

Save the Children's Emergency Response for Children and Families Affected by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar

One Year Report – May 2009

Submitted to:



Save the Children supplied the building materials for this "safer school" in Pein Nae Chaung village and trained villagers to build safer structures which will provide greater protection from storms. Photo courtesy of Tina Salisbury

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The devastating cyclone that ravaged Myanmar on May 2–3, 2008, caused human loss and suffering on a scale previously unseen in that nation. Nearly 140,000 people were either killed or reported missing, and 2.4 million people were severely affected. In the initial weeks following the storm, some 260,000 people were residing in temporary settlements throughout the Irrawaddy Delta region. Save the Children's longstanding presence in Myanmar enabled us to mobilize resources and respond within hours of the storm with lifesaving humanitarian relief.

In the months following Cyclone Nargis, Save the Children, the largest international aid agency currently responding in Myanmar, was able to mount one of its largest emergency responses in its history. ***In the year following the disaster, the agency has assisted over 600,000 people, half of them children, who were most affected by the storm.***

With the generous support of our donors, Save the Children has:

- Helped 137,000 children get back into school;
- Supported 40,000 families with cash grants to restart their livelihoods;
- Provided 60,000 people with drinking water through the height of the dry season;
- Reached close to 200,000 people through our water, sanitation and hygiene activities and distributions;
- Set up 165 safe play areas, reaching more than 35,000 children;
- Distributed school supplies and helped improve education for more than 140,000 children, including helping to build 400 temporary schools;
- Established over 100 child-protection committees in affected villages to help keep children safe;
- Registered 953 separated, unaccompanied and missing children for family tracing—92 of whom have been reunified with their families;
- Reached some 80 rural villages — home to over 120,000 people — through our health clinics, providing them with basic curative and preventive health services, as well as some maternal and reproductive health services; and
- Worked with children and their communities to plan and prepare for future disasters, strengthen schools and other structures, and map evacuation routes.

Today, Save the Children continues to support children and families in areas hardest hit by the storm — helping them recover from the crisis, restore normalcy and rebuild their lives. We are working to improve their lives and well-being through education, health, clean water, sanitation, nutrition and livelihoods programs.

This report outlines progress on Save the Children's initial relief and recovery efforts and our longer-term development work from the beginning of May 2008 through the end of April 2009.

Your support to Save the Children's cyclone-relief and recovery programs in Myanmar has been invaluable in helping us reach children, families and communities that desperately need our assistance. On behalf of the many children who have benefited from your generosity, we offer our profound gratitude.

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I. SITUATION ANALYSIS: THE STORM AND ITS AFTERMATH

When Cyclone Nargis struck the southwest coast of Myanmar on May 2–3, 2008, it destroyed homes, infrastructure, livelihoods—and put hundreds of thousands of children and families directly in harm’s way. A large number of coastal communities were damaged or destroyed across the Irrawaddy Delta, resulting in devastation to 90 to 95 percent of the surrounding area. There was near-total destruction of fields, housing, roads and bridges in areas that were directly hit by the cyclone, in addition to downed power and communication lines in a broader region. The affected areas are remote, heavily populated and difficult to access. With pervasive poverty and the majority of Delta residents landless, unemployment has risen from 16 percent to 27 percent in the affected area.

‘Before noon on May 5, 2008, we had mobilized, briefed, equipped and dispatched assessment teams to three poor townships of the city that we had heard were badly affected. By the end of the following day, we had reached 35,000 people with immediate relief supplies.’

Andrew Kirkwood, Save the Children’s Myanmar Country Director

Assessments conducted by the U.N. in 11 of the 15 worst-affected townships found that nearly 1,400 villages experienced severe loss of life and infrastructure. Nearly 543,000 acres of rice paddies were inundated with salt water, adversely affecting crop production in many farming communities.

Save the Children has worked in Myanmar since 1995 with a focus on early childhood care and development, child survival and protection. The agency, which had 500 staff members in country when the cyclone struck, launched an immediate and sustained relief effort, providing lifesaving and life-sustaining assistance to storm survivors as well as working to reunite separated children with their families, provide health services, get children back into school and support them in their emotional and psychological recovery. By June 2008, one month after the cyclone struck, we were getting aid through to the worst-affected parts of the Delta and had reached over 220,000 people, including 70,000 children with food, clean water, shelter equipment, household items and school kits.

To date Save the Children has reached over 600,000 people, including at least 300,000 children and is working in 14 of the most-affected townships.

