

Regional WASH and Shelter mission in Myanmar from 11 to 21 Nov. 2015 report

The newly hired Regional – Asia - WASH and Shelter Technical assistant has been based in Islamabad, Pakistan, since 21 September 2015. Part of this first mission to Myanmar, 2 days were planned in Bangkok on 9 and 18 November to meet with the team based there.

Late on 9 November, Nicolas, HoO Yangon, informed us that the Travel authorization for Rakhine was not gotten yet and he then advised to postpone the trip by one day.

The Travel authorization will not be received until 17 November – initial date the Technical assistant was planned to leave Myanmar; then, an extension of mission was proposed and agreed, the flights, hotel bookings were modified.

Getting the Travel authorization takes more or less time, up to several weeks. Then, as much as possible, ask for it as early as possible and plan mission when its granting is confirmed – probably, this mission just after the presidential election was not the best timing for administrative facilitation. Additionally, getting the Myanmar visa from the Islamabad embassy is also difficult and lengthy.

Wed. 11 Nov. 2015

Meeting at UNHCR office with

Edward Benson

National Shelter/NFI/CCCM Cluster Coordinator, Myanmar

UNHCR Myanmar

and Olivier Le Guillou

National Wash Cluster Coordinator

Yangon, Myanmar

ECHO present: Sai, Steve and Luc

Presentation by the 2 National Cluster Coordinators of the Myanmar context with 2 different operations in Rakhine and Kachin – Shan. The cluster got activated in January 2013. Rakhine was described by Edward as the ‘perfect storm’, with segregation – discrimination and involvement questioned – question of complicity. Structures are temporary not permanent, before or until return. Housing funding is 47 % by government, 25 % by UNHCR, the about last 25 % by other INGOs.

The humanitarian community was attacked in 2014.

The will is to ‘depopularize’ camps.

The government is in charge.

Cash transfer got introduced for housing; its use is monitored closely and seems quite successful so far.

Evolution of concept from shelter to habitat to include latrines. Cost is around US\$ 1000 per household.

Low quality technical competence is observed in INGOs like Save and Oxfam that work without expatriates.

Food is obviously a big commodity.

Meeting with Solidarités International (SI) at their office with

Marie-Alice Torré, Country Director Myanmar, Emmett Kearney, WASH Coordinator Myanmar, and

Fabien Cassan, MEAL and FSL Coordinator Myanmar

Same ECHO representatives

Officially, MoU for Solidarités with Myanmar expired in August.

SI has been in Rakhine and Pauktaw since 2013. In Pauktaw, sanitation infrastructures get cannibalized.

Funding is difficult for livelihood and shelter plus there are technical issues. SI has 3 contracts with ECHO, UNICEF and OCHA.

Number of challenges: access, time to reach from Sittwe, short time window during the day as return is to be by 17:00; salt is all around, in water, in sand: difficulty to use non-salty water and sand in fresh

water stressed context, often below sea level, with very shallow underground water; tough rainy season from June to October with 5 m of rainfall in 5 months with high water level – flood, cyclone, mud... Regarding construction, a main issue is quality control, monitoring. Staffing is also difficult, for both internationals and nationals, with little attractive salaries even if SI had its salaries increased; then, high turnover; average Burmese people are usually little willing to go to Rakhine that has bad perception and reputation.

SI announces us the visit of an anthropologist from December to March to better understand the situation, context, people and try to bring a better adapted answer.

LWF is responsible for camp management.

The meeting was continued the following day to dig more the technical aspects with SI WASH Coordinator Emmett at UNICEF office with UNICEF represented by James Robertson | WASH Specialist | UNICEF Myanmar and Htoot Min, WASH Emergency Officer, Young Child Survival and Development Section, ECHO present: Sai and Luc.

Latrines are constructed by 4 cubicle-blocks with 2 round pits; the cost of one cubicle latrine is over US\$ 500. A greater septic tank with the superstructures on its top was considered but SI does not trust the work quality and the option seems too risky regarding possible accidents with slabs collapsing.

UNICEF finances water boating at the end of the dry season – very costly.

It was agreed that SI would prepare a proposal with necessary technical amendments for the current contract budget together with 2016 HIP. The theoretical latrine coverage would be decreased by 2 with reinforced better adapted design, more costly and budget was made for rehabilitation that was realized not possible anymore, the damage / weathering / cannibalization is beyond possible retrofitting or repair.

