



# MYANMAR

## CYCLONE NARGIS OPENS UP BIG NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR PEOPLE

The community-driven development process in Myanmar - one of Asia's poorest countries - got a very big boost through the intense process of relief and rehabilitation which took place after Cyclone Nargis devastated the country in May 2008, killing 140,000 people and affecting a majority of the country's already-poor, already-traumatized population. The storm triggered all kinds of changes and opened up new development possibilities in this very difficult country. Because the calamity was so great, and because it affected so much of the country, government authorities weren't able to do enough and were finally obliged to open up the country to assistance from international agencies, albeit slowly and stubbornly. Since the storm in 2008 and the big political changes that followed in 2011, Myanmar has been opening up to the world at an astonishing speed. Investors are flocking in to exploit the country's vast natural resources and cheap labor, and market forces are making land prices soar. Evictions are increasing, and problems of urban and rural landlessness are clearly going to get worse before they get better. At the same time, consultants and development agencies of all sorts are flooding into Asia's newest poverty hotspot. Most of the projects these agencies develop are following the old top-down, supply-driven model, in which poor communities are passive receivers of someone else's idea of what they need.

In this context, the ACCA-supported projects here could not be more vital or more timely for Myanmar, for they show how much poor communities can do to solve their own problems of poverty, land, housing and livelihood, when they are given a little space, and access to very modest resources, to plan and carry out their own solutions, as communities. The solutions these communities are showing are still small in scale, but they have several elements in common and show a new light.

## ACCA in MYANMAR :

### PROJECT CITIES (total 8)

- Kaw Hmu Township
- Kunchankone Township
- Dedaye Township
- North Ukkalapa Township, Yangon
- Hlaing Tar Yar Township, Yangon
- Htantabin Township, Yangon
- Myayenanda Township, Mandalay
- 5 more townships in Mandalay

### SMALL PROJECTS

Small projects approved : 42  
 In number of cities : 8  
 Total budget approved : \$119,500

### BIG HOUSING PROJECTS

Big projects approved : 10  
 In number of cities : 8  
 Total budget approved : \$391,200

### SAVINGS (only in 8 ACCA cities)

Savings groups : 113  
 Savings members : 3,826  
 Total savings : \$262,231

### CITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

CDFs active in : 4 cities  
 Total capital in CDFs: \$291,642

- from ACCA \$256,206 (88%)
- from coms. \$34,736 (12%)
- from gov. 0 (0%)
- from others \$700 (0%)

### IMPLEMENTING GROUPS

The ACCA projects are being implemented by three groups: Aungzabu Foundation (Kaw Hmu and Myayenanda), Bedar Development Trust (Dedaye) and Women for the World (Kunchankone, Mandalay and Yangon).

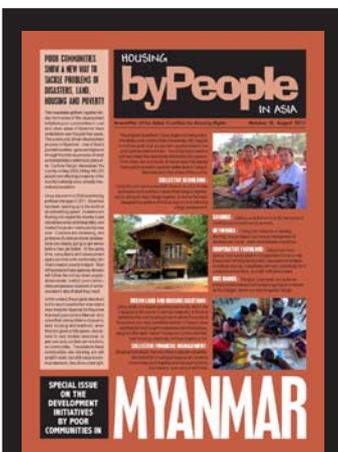
## CYCLONE NARGIS: Three support groups use ACCA support to facilitate a new kind of development process that is led by people, instead of by NGOs or aid agencies

In the weeks before the foreign aid organizations were allowed in, the greatest source of help and support to cyclone victims came from committed groups of Burmese people themselves, and from monks in the networks of local Buddhist temples around the country who gave shelter to people who'd lost their homes, helped provide whatever food and health assistance they could, and organized cremation ceremonies for the dead. The first three ACCA projects in Myanmar were implemented by three small, local groups who all first became active in the post-cyclone relief activities and worked in three badly-hit townships:

**1 KAW HMU TOWNSHIP:** Here, a network of 18 villages organized themselves around the Aung Zabu Buddhist Monastery, with support from Abu and the Aung Zabu Foundation. They used ACCA funds to rebuild their totally destroyed villages. They started by using the ACCA big project funds to repair and rebuild some 750 houses within less than a year, through an extraordinary collective construction process that was managed entirely by the village savings groups. They also used the small project funds (and some additional disaster support) to repair roads and drains, rebuild community halls, set up rice banks, plant trees, restore wells and water ponds and rebuild bridges that had been washed away in the cyclone. They also set up a special fund for education and the elderly, and planted vegetable gardens, as part of a longer-term sustainable development program.

