In Chin Seik village, people are starting to notice the change that food distributions have made. “Before we were starving, running and struggling for life. We were very small and very skinny. After the floods, people have started getting fatter,” Ma Nu Sein said.



Mae Ma Chay and Aung Nu Phyu spent over a week in the mountains before returning home.

NON-FOOD ITEMS (NFI) ASSISTANCE

NFI kits have been distributed to 25,683 people in 22 villages. There were two kits: family kits comprised of blankets, tarpaulins and clothing and 100% of people surveyed said they were happy with the contents of the kits. Children kits included clothes and sandals, play equipment and stationary, and were distributed to 1,968 households.

“We got hygiene kits from Plan International but we didn’t get enough. We didn’t get kitchen sets or water containers,” - Female, Ah Thay Kalar village.

Many households returned to their homes to find all household belongings had been destroyed. To address this immediate need for clothing and shelter, Plan International provided non-food item kits (NFIs) to affected communities across Minbya Township. Twenty two villages received NFI kits, including all villages visited by the assessment team. Focus group discussions reported that all households in the villages visited received kits.

The NFI kit was reported to be targeted at the household level, with each household receiving the same items with no adaptation for different size households. The kit contained men and women’s longyis, shirts, sandals, umbrellas, blankets, a tarpaulin and other basic items.

Post-distribution monitoring conducted by the Plan International team in 9 villages covering 145 respondents indicated that the kits were well received and utilized. Of the 145 people surveyed 100% indicated that they were satisfied with the kits received. The Post-Distribution Monitoring showed that all items were used with the exception of t-shirts that were traded if they did not fit one of the household members.

EDUCATION

Plan International provided Essential Learning Material kits in 19 villages, including 5057 student kits, 150 teacher kits and 5311 essential learning kits. Six TLS have been constructed and four have been repaired.

“In the classrooms, everything was washed away. Plan International gave us some books and some clothes for the children and NFI’s. These were really good for the students,” - Female, Min Hpu village.

“The school was not destroyed because it was made from cement but the teacher’s houses were destroyed. The children lost all of their books and learning materials. Organizations came and gave us pens and books but we don’t have a curriculum,” - Female, Chin Seik village.

Cyclone Komen affected education facilities across Minbya. All schools in the assessed villages were affected by the floods and some had been totally destroyed. Over 85% of assessed villages reported needing new teaching materials and furniture.

Education assistance formed part of the Plan International’s overall assistance to villages across Minbya Township. In 19 villages, Plan International provided Essential Learning Material kits targeted at children.

For a number of villages where damage to schools had been particularly severe, Plan International provided materials for a total of six temporary learning spaces (TLS). Plan International also provided materials for repair to 4 previously constructed, Komen-damaged TLSs. In some villages, Plan International delivered materials to the TLS alongside food aid, in others a separate trip was made. Plan International did not manage the construction process, delegating responsibility for organizing village labour to build the TLS to the village leader.

TLSs were present and being used in two villages visited by the research team. However, due to the large size of the village student body, the TLS was being used in addition, rather than in place of, the damaged school building.

CHILD PROTECTION

Community mobilisers have conducted recreational and psychosocial support activities in 14 villages.

Plan International’s assistance in the child protection sector in flood-affected villages in Minbya Township included the provision of recreational and psychosocial activities for children as well as awareness-raising sessions on child protection and child rights for children, caregivers and community members.

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) are operating in three villages to ensure children had access to a safe space to play and receive the necessary psychosocial support. The CFS are open six days a week, and are a place where caregivers provided creative, physical, communicative and imaginative activities to all children to improve their psychosocial well-being.

Community mobilisers conducted recreational and psychosocial support activities with children of different age groups on a weekly basis in 14 additional flood-affected villages. In addition, community mobilisers were trained and provided positive parenting education sessions to parents and community members. Parents report that these sessions were very helpful as they learned how to discipline their children without being aggressive.



Students in Minbya Township at their new Temporary Learning Centre that was built by Plan International.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising for the response drew on Plan International's unrestricted funding, a public appeal in Japan, and grants from donors based in Myanmar and globally.

A total of US\$1.65m was secured to fund the response programme and operation.

Plan International provided an initial funding support for the response to ensure a rapid response and ability to meet the immediate needs of affected households.

Donor's that supported the humanitarian response were UNICEF, WFP, UNOCHA (Emergency Response Fund), IrishAid, Jersey Overseas Aid Commission (JOAC), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA).

ONGOING NEEDS

Plan International Myanmar's initial WASH, food distribution, NFI, education, and child protection humanitarian assistance was widely described by focus group respondents as life-saving. Participants frequently cited their lack of food and water after the floods and said that the death toll would have been much higher without Plan International's assistance. Six months following the floods, all response activities have now finished.

Plan International Myanmar was present in Minbya prior to the flooding, and is working to respond to ongoing needs of flood affected communities. Activities have already started with cash-for-work projects and further pond rehabilitation. Further activities are being planned in education, child protection, livelihoods, and seeking to improve the sanitation situation in target communities. The transition phase therefore will serve as a crucial period when communities will not only be supported in the recovery process, but also focus on ensuring that girls, boys and their families are better prepared and more resilient to future floods.



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