I. THE IMPACT OF SAVE THE CHILDREN’S WORK FOR CYCLONE-AFFECTED CHILDREN

Generous gifts from our donor family, when pooled with other support, helped Save the Children address seven vital sectors of our response: health; nutrition; education; child protection; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); food security and livelihoods; shelter and non-food item distribution. This report covers accomplishment to date – from our Phase I relief and recovery efforts through October 2008 to our longer-term relief and development activities under Phase II.

Immediate Response: Shelter and the Distribution of Household Items, Food and Water

Immediately after the cyclone, teams of Save the Children staff travelled to affected areas and conducted rapid needs assessments followed by a wide-scale distribution of shelter materials, food and water to meet immediate needs.

Emergency Distributions: In the weeks following the disaster, rice was distributed as well as essential household items such as mosquito nets, blankets, oral rehydration salts, clothing, cooking utensils, additional food (beans, oil, salt, sugar, and noodles), soap, and water purification tablets.

During May and June, Save the Children procured and distributed 4.4 million pounds of rice, 79,121 pounds of pulses, 95,843 pounds of oil, 102,448

pounds of salt and 216 pounds of sugar. In total, it is estimated that over 560,000 people benefited from these food distributions.



A family receives a household kit.

Shelter: It is estimated that Cyclone Nargis destroyed or damaged approximately 450,000 homes; in addition, some 350,000 houses lost all or part of their roof. Due to large numbers of affected people and the quickly approaching monsoon season, we conducted an immediate distribution of one plastic sheet per household. Save the Children was able to secure large quantities of gift-in-kind tarpaulin sheeting from a number of donors immediately following the cyclone. Local tarpaulin was also bought in Myanmar and Asia. ***In total, we distributed enough plastic sheeting — as well as the rope and tools to help build temporary shelter — to provide shelter for some 100,000 households.***

More than half a million people — including 200,000 children — still do not have adequate shelter and are living in makeshift homes at the mercy of the elements. Save the Children is preparing to distribute emergency materials to 8,000 households before the end of May 2009. This will benefit some 40,000 vulnerable people.

During the storm, families lost not only their shelter but all of their household possessions. Through funding from our donors, Save the Children distributed household kits to affected families. The kits included shelter materials, other non-food items, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) items.

At the same time we began procuring and preparing 70,000 household kits to provide families affected by the storm. Following an initial order of 5,000 pre-packaged kits, Save the Children staff started packing the remaining 65,000 kits based upon a contents list agreed by the U.N. interagency shelter cluster coordination body. We focused on distributing these 65,000 household kits in areas where other agencies were not working or could not reach. Alongside the household kits, we also distributed additional mosquito nets, plastic sheeting and blankets to families who had only received one of each during the initial distributions in May and June.

Health

It is estimated that about half of all health facilities were damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Nargis, with the number of damaged facilities reaching up to 75 percent in some of the worst-affected areas. The potential public-health impact — including increased incidence of respiratory infections, diarrhea and measles — was a cause of great concern. Monsoon season, which began immediately after the cyclone hit, further increased the risk of malaria and dengue fever.

In light of these concerns, Save the Children provided essential healthcare services to affected communities through the establishment of 12 mobile and three stationary clinics. **The**

clinics reached some 80 rural villages, including over 120,000 people, providing them with basic curative and preventive health services, as well as some maternal and reproductive health services.

Mobile clinics based on small boats visited villages where health facilities were destroyed or unavailable on a weekly or more frequent basis. Our medical teams provided basic services for the treatment of common diseases such as respiratory infections, diarrhea, malaria and dengue fever. In addition, our emergency health program supported safe births through the distribution of clean delivery and neonatal kits to pregnant women, the presence of local birth attendants/midwives, increased access to family planning services, and the prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections. Our staff also provided essential drugs for the treatment of common childhood diseases and other common communicable diseases. Serious emergency cases were referred to township hospitals for further treatment. Save the Children supported these referrals by meeting transport and other costs. Additionally, we helped strengthen the capacity of four local referral hospitals by providing them with equipment.

Following the initial period of response, we began scaling down the mobile clinics and moved toward establishing mechanisms for community care management. Today, the emergency clinics have given way to an integrated Community Health and Nutrition Program that aims to increase survival in children under 5 by bringing healthcare closer to their homes. We are working with communities to build their capacity for treating and preventing newborn and childhood illnesses, such as pneumonia, malaria and diarrhea. This community case management approach is a sustainable and low-cost way to treat and prevent common childhood illnesses, and to reach families

Disaster Response and Resilience Learning Project

Early in the Cyclone Nargis response, many organizations faced extraordinary challenges working to quickly meet the immediate needs of hundreds of thousands of people. Despite these challenges, many organizations undertook rapid and effective response activities in difficult circumstances. Save the Children in Myanmar recognized a significant opportunity to share this knowledge across organizations working on the Cyclone Nargis response.