**2 KUNCHANKONE TOWNSHIP:** The Yangon-based NGO Women for the World (WFW) used ACCA support to help another network of 15 cyclone-devastated villages to rehabilitate their houses, farms and communal facilities and build new self-support systems in the process. Besides setting up women's savings groups in all the villages, establishing rice banks (and a "cow bank" in one village also) and rebuilding destroyed houses, roads and bridges, they used ACCA project funds to build children's libraries and set up special revolving loan funds to support experimental farming cooperatives for landless families (rural landlessness is a huge problem in Myanmar) that are managed by the whole village and that are testing mixed cropping and organic farming techniques as an alternative to the conventional chemical farming practices which have bankrupted so many farmers.

**3 DEDAYE TOWNSHIP:** Another small local NGO, the Bedar Rural Development Program (BRD) worked with yet another network of 4 cyclone-affected villages in the Nay Yaung Kar region of Dedaye Township, which is just south of Kunchankone Township, on the Andaman Sea, to rebuild houses, restore damaged village infrastructure and revive these village's livelihoods and self-reliance.



The ACCA process in Myanmar is the subject of a special 28-page issue of the ACHR newsletter, "Housing by People in Asia", which can be downloaded from the ACHR website.

# Post-cyclone HOUSING:

**ACCA big project funds in three townships allowed cyclone-hit villages to say no to cookie-cutter housing give-aways and to rebuild their own houses together, in their own ways . . .**

Some 450,000 houses in the Ayeyarwady delta were totally destroyed by Cyclone Nargis, and another 350,000 were badly damaged. Eventually, about 60 overseas NGOs, aid agencies and volunteer groups were officially allowed into Myanmar to work on the Nargis rehabilitation, and each group was assigned a strictly-demarcated area by the government, to avoid overlap. Initially, most of these organizations focused on emergency relief support - food, medicines, drinking water and such things. But later on, it became clear that housing was a serious need for the survivors, especially as they faced the onset of the monsoon rains in June.

So they began building as many houses as possible, as fast as possible. Most of these international organizations came with their own standardized house models, costing between \$500 and \$1,000, which were reproduced by the hundreds, in long straight rows, and *delivered* to the affected people. Although they were simple and small, a lot of attention was paid to the technical specifications of these houses and how the construction was managed, to maintain a high standard of quality and to make the houses strong enough to withstand another typhoon. But a year after the storm, of the 750,000 houses that needed to be rebuilt or repaired, these 60 agencies had been able to build only about 14,000 houses - *just 2% of the actual need*. In this way, high technical standards and institutional limitations of conventional "housing delivery" approach trumped the real scale of need, and thousands continued to live under scraps of tarp and palm thatch.



**ALTERNATIVE :** Let the people rebuild their own houses and manage the money. In the ACCA-supported housing projects in Kaw Hmu and Kunchankone Townships, the people sat together and planned their own houses. With very modest grants from ACCA, the villagers in these two townships were able to repair and reconstruct over 1,000 houses - all of them beautiful, all different and full of whimsy - for the same amount the big relief agencies could build less than 100 houses. Some houses needed only a little bit of repair, while others had to be totally rebuilt, but the important thing was that the villagers did the reconstruction *together*. So the house reconstruction wasn't a charity hand-out, but became a way by which these traumatized communities could rebuild their own systems of self-reliance after the cyclone.

**EXAMPLE : 19 villages rebuild and repair 750 houses in Kaw Hmu Township:** There were too many damaged houses in the 19 villages in the Kaw Hmu network for the limited support from ACCA, and too many to just hand-pick a few beneficiaries. So all 19 village committees began by sitting down together and looking at the whole scale of housing needs, prioritizing who needs what most urgently, and then agreeing as a whole village about who would get what house construction support. For both house repairs and new house construction, the people did all the work themselves, working in teams rather than individually, and they bought all the materials collectively. The whole process was managed by village committees. By using extremely simple and quickly-constructed house types they developed themselves, and by using local materials of bamboo, timber and thatch, they were able to reduce the cost of total house reconstruction to just \$100 to \$300 per house, and house repairs to as little as \$30 - \$50 per house. Through all this working together and economizing, and by merging the \$40,000 big project support from ACCA with another \$60,000 grant from Selavip, they were finally able to rebuild 750 houses, in less than six months.