Mon. 16 Nov. 2015

Yangon national WASH cluster meeting at UNICEF

Present: UNICEF - Olivier Le Guillou and James Robertson, UNHCR - Edward Benson, ICRC – Martin Gauthier, Water & Habitat Coordinator, ACF, Solidarités, Oxfam, World Vision, ECHO – Sai and Luc.

WASH response to flood: budget # US\$ 8 M for 428 810 beneficiaries - # US\$ 20 per beneficiary.

Hygiene kits: stop blanket distribution; maybe replace by livelihood – NFI support.

Current National Wash Cluster Coordinator Olivier Le Guillou is ending his mission in Myanmar this December after 2 years. His replacement is being recruited and will not be in Myanmar until next February; James Robertson will assume this responsibility ad interim adding to his UNICEF WASH responsibility – the 2 roles / functions are meant to be separated and independent even if the WASH Cluster Coordinator position is UNICEF staff and sits in the UNICEF office.

Meeting with Mr Krishna, LWF Country director at their office

Shelter repair and maintenance is funded by Diaconia Germany.

Difficulties: government / authorities approval – they send back responsibilities between each other; the government does not tell what they do – you end up by seeing it.

In the 3 Pauktaw camps where SI caters WASH funded by ECHO, ICRC distributes briquettes for cooking firewood.

In the case of Nget Chaung (NC) 1, IDPs are actually displaced by 200 to 300 m from their initial places of origin because their houses were burned. The 2 camps, NC 1 and NC 2, are different as people in NC 1 are mostly pretty much on their lands and are settling back with individual houses achieved whereas in NC 2, IDPs did not accept housing because they want to return to their places of origin. Repair and maintenance were done, supported by LWF. Material disappeared.

Traditional livelihood is lobster and crab.

Camp management meetings are attended by everybody.

Mr Krishna (Nepalese) describes the Pauktaw IDPs as 'awkward', not trustworthy, dishonest – material disappears in the night but nobody knows anything about it, people are united in that case; assistance spirit is developed. He says people over there are dirty. People have managed there forever, including water. A night, a baby fell from inside a house into the under water – mud and found death there; the parents did not realize until the next morning – the incident was not reported. Fear is on every side, there is no dialogue.

For the first time, the political majority has changed with the Rakhine winning at the last elections while the national majority has also changed but is not the same: to be seen how that will possibly affect the situation, the relation with the central government, which has been used to appointing the authorities until now.

Then, Mr Krishna confides that camp management agencies should take care of other activities, domains, thus reducing overhead. He says that agencies care for their own domains and there is implicit status quo, which LWF also respects, refraining from telling another agency what they could or should do better. According to Mr Krishna, LWF proposed Solidarités funds for sanitation but it seems there was no reaction. Eventually, LWF would consider and accept to take care of and take over WASH. LWF is quite big in Myanmar, well present across the country, with numerous staff, also taking care of logistics for other members of ACT Alliance.

Wed. 18 Nov. 2015

At 08:00, we, Sai and Luc, are picked up from our Sittwe hotel by Solidarités, Alessandra, WASH program manager, with 3 national staff.

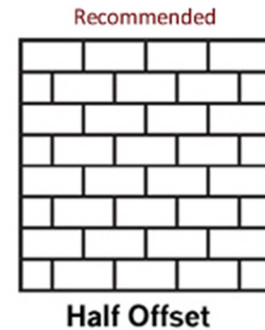
Alessandra, Italian, is finishing her 6 months mission in December and would not extend. She had health problems, Dengue. The rainy season was very hard, with rain all the time, seeing the sun only after 2 months. The guesthouse they had at the time was not good, not healthy, with wood, most everybody, especially expats, got sick. SI experiences human resources problems with high turnover, expats usually stay for 6 months and leave when they become familiar with the environment; nationals are low quality, low level, do not speak much English, communication is difficult, salaries are low.

The SI expats without any travel authorization, we go to NC with the 3 national staff only.

After about 1 h of speed boat, we reach around 09:30, with some difficulty with very shallow depths.