Save the Children initiated the Disaster Response and Resilience Learning Project to facilitate the cross-fertilization of learning related to humanitarian work, including disaster response and preparedness, accountability and international standards. The project uses an innovative approach to skill development through field-level, on-the-job learning and peer support delivered through a self-study workbook, participatory workshop, discussion group meetings and exposure visits.

Today, this interagency project targets 480 staff working in 12 cyclone-affected townships and is providing unique learning opportunities and a foundation on which to build partnerships and prepare for future disasters.

with limited access to health facilities. As part of this program, we will also be supporting the construction and rehabilitation of 10 rural health centers and providing equipment and training for the staff.

Nutrition

Malnutrition rates in the cyclone-affected area were high before the disaster due to poor food quality, diarrhea and other disease and poverty. Infant and young child feeding practices were also poor. The disaster increased existing risks to nutritional status for children, resulting in more malnourished children threatened by disease and death.



A teacher unpacks a teaching kit that includes chalk, books, pencils and other teaching material.

An assessment carried out by Save the Children soon after Cyclone Nargis found inappropriate and sometimes dangerous feeding practices for young children. In order to respond to this issue and the problem of malnutrition in cyclone-affected areas, Save the Children established two nutrition projects — one focused on improving infant feeding practices and the other on treating malnutrition in young children through supplementary feeding.

Our ***infant feeding program*** runs health education sessions with mothers and caregivers focused on appropriate feeding practices for young children. Mothers and children with feeding issues are identified during these sessions and receive skilled support. Referrals are also made to clinics, hospitals or Save the Children health teams for mothers and children in need of healthcare and for malnourished children. To date, this program has reached almost 19,000 mothers and caregivers through our health education sessions.

Our ***supplementary feeding program*** is community-based and brings services closer to home. It provides monthly nutrition screenings and ensures that moderately malnourished children are treated immediately to prevent deterioration in their situation. Almost 1,200 children with moderate acute malnutrition have been provided with supplementary feeding, and almost 100 children with severe acute malnutrition have been treated in our outpatient program.

Moving forward, we aim to improve the nutritional status and health of children under 5 through our integrated community health and nutrition program. We will focus on reducing the causes of malnutrition on many fronts, including support for good infant feeding practices and increasing access to health services and adequate food.

Education

According to assessments conducted by the Ministry of Education, 2,400 schools were affected by the cyclone, of which 75 percent were severely damaged. Rapid assessments were also conducted by Save the Children immediately after the storm to assess damage to schools (primary, middle and high), missing children and teachers, and the loss of school supplies and materials in Yangon and the Western Delta area.

Over the past year, Save the Children has helped provide access to education for cyclone-affected children. Our focus has been on repairing damaged schools, building temporary schools and providing materials for teachers and students to allow them to continue their education. ***To date, Save the Children has helped over 140,000 children return to school by repairing more than 250 schools and building over 400 temporary schools.***

Moving forward, we will continue distributing school and student kits, as well as strengthening local capacity through teacher training and support activities. We are also establishing a number of early childhood care and development (ECCD) centers to support very young children as well as to provide non-formal education activities to reach the many out-of-school children. In some areas, we are transforming some of the child-friendly spaces, established after the cyclone, into ECCD centers. To date, 46 centers have been established benefiting over 2,600 children.

As part of our child-led disaster risk reduction work, we are also targeting over 100 repaired schools for further structural improvements. This will not only ensure that they are better able to withstand future storms and cyclones, but will also serve as a community shelter in the event of future storms.

Child Protection

Assessments conducted shortly after Cyclone Nargis revealed that women and children, in particular, had become vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. Children separated from their families, child-headed households and other vulnerable children needed special support. Common signs of distress such as withdrawal, depression, anger and aggression were being reported in both children and adults.

In the months following Cyclone Nargis, Save the Children set up ***child-friendly spaces*** in temporary camps and affected villages where toys, game kits and books were made available for children. Young adults from affected communities were trained to organize learning activities and games for children as a way for them to play and overcome distressing experiences. ***We set up 165 safe play areas, reaching more than 35,000 children.*** In collaboration with communities, many of these spaces have transitioned to early childhood care and development centers or community resource centers for children in affected villages.