## House Rebuilding

| KAW HMU TOWNSHIP (in 19 villages)    |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| • Budget from ACCA                   | \$ 40,000  |
| • Budget from community              | \$ 1,000   |
| • Budget from other donors           | \$ 60,000  |
| • Number of houses rebuilt           | 750 houses |
| KUNCHANKONE TOWNSHIP (in 6 villages) |            |
| • Budget from ACCA                   | \$ 40,000  |
| • Budget from community              | \$ 3,600   |
| • Budget from other donors           | \$ 68,000  |
| • Number of houses rebuilt           | 286 houses |
| DEDAYE TOWNSHIP (in 4 villages)      |            |
| • Budget from ACCA                   | \$ 35,200  |
| • Budget from community              | \$ 9,400   |
| • Number of houses rebuilt           | 20 houses  |



▲ **\$600** Built by Habitat for Humanity



▲ **\$220** Built by people (Kaw Hmu)



▲ **\$800** Built by Save the Children



▲ **\$833** Built by people (Kunchankone)

## Who builds houses better, cheaper and faster?

In a country where most rural people have always lived in wood and bamboo houses they designed, built, repaired and expanded themselves, it does seem a little crazy to make the affected people wait around for a foreign engineer and a contractor to build them a house that's really not that much different than the ones they build for themselves. But that's what happened, and nobody seemed to find it odd that this great army of accomplished Burmese house designers and house builders was left to be idle spectators in the Nargis reconstruction process. Many of the projects did include a "participation" component in their housing programs, while others organized training workshops for villagers on cyclone-resistant construction techniques or experimented with getting villagers to manufacture housing components to speed up construction on the site. But these efforts fell short of actually allowing people to organize the building themselves, and the pace of delivery continued to be slow. Compare that to the process where community people got the funds and rebuilt their own houses faster, better and cheaper.

## Expanding the same community-driven model from Cyclone Nargis to **YANGON** :

Most visitors to Yangon see only a nice clean, colonial city, with wide, tree-lined streets, grand old buildings, lakes and gilded pagodas. But outside that picturesque center lie vast swaths of informal settlements, where the city's poor live in bamboo shacks without basic services, on swampy, low-lying land under a patchwork of tenure conditions ranging from insecure renters to squatters.

In the 70s and 80s, the government evicted thousands from the city center and relocated them to these peripheral areas, but disasters, conflicts and sheer poverty in other parts of the country have pushed thousands more poor migrants into Yangon, looking for jobs, opportunities and a new life. Nobody knows how many poor families live in Yangon and nobody's surveyed them yet: the city government estimates that 10% of the city's 6 million inhabitants are squatters, but WFW puts the number at 40%.

The three ACCA projects in Yangon (all supported by WFW) are focusing on these peripheral areas of the city, where they are helping to set up women's savings groups, survey and map their settlements, search for possible land for housing and implement several small infrastructure upgrading projects to pave roads, lay drainage lines and develop communal water supply systems. But the most striking breakthroughs in Yangon have been in the three big ACCA housing projects that have been implemented so far - all completely finished now.

**"All of us have come from a very, very bad situation, and now we have secure land and simple, basic houses that we can all afford - even the poorest squatters - without going into heavy debt. The houses aren't very fancy, but houses are easy to improve. For us, the meaning of a house is ownership and stability and security. Before, we all squatted on someone else's land or rented rooms alone. We didn't know each other, and all our problems we dealt with alone. Now we all stay together here like a family and help each other in so many ways. Our lives have totally changed in three years."**

*(Daw Naing, Htantabin Township savings group leader)*



*"When we are squatting or renting a tiny room, we're never free, we worry about everything. But now we ourselves are the landlord and the tenant both. We set the rules. It's our house and land. Nobody can evict us."*



## URBAN HOUSING :

**ACCA supports the country's first three community-planned, community-built and collectively-owned urban poor housing solutions for poor squatters in Yangon . . .**

### **1 FIRST PROJECT in Hlaing Tharyar Township, Yangon (20 houses)**

All of the women in the savings group in Ale Yaw Ward were squatters and all were fed up with having their houses demolished again and again and having to keep moving and rebuilding. So they began searching for land and found a small piece of agricultural land nearby, which they negotiated to buy cheaply, with a loan from their new city fund. It was enough for 20 families. Then, with help from the community architects and WFW, the women designed their new community's layout plan and simple, inexpensive houses which they could build with a loan of 700,000 Kyat (\$833). It took just three months to build the houses and put in pathways and toilets with shared septic tanks - and the people did everything.



### **2 SECOND PROJECT in North Okkalapa Township, Yangon (30 houses)**

Inspired by the first housing project, the savings members in Htawinbe Ward began talking about housing too, and started looking for cheap land. Despite fast-rising prices, the women found and bought a 20,000 square feet of agricultural land for 11 million Kyat (\$13,095), with a loan from the city fund. With help from the community architects, they organized a workshop to plan the layout of their new community and design simple houses they could all afford, within the small housing loan of 700,000 Kyat (\$833). The plan they developed includes 30 house plots (14 x 30 feet) arranged in clusters of six houses facing onto small side lanes. Each house has a toilet behind the house, with three houses sharing a common septic tank.