LWF reaches just minutes after us – neither they nor Solidarités knew that the others were coming – with a team made of Shelter Officer Fabio Borba, a Brazilian architect, Education Coordinator Duanporn (Puk) Saussay and a few others.

LWF is making pathways, embankments with burned bricks on top – those were made by UNHCR a year ago but duration is little in this tough environment. We notice that bricks are laid in line; we then advise to have them offset by a half, enabling to bond them better.



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LWF acknowledges and tells they will use the offset way for the remaining 50 % pathways.

We start the visit by NC 2.

The sludge treatment unit is currently discontinued because pools / tanks are damaged, walls are close to collapse, embankments are eroded, only after 2 months it was completed – material used, wood, is not sufficient quality; the situation is beyond rehabilitation / repair. Same situation in NC 1 for same reasons. PVC pipe is uncovered although it has to be protected from UV (ultraviolet) radiation. New big pools / tanks were excavated with the use of lime injected but the reaction does not occur as expected because of the lime quality found in Myanmar.

Solid waste management seems ok in the camp, not too much volume is produced, it gets collected, dried and incinerated.

Full syringes with needles were seen thrown in an open pit. It seems those syringes were left, presumably after a training by MSF, to be disposed of – Solidarités promised to talk about it with them.

In NC, everything is to be handled manually, by hand, by human manpower, there is no machine, no crane.

Some latrines and pits have become inaccessible, at least to work on them, to rehabilitate them, surrounded by other latrines and pits.

Participation is difficult, people do not care, it is NGOs' work and responsibility, most men are away on other activities during the day, like, mainly, fishing.

Many SI and LWF T-shirts are seen worn in the camps, plus some of other NGOs.

Water – stagnant, dirty – is everywhere – many parts of the camps are below sea level, there are sea intrusions because of leaks in embankments or flows below those, infiltration is very slow, people throw everything where they are at the very moment they throw; there are holes and ponds everywhere filled with more or less dirty water.



Water for drinking is pumped from a pond into a 10 m³ onion tank where flocculation is catalyzed with the addition of aluminum sulfate; after 1 h allowing flocculation and sedimentation, water is fed into a below pillow tank by gravity where chlorination is done; from there, water is pumped into elevated tanks from which water is distributed by gravity through tapstands from 08:00 to 10:00 and 16:00 to 17:00 – the tapstands are made with PVC pipe in the sun, not protected.



At 12:00, we have a meeting with the CMC (Camp management committee) composed of 30 members, 15 males, 15 females, in the CMC building, which also has a room equipped with sewing machines where girls and women were trained and do tailoring and dress making. In the room, lots of useful statistics are written on a board – total current population: 3333 = 1707 males + 1626 females.

Land is always an issue: owned by the government, it is rented to private people; to have access to or use it, compensation is required and approval from land 'owners' for all construction activities.

The IDPs concerns:

- 1) water shortage after December; they ask for 2 more ponds – SI does not have any provision for that but water will be pumped from remote ponds from March until the rains;
- 2) pathways and access to water in ponds, kind of jetties – will be addressed and covered by LWF;
- 3) shelter: rehabilitate long houses that were damaged by cyclone; government proposes individual housing that IDPs reject; LWF takes care of shelter maintenance and repair:

- 4) food insecurity for some 400 people who do not appear on the lists after they left and came back – it seems lists do not get updated and WFP would lack budget to increase their distributions; still, LWF, aware of the situation, will keep addressing it with the authorities and WFP;
- 5) make a school – LWF has a primary school; for middle and high schools, possibly temporary, LWF is going to discuss with the Education department;
- 6) cyclone resistant shelter: strong and big; again, issue with government regarding permanent structures, which everybody is aware of;
- 7) NFIs: were distributed in 2013 and nothing since - with IOM, LWF are currently distributing mosquito nets and will request additional items from UNHCR;
- 8) 'dignity' kits for women: bras and underwear – LWF will address those with their tailoring workshop. ... WASH and mainly sanitation were not cited: they are not concerns for NC 2; they are used to poor basic little hygienic conditions and manage with those. Sai also agreed and found the situation about ok with Myanmar standards.

Meeting with the NC 1 CMC – 31 members, out of which 15 women

Population: 4127 = 2065 males + 2062 females; 846 HH – 775 houses + 71 shelters for 'unofficial' HH displaced from elsewhere.

350 families were originally from there, about 500 were added.

Since 2004 and the conflict crisis, restriction of movements prevents population from being independent, to manage by themselves.

Their concerns, in that order:

- 1) 480 HH latrines – needed since 1 year – land availability is an issue;
- 2) pathways – LWF works on those; given limitations, LWF asked the priority between a pathway to NC 2 or the boat jetty; the answer was unanimously the jetty;
- 3) drainage – although many parts are below sea level, the CMC responsible – appointed by government and who is also a contractor – assures there are technical possibilities: to be checked;
- 4) education: infrastructures and teachers – LWF will look into it, also with the Education department;
- 5) water shortage: out of their 3 ponds, 2 are damaged and need rehabilitation.

Back in Sittwe the same evening, debriefing meeting with SI at their office and LWF Rakhine Yadu Shrestha, CCCM Coordinator. Agreement that better communication and coordination would benefit all parties and both organizations agreed to make efforts to improve those.

SI acknowledged technical and human resources weaknesses – staffing in Rakhine is challenging, they keep working on improving technically, piping is planned to be replaced, including tapstands and they took good note to have PVC protected from UV, new design for latrines includes iron bar mesh reinforcement – bamboo was used in the past for pit covers in only one direction, pit rings had no reinforcement -, steel sheets for walls to replace mats, direct concrete access pathways rather than long wooden plank footpaths to fight against stealing of wood parts for fuel or shelter repair. SI need to improve and address institutional memory and high quick turnover causing a lack of responsibility between design, construction and running of infrastructures, leaving questions unanswered regarding choices and sizing – for example, the capacity of the sludge plant is around 4 m3/d while the need is estimated 14 m3/d.

SI is also in charge of fecal sludge treatment in Sittwe camps with their Sludge treatment station (STS), operational since October 2014. Oxfam takes care of the transport part with small tractors. The consortium formed is financed by DFID.

It is acknowledged the STS does not work as it should for several reasons, out of which some are unknown.

It is also fair to emphasize the STS is a great achievement, which greatly participates in treating the problem, even if not completely or completely satisfactorily.

The transport capacity is 40 m³/d times 5.5 days per week while the daily production is 200 m³ every day.

The theoretical capacity of the STS is less than 40 m³/d but unknown. It depends on the technical characteristics of the entering sludge, which are not known and have not been studied until now. After SI Sittwe WASH Activity manager Manuel Krahenbuhl came, he ordered the material and reagents in August and those are about to come.

Manuel initially came for 5 months and extended for 1 – the problems and issues were (probably) underestimated. The current plan is to hire a consultancy to really study the situation, analyze and understand it, the setup, by an experienced skilled expert, to make concrete recommendations, including sizing.

Thurs. 19 Nov. 2015

Visit with IOM Head of Sittwe office Konrad CLOS of Ngan Tet village where IOM undertakes Building back safer communities in flood and cyclone-affected areas of Myanmar, financed by ECHO – ACF covers WASH in the same contract.

The project has not actually concretely begun yet – the start date is 7 September; the flood mainly happened early August. The project plans, among other activities, shelter construction for 600 HH – 3000 cap.

The village is isolated, 2 good hours from Sittwe by speed boat.

So far, IOM has concentrated on preparation with hiring staff, training, arranging with accommodation and targeting the most vulnerable HH.

In Ngan Tet village, 6 HH were selected together with the population as the most vulnerable.

One of the 6 beneficiaries is still fit 78 year old Mrs Daw Nithar Phyu, living alone, her husband is dead and she has no children. After her husband's health problems, she had to sell her land but the new owner, a neighbor, allows her to stay on the compound shared with another family. She has lived all her life in the same village. For a living, she used to prepare snacks that she sold.



When the flood happened, she had to flee to a higher elevation of the village. She was displaced for 2 months. Her previous home was gone, destroyed, washed. Village people provide her with food and constructed for her a new simple basic shelter elevated on stilts. IOM will have it replaced with a better more solid, more resistant, more permanent shelter.

The village has no sanitation facility, zero latrine, people go to the bush, by the riverside.

ACF will consider WASH.

Afternoon same day, visit of Bawgardi village, an island some 2 km away from Sittwe mainland, which also can be reached walking in a few feet of water, with ACF Sittwe Head of office Aleksandar K (Serbian). The village is selected by ACF for WASH as being vulnerable, poor, having suffered from cyclone and flood in August – they did water boating at that time, bringing some 4000 l of fresh water from Sittwe right after the flood hit. The island actually shrinks by meters every year because of strong erosion. IOM will probably intervene there on shelter after conducting an assessment.

The village livelihood is fishing: we could see many boats and big nets of prawn that are taken to Sittwe where they are sold – the village may be poor but they do have a very good source of livelihood, regular income.

Population: 1500 cap – 235 HH. 65 latrines in the village, out of which about 5 are shared. No public health data but 6 children are said to have died last month of diarrhea. There exist 15 public water points + 5 private ones – more were discovered during our visit; those are hand dug shallow wells, lined with bamboo, using rope and bucket, and manually drilled boreholes, 30 ft # 10 m deep, equipped with Myanmar made suction manual pumps, brand Shwedagon. People manage to replace wearing parts like washers, available in Sittwe. Some boreholes were constructed this year. Those water points do not have the best protection but they are not bad at all, they deliver good clean clear water. The cover / access is very good with more than 20 water points for 1500 people: water is available within short distance.

ACF is planning to improve / secure water access, rehabilitating and improving protection of some water points, possibly drilling an extra borehole to be fitted with a manual pump, emphasizing on training the population so that they get sensitized and get better habits and behavior and are more self-reliant and independent. They will do public health promotion – education. Regarding sanitation – latrines, they do not have a budget for it; then, they may show / demonstrate how to build low cost / no purchase expense latrines. They will also try to show the benefit of being and remaining healthy / non-sick, remaining productive, able to work every day, without which no income, not having to cure and buy medicines – then, possibly investing lightly on sanitation and hygiene has a positive return.

ACF has 2 offices in Sittwe, a main office in the main part of town and a second one in the Muslim part after the checkpoints where they have Muslim staff who stay in the Muslim areas.

Back in Sittwe, we kept exchanging with ACF Sittwe Emergency WASH program manager Frédéric (French) on a 3 months mission, leaving in December, supposed to be replaced with overlap, wondering loud about a motorized central water system with distribution. The individual water points are incredibly very cheap and then are obviously cost effective, explaining why there are so many of them: wells are pretty much free, some people dig themselves and line with mats; 30 ft deep borehole drilling costs less than US\$ 15, the manual pump, available on Sittwe market, costs less than US\$ 30; then, a 2" diameter, 30 ft deep new borehole fully equipped with manual pump, piping and platform is much less than US\$ 100. On top of it, the manual pumps can easily be connected to some piping to pump the water even closer to homes.



Fri. 20 Nov. 2015

Visit of Ohn Taw Gyi (South) (OTG S) camp with Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Sittwe Program manager Krishnan Nair (35 year old British with an Indian father) and his deputy.

Krishnan did an impressive comprehensive presentation – briefing, showing deep broad knowledge, interest and investment.

DRC took over WASH in OTG S from Oxfam on 25 September 2014.

Population # 6000 – 2320 HH on distribution lists. Camp management by LWF, (child) protection by Save the Children, education + food by Plan, health by Mercy Malaysia and IRC.

Plenty of shallow boreholes fitted with Dagon manual pumps: 170 – 50 % nonfunctional, to be fixed.

847 latrines – very clean! Less than 3 families, less than 10 people per latrine in average: much better than any demanding guideline! No big deal, mosquito mesh is placed on opening over the door but not covering the whole opening: is then useless; will be corrected.

DRC has 119 Incentive workers for WASH in the camp, divided into 8 functions, hygiene promoter, latrine cleaner, camp cleaner, desludging responsible, open defecation cleaner, facility assessor, solid waste management responsible and hand pump assessor. Without any contract, they receive 50 000 kyats per month, a bit less than 50 US\$ - incentives are different for different organizations, surprisingly but quite commonly, they cannot agree on an amount across the board.

A brand new, as of August, incinerator has never been used: the incentive workers like better to burn directly in holes on the very spot rather than transporting.

Those same DRC incentive workers have a bad habit to remove all vegetation instead of possibly only cