

Metta Nargis Emergency Response, Weekly Update; 27th May, 2008

Greetings again from Metta Development Foundation! We continue to remain extremely grateful and humbled by the outpour of support from all of you, our partners here in Myanmar and around the world. We have made much encouraging progress on the ground but we still have a long way to go. We know that your continuous support and guidance will enable us to complete this journey with our cyclone affected communities from total devastation to collective healing and recovery.

Its been 3 weeks since cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar, causing casualty to hundreds and thousands of people living on the Ayeyarwaddy delta and displacing millions of people from their homes and land. The latest available data on the magnitude of the casualty indicates that 77,738 people have died, 55,917 still missing and 2.4 million have been affected by the cyclone¹.

Since day-one of the cyclone, Metta Development Foundation has been involved in providing immediate relief to the affected communities in all the four worst hit districts of Ayeyarwaddy division. It may be noted that Metta has been managing one of the biggest Tsunami relief programs along those areas for over 4 years, and therefore, has a huge pool of extremely committed staff and volunteers based in these areas, who are now facilitating and spearheading all the relief programs in the region.

Our relief service is focused on responding to urgent needs such as food, clean and safe water, hygiene and sanitation, temporary shelter, medical care, child care programs including building play space for children in the camps and providing support for burials and memorial ceremonies. This week, our network has reached 76,000 number of affected people, most whom are women, children and minors. We are also committed to building and restoring the basic infrastructures such as roads and bridges which are part of the critical needs on the ground.

Breaking News.....

Metta Yangon team, including the Programme Director, visited many of the worst affected areas last week, and saw that communities are now moving very rapidly from Relief to Reconstruction phase. So, the most urgent need on the ground at the moment is to provide house-building materials, farming tools, house-hold utilities and support for reconstructions of schools for children. Metta's approach all along has been to work directly with the affected communities and in close collaboration with local leaders and our main responsibility is to facilitate a smooth and easy transition into the reconstruction stage.

On the ground, we need to ensure that ponds and wells are cleared-off from contamination and thereby reducing the risk of infections and diseases; that proper nutrition and food supply is available for the most vulnerable groups, especially children; and that families are empowered with tools and resources to reconstruct their homes and also towards regaining and sustaining their livelihood. We are aware that when communities are mobilized and empowered to rebuild their lives, they are in better condition to recover from the impact of this most horrendous cyclone.

One significant development during this reporting period has been that Metta has started to engage in another new township called "Maw-la-myaing-kyun" which was not initially identified as a critical area due to its isolation from the rest of the affected areas. Metta had to move in there with relief services as it was found that no relief programs has reached them yet even after 3 weeks of the cyclone. We are still in the process of assessing the situation there but there is enough indication that it is also critically affected by the cyclone like the rest of the delta region. While assessing the situation, the team is able to provide relief materials and mobilize communities for rebuilding initiatives.

¹ Information from Office for coordination of humanitarian affairs, 26th May, 2008

The estimated number of affected communities of our focused-areas as indicated earlier in the reports remains the same:

Ma-u-bin District	3,870	Ma-u-bin Township
Myaungmya District	49,089	Laputta Township and Kaing Taung Island
	12,767	Myaungmya Township
Pathein District	39,029	Pyin-kha-yai Island ² (Ngaputaw Township)
	5,218	Pathein Township
Pyapon District	1,200	Bogalay Township
	1,500	Dedaye Township
	2,100	Pyapon Township
	114,773	TOTAL

Some significant achievements over the last one week:

1. Metta's leading coordinator on the ground was elected by the local people to be the chair of the committee for relief work in 13 villages in Pyin-hka-yai Island of Ngaputaw Township which will work in collaboration with all agencies and Government programs. It is hugely encouraging to see that our team is providing leadership in communities and taking responsibility to facilitate all relief programs and not just doing Metta's activities.
2. Metta is taking the lead in restoring water storage systems and clearing of ponds and wells in villages where people have started to return. Part of our support for this is providing pumps, generators and water storage equipments.
3. Nearly two third of the people are beginning to return to their original land, even despite having no houses, fields, or anything to return to. This meant that we are now rapidly moving towards reconstruction. Metta is providing house-building materials, utilities, farming equipments and even repairing roads and bridges. This activity need to rapidly scale up as the number of returnees is growing in huge numbers every day. Metta volunteers are accompanying people to their villages in order to asses their most urgent needs and plan with them for the reconstruction phase.
4. Metta is reaching out to the most isolated areas at the lower most part of the delta, where relief services are scarce and human resource limited. Our main focus has been to respond to the ground needs urgently and quickly so that vulnerability or further risk is reduced and greater involvement of affected communities in the reconstruction program is ensured.
5. Metta is now initiating 'food for work' activities, which means that communities are mobilized to repair, rebuild and restore the infrastructures such roads, wells, schools etc and in doing so, they receive 3 meals a day.
6. The coordination meeting of relief agencies at Myaungmya township is often held at the Metta office, which indicates that there is positive networking and coordination amongst all players of relief work.
7. Meeting for relief camp leaders and local stakeholders are often facilitated by Metta and those meetings are held in Metta coordination office. And Metta provides supports for their initiatives and ideas with the required resources.
8. Referrals for basic services such as food rations, medicines, utilities etc are often made to Metta by the village heads and leaders, and so many unexpected groups of people representing villages which are not being covered by other agencies come to Metta for help.

² Though the island is under Pathein District, the Metta staff at Myaungmya district assists Pyin-kha-yai because they have better proximal access.

9. Due to its popularity with the communities, Metta is able to provide assistance in information gathering and assessment of the situations to other external agencies who need such information in order to effectively design and implement their programs
10. We are facilitating and organizing a 'memorial ceremony' for the staff, volunteers and community members we lost during the Cyclone Nargis. This is part of an ongoing relief and rehabilitation work.
11. There is a significant healthy relationship between Metta and authorities at the divisional level, district level, township level and villages level and local commanders who are in charge of relief services for particular areas

Key challenges and limitations:

1. Due to poor road and transportation connectivity, materials and goods do not arrive on time to the affected areas whereby causing inconveniences to the field team as well as those who need those materials urgently
2. Renting of cars and motor boats are scarce and often the ones available are in bad conditions, and so much time is wasted on making logistical arrangements for relief services to reach the people
3. No uniform information gathering and data processing methodologies are yet to be put in place and therefore gathering data and compiling them in proper formats have been a great challenge. In responding to this challenge, a two days of intensive discussions and meetings between Metta staff in Yangon and technical resource persons from supporting agencies as well as with representatives from affected communities, have led to the development of various reporting formats and documentation procedures and hence, a proper information will soon be available
4. There is an indication that there is some overlapping of activities by different agencies and hence, proper coordination and information sharing need to be strengthened amongst supporting agencies. One villager received a set of taroline from Metta and another from save the children, and he used one as a roof and the other to cover the walls of the house. This indicates that we are responding to a need and that sometime, there may be overlapping of services.
5. Continuous rainfall is causing huge problems in scaling relief services and in getting relief services to reach the people.
6. One of the biggest challenge is that affected communities are moving very fast towards rebuilding of their homes and villages and with our limited human resource as well as material resources, we are struggling to keep pace with them. One such example is that those affected communities who were temporarily sheltered in school building have to be quickly relocated as the schools are beginning to reopen and so these people have to quickly vacate the school and return to their villages.
7. The needs of affected communities do not remain static. It keeps changing based on their circumstances, and therefore, we are constantly challenged to remain flexible and respond to needs rather than to stick to our planned programs.
8. Every supporting agencies or donors have certain criteria and needs and it has been a challenge to respond to their required procedures and systems. We are grateful that many have been very flexible with us and provided us the opportunity to use their support in facilitating the relief services based on the ground needs and situations. One of our biggest limitation this time has been our inability to provide separate report for each agency. We will however provide a comprehensive report with detail statement of accounts to all supporting agencies and well wishers.

Plans for next phase:

1. Provide tools and materials for rebuilding of houses
2. Clear contamination of water in wells and ponds
3. Repair and rebuild schools and classrooms
4. Repair roads and bridges for easy transportation of materials and returnees to the villages
5. Continue to provide food and utilities until people are able to grow their own crops again

6. Provide rain coats/cover for people who will be assisting in rebuilding of houses and schools
7. Provide vaccination to all field staff with the help of agencies who have vaccination services
8. Provide tools for farming, fishing and any other equipments needed for regaining livelihood support
9. Provide expertise and technical support in rebuilding houses in cyclone prone areas by sending our engineers to work with the villages
10. Provide rain water storage materials for people who have resettled in their own homes and those in camps and also in schools
11. Provide capacity building support and motivational workshops and programs for field staff
12. Provide uniform reporting formats and data collection tools to all staff and volunteers
13. Prepare a comprehensive one month Progress Report and statement of accounts
14. Continue to work on resource mobilization and networking with external agencies and well wishers
15. Continue and strengthened the ongoing Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs in the affected areas.

Conclusion:

This will be the last regular weekly update from the Metta Nargis Response Program. However, whenever there is any breaking news or drastic changes of plans and programs on the ground, a quick update will be developed and delivered to all partners.

A monthly report will soon follow with detail activity report as well as proper updates with key outputs and outcomes. After this two months emergency relief program, we will be able to assess where this initiative need to move towards and based on the assessment, we will develop a reconstruction and rehabilitation plan which will cover the long-term goals and objectives of this initiative. Keeping in mind the need to develop an evidence-based, needs-based and community led program, we will soon recruit a consultant to provide the technical support and trainings to the field team which will enable Metta to develop a participatory proposal for a community led rehabilitation program.

We are also in need of a technical-consultant with skills and experiences of designing houses and shelters in cyclone prone areas. This person may be based in Yangon but will provide technical assistance and expertise to our local engineers who will be working with the communities in the reconstruction sites.

We will also recruit and assign one independent accountant who will work solely on the Nargis project and will be responsible for managing the Nargis project financial systems. From the experiences so far we are aware that our proposed budget lines are likely to change and that we will need flexibility from our supporting agencies in order to enable us to respond to the needs on the ground effectively.

We are confident that our well wishers and supporting agencies will continue to extend their most valuable help and support towards this initiate. We remain extremely grateful for **all** your support and solidarity with us at this difficult time.

This report is compiled by Seng Pan and Neichu