### **3 THIRD PROJECT in Yalay Ward, Htantabin Township, Yangon (50 houses)**

The women decided to focus their third project on accommodating savings members with the most serious housing problems: roadside squatters who couldn't even afford to rent rooms. After months of searching, the women found and bought a piece of low-lying paddy land for 17 million Kyat (\$20,238). With help from some local architects, the women developed a simple grid layout plan with 50 plots and space for a community center and playground. To reduce the loan burden on these very poor families, they decided to use bamboo initially, to make the houses as cheap as possible. The community network in Kunchankone Township sold them the bamboo cheaply and also sent a team of skilled carpenters to help build.



# The community-driven process expands next to the even more difficult city of **MANDALAY**

**Two ACCA projects in Myanmar's second largest city are helping poor squatters to save, network and start exploring solutions to looming evictions . . .**

Problems of soaring land prices, break-neck development and increasing evictions are bad in Yangon, but many believe they are worse in Mandalay, the country's second largest city. Though smaller and less dense than Yangon, the city has extremely high land prices, partly because of the heavy investment from China in this important trading city, which is right at the geographical center of Myanmar - just a few hundred kilometers from the Chinese, Thai, Indian and Bangladeshi borders. Mandalay was built in the 19th Century by Burma's last king, right before the British took over. Mandalay was to be the center of the country's courtly and religious life, and the palaces and gilded pagodas in their hundreds are all still there.

But Mandalay is now a city full of squatters. Most are migrants from impoverished rural areas or refugees from conflict-wracked or disaster-hit regions, who settle in squatter settlements along roads, rivers, canals and on empty land in the fringe areas of the city. Nobody knows who owns a lot of the land these poor families occupy, but people are increasingly showing up and claiming to own the land - sometimes decades later. And there are lots of evictions happening - most with the full support of the government. As in Yangon, there are no government departments or programs to support the poor.

But with support from ACCA, women's savings groups have started and are growing fast in two wards of Chanmyathazi Township, the poorest and most squatter-rich of the city's seven townships. With support from WFW and the borrowed wisdom of the women's savings groups in Yangon, the embattled squatter communities in Mandalay have been very busy trying to figure out how to respond to the growing eviction crisis. The situation they find themselves is one most other Asian cities faced decades ago, but because this kind of urban "development" has come so recently to Myanmar, the urban poor are experiencing this sudden assault by market forces as a very rude awakening.



## **NATIONAL WORKSHOP** showcases people-managed development

Community-managed development and women's savings are still new concepts in Myanmar. While word is spreading fast around communities, these breakthrough cyclone reconstruction and urban housing initiatives are not so well known among government, development agencies, politicians, the press, and the public. So the women's savings network and WFW decided to organize a big national meeting, to showcase these projects and toot the horn for community-led development. The one-day workshop, "Support for secure affordable housing and strong communities in Myanmar," was held on May 4, 2013, at the gilt-encrusted Karaweik Palace in Yangon. The meeting brought together some 100 people, including local government officials, members of parliament, representatives from development agencies, the press, Burmese professionals and community leaders from around the country, as well as 20 international participants from 7 other countries.

## Understanding the problems and exploring solutions with **MAPPING**



In Yangon, the women's savings groups were able to buy up three pieces of inexpensive peripheral land while prices were still low and develop three small housing projects, with help from WFW and ACCA. But as land prices have skyrocketed - sometimes increasing by ten times in just three years! - that kind of land-buying-by-people in Yangon and Mandalay has quickly become an impossible dream. So if the poor can no longer afford to buy any urban land, and aren't being allowed to stay on the public or unclear land they already occupy, what to do? Fortunately, these communities are not struggling in isolation, but have many friends in the ACHR network who have faced similar eviction situations and developed tools which can help to strengthen themselves, develop their own alternatives to eviction and negotiate for those solutions with the authorities. And one of the most powerful of those tools is citywide survey and mapping: locating where the squatters are, finding out who owns the land they occupy and whether that land can be negotiated for or not, and identifying other possible land for housing, where relocation is necessary.

The women's savings groups in Mandalay had begun to do a little settlement surveying, but their efforts got a big boost in March 2014, when WFW and the Thai community architect Chawanad Luansang (from CAN) organized a week-long workshop in community mapping and citywide upgrading planning, concentrating on the most densely-settled squatter area in the city: Tuntone Ward. After surveying and mapping all the squatters in that ward, they undertook a ward-wide planning exercise to develop schematic housing plans which would allow everyone in the ward to stay and get secure land - some through on-site redevelopment of existing riverside squatter settlements, and some through nearby relocation to highly dense new housing layouts within the ward.

As part of the planning, they developed a very efficient alternative layout plan in one 9.2 acre block of land which is understood to be government land, with 328 house plots (of about 65m<sup>2</sup> each) arranged in clusters around small shared open spaces. The next step is to get the government to buy into this idea and provide the land - either free or on some nominal long-term lease to the communities. Which of course will not be easy. But armed with a clear alternative plan and strategy, with a more citywide vision, the communities are now in a much stronger position to negotiate the next step.