Access to Education in “Safer” Schools

Save the Children is working with communities across the Irrawaddy Delta to help them prepare for future natural disasters. We have encouraged children to draw maps of their village and identify high ground and the strongest buildings so that they will know where to go and what to do in case disaster strikes again.

Save the Children is also providing villagers with training and materials so that they can rebuild damaged schools to safer standards (to withstand winds of up to 125 miles per hour). They include simple construction devices like U-shaped brackets to secure the roof to the rafters, screws instead of nails and cross-beams in the roof.

Htun Aung Kyaw’s school in Pein Nae Chaung village was damaged during the cyclone. Now he and the other pupils are helping to rebuild it. “We really need a good, strong school like this one,” the 9-year-old said. “If there is another Nargis, the school will not fall down and people can come and shelter here.”

In addition to providing a safe place to seek refuge during the storm, “safer schools” also mean it is less likely that children will drop out of full-time education. The building practices also can be applied to homes and other structures in the village.

Our child protection work also includes the identification and registration of children who were separated from their parents or guardians during the cyclone. We registered 953 separated, unaccompanied and missing children for family tracing — 92 of whom have been reunified with their families. The majority of the other children are living with relatives or being taken care of by their communities, with follow-up support visits.

We have also consulted with children to help us better understand the protection issues they face, and organize awareness-raising activities on abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence against children, with parents, caregivers and community leaders. As a result, concerned adults and children have set up child protection committees. Over 100 committees have been established in affected villages and committee members are working, with Save the Children's support, to keep children safe. Action is taken to protect children when cases are reported.



Children play in a child-friendly space supported by Save the Children in Kungyangon Township.

In addition, we are working with children and adults to identify disaster risks in their villages and to develop action plans on how to mitigate them, and how to be better prepared for future emergencies.

WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)

In the first few weeks after the cyclone, Save the Children distributed large quantities of bottled water to affected children and their families. At the same time, plastic sheeting and water containers were distributed to enable people to catch and store rainwater, many communities' traditional approach to accessing drinking water. Rapid assessments confirmed that many water points had become contaminated, most latrines had been completely destroyed, and families had lost all their possessions including those that enable good sanitation and health. In response, Save the Children distributed water purification products, soap and mosquito nets, while beginning to repair, clean, rehabilitate and reconstruct ponds and wells. Three water treatments plants were also quickly employed to provide clean water.

In addition to these immediate measures, focus soon shifted to ensuring sustainable water sources and improving sanitation within communities. Wells were rehabilitated, ponds cleaned, rainwater catchment systems built and latrines constructed in communities across the Delta. We also distributed hygiene kits as part of our household kits and conducted widespread public health promotion training to encourage good hygiene practices. This was done through the recruitment and training of community health promoters, who regularly visited each household to monitor sanitation practices. ***To date we have reached over 200,000 people through our water, sanitation and hygiene activities and distributions.***

Save the Children also worked to establish over 400 community level water, sanitation and hygiene committees in villages. These committees are Save the Children's point of contact with villages and are involved in discussions regarding work plans for the village, proposed locations of water points and latrines and are the main focus for organizing village cleaning campaigns. The committee members receive hygiene and sanitation training in order to lead by example and promote good practice in their communities.



U Ashwim with his family. Save the Children gave him a livelihood grant to buy seeds and fertilizer. "If we hadn't got the seeds and fertilizer, it would have been really difficult for us to make a living."
Photo courtesy of Tina Salisbury.

The onset of the dry season has led to concern, as many ponds are still salinated even after cleaning. In response, large-scale temporary rainwater catchment and storage systems have been constructed, and Save the Children is also trying to replace households' traditional large clay storage pots that were destroyed in the cyclone. These methods alone cannot provide sufficient water, so we have also set up additional water treatment plants that have reached over 60,000 people with drinking water in the dry season.

Food Security and Livelihoods

Hundreds of villages were swept away in the cyclone, farmland was inundated with sea water and household assets —including food stocks, seeds and livestock — were destroyed. Overnight, close to a million people were left without the means to access adequate food. Early assessments concluded that small-scale farmers and landless rural households were left particularly vulnerable and in need of immediate assistance. Families were spending most of their savings or income on food or were forced to access credit to feed themselves. It has been shown that some families in times of crisis need to make difficult choices — such as cutting back on their children's education — in order to buy food. Providing food was essential, not only to prevent malnutrition, but also to protect incomes and allow people to start rebuilding their lives.

Through an emergency food distribution in May and June, Save the Children reached some 500,000 people.

Once immediate needs were met, staff began working on improving food security for children and their affected townships. We targeted the most vulnerable families and villages — 240,000 people — to receive ongoing food aid. We also distributed a supplement of fortified instant noodles to pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under 5 to address micronutrient deficiencies and to help educate and empower women on feeding practices for their children and the importance of a healthy diets. Information centers were established at food distribution points for this purpose.

One of the biggest challenges people living in the Irrawaddy Delta continue to face is being able to earn a living. Where possible, livelihoods programs have overlapped with areas receiving food aid to help ensure that families begin rebuilding their lives instead of spending money on food. Save the Children's livelihoods response began in July 2008 with a Quick Impact Project to address the immediate livelihoods needs of cyclone-affected families. ***Through this project, we distributed over \$2 million to nearly 41,000 households, benefitting some 160,000 people including 45,000 children. In addition, we reached an additional 3,500 fishing households and 2,300 non-fishing households from across 75 communities through asset-replacement projects and 4,500 households through cash-for-work projects to rebuild community infrastructure such as roads, jetties and bridges.***

Today, our livelihoods work is continuing to focus on restoring essential assets so that families can become more self-sufficient in meeting their basic needs. We will also undertake livelihoods skills training and pilot the creation of village savings and loan associations. Communities will be engaged as partners and will jointly plan and deliver services with Save the Children.

III. LOOKING AHEAD FOR CHILDREN

In the months following Cyclone Nargis, Save the Children was able to mount one of our largest emergency responses in its history. Our tireless staff have helped 140,000 children get back into school; supported 40,000 families with cash grants to restart their livelihoods; and provided 60,000 people with drinking water through the height of the dry season. In the year following Cyclone Nargis, Save the Children has assisted over 600,000 people, nearly half of them children, who were most affected by the storm.

Because the destruction was so widespread and because families had such few resources to begin with, the people of the Delta have a long road to recovery. But we intend to be with them as they struggle to rebuild their lives. Today we continue to stand by affected communities — helping them build stronger schools and homes, and empowering children to plan for the next disaster. Shelter and livelihoods remain key issues. Save the Children also is distributing food and water to tens of thousands of affected families across the Irrawaddy Delta. We are preparing to distribute additional building materials and cash grants to people living in the low-lying region.

We are advocating with donors and governments to maintain and increase their commitments. This disaster is not over just because a year has passed.

IV. CONCLUSION

Save the Children has been very effective in reaching a large number of children and adults in a timely manner during the initial and most crucial phase of the Myanmar emergency response and through the first year. Save the Children is deeply grateful to our donors who helped us to assist children and their families in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.

Annex

Min Min: One Year Later

Save the Children staff first met Min Min after Cyclone Nargis. Min Min was 6 years old and living in Kamar Kalun village, an area of Myanmar near Yangon directly hit by Cyclone Nargis. The village was badly destroyed, and there was a terrible toll: eight school children died in the storm, the school was severely damaged and Min Min's house was destroyed.



One year ago, Min Min had just survived the worst natural disaster his country had ever witnessed. All that was familiar and safe for the little boy was swept away by the wind and rain. At the time, Min Min's mother said her son was frightened by the country's monsoon season and found it difficult to speak with others. In June 2008, just one month after the disaster, Save the Children established a temporary school and a child-friendly space for Min Min and his classmates, bringing a much-needed sense of normalcy to their lives and a chance to continue their studies and look toward the future.

One year later, Min Min is a very different child. Today the energetic and curious 7-year-old now delights in seeing visitors and is engaged in his studies. "I like to draw," says Min Min. "I take books home and read with my friends."

Today, the child-friendly space has been transformed into an early childhood center led by older girls from the village trained by Save the Children. Programs at the center enable children to express themselves through playing, singing and drawing.

"Min Min is smarter and less fearful now that he plays at the center. I am glad. I want him to be educated. I want him to go to the university," says his mother. Min Min's parents have also benefited from Save the Children's livelihoods programs, receiving a piglet to raise and sell for profit. His father is a day laborer and his mother grows vegetables, which do not bring in income sufficient for the family.

"We are not getting a good price for our vegetables as the prices dropped. And my husband's daily income is not stable," says Min Min's mother. "Life is not yet back to normal, but the pig will help."