

Reducing Vulnerabilities, Building Skills and Bolstering Local Capacities for Sustainable Peace in Myanmar

Myanmar | Duration: June 2022 - July 2024 | Implementing partners: Not disclosed

The Challenge

The western region of Myanmar is highly impacted by poverty and conflict. Many townships have experienced protracted internal displacement, ethnic and religious conflicts, and clashes between various armed forces. Furthermore, rural populations are vulnerable to the tropical monsoon climate, with heavy rainfall for up to seven months annually, leading to flooding, cyclones, crop losses, and increased food insecurity. Both insecurity and climate-related factors drive displacement, which has also affected social cohesion between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members.

The Solution

This project developed an innovative friendship-center approach to reinforce peace in adaptive humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus programming. The multi-ethnic community centers were co-designed and managed by Rohingya, Rakhine, and other minority community members to serve their communities. These centers functioned as safe spaces for dialogue and community building, while also serving as bases for delivering integrated responses focusing on livelihoods, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction for IDPs and host communities.

The project utilized the Climate Adaptation Fund for Emergencies (CAFE) model for microgrants, a fund facility at the local level empowering communities to respond to natural disasters and climate change and build resilience. The initiative also collaborated with research partners to identify best practices, challenges, and opportunities for social cohesion, community economic development, and climate change resilience.

What Made This a Promising Practice?

The friendship-center approach proved effective in reinforcing the peace component in adaptive HDP nexus programming. These multi-ethnic community centers contributed to intercommunal and host-IDP collaboration, economic prosperity, and resilience building. The project fostered community relationships through multiple channels: safe spaces, sustained dialogue, joint village committees, leadership training, vocational training, agricultural initiatives, disaster management committees, and disaster risk reduction training.

The CAFE model for microgrants empowered communities to respond independently to natural disasters and climate change. This was a scale-up of an existing innovation previously tested in four villages and proved successful in raising awareness of climate changes while providing practical support for adaptation.

The practice also demonstrated innovative collaboration with a research actor in an equitable partnership instead of using a sub-granting modality. This approach was mutually beneficial as the research partner strengthened project outcomes through in-depth exploration of challenges and opportunities, while gaining access to research participants and necessary personnel through the implementing NGOs.

The Response

The project served as an excellent case study on nexus programming and the limitations of a development approach during worsening humanitarian conditions. Project savings were used for emergency distributions, and some activities were brought forward to respond to Cyclone Mocha. The deteriorating situation in the country, along with insecurity and restricted access, sometimes prevented participants from attending activities as their focus shifted to immediate food security needs.

Research findings were not as well integrated into project implementation as anticipated, likely due to the challenging operating environment. A lesson learned was that a workshop with implementing partners earlier in the project would have been useful to discuss the benefits of research and explore ways to better apply findings.

Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated the importance of including contingency budgets for humanitarian needs in development projects and ensuring programming flexibility through strong partnerships between funding sources and implementing partners. For future programming, providing learning and recreational materials could reinforce the centrality of friendship centers in communities and strengthen their activities.

The CAFE grants highlighted the value of indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable environmental practices and climate adaptation strategies. Long-term, trust-based relationships with indigenous communities proved important for increasing public awareness of environmental issues and climate change, which in turn drove more substantial mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Key Results

Friendship Centers Development:

- Established multi-ethnic community centers co-designed and managed by diverse community members
- Created safe spaces for ongoing dialogue and community building across ethnic lines
- Equipped selected centers to serve as emergency shelters with bunkers for protection during airstrikes, flooding, or cyclones

Climate Adaptation and Resilience:

- Implemented the CAFE microgrant model for climate adaptation and disaster response
- Raised awareness about climate change among community members
- Supported community-led initiatives to address environmental challenges

Research and Knowledge Building:

- Collaborated with research partners to study social cohesion dynamics
- Trained local community members and NGO implementers in research skills
- Documented best practices for enhancing community development and climate change mitigation



LiD Lives in Dignity GRANT FACILITY

The Lives in Dignity (LiD) Grant Facility was an EU-funded initiative managed by UNOPS that promoted development-oriented approaches in forced displacement settings. With €24 million allocated between 2021–2025, the Facility supported 14 innovative, multi-stakeholder projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its flexible funding model empowered local actors, strengthened partnerships, and fostered integrated programming across five key areas: livelihoods, service delivery, housing and spatial planning, protection, and disaster- and climate-related mobility. The Facility prioritized community-led solutions, localization, and social cohesion, advancing sustainable development for both displaced populations and host communities. **Find out more at** https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/lives-dignity-grant-facility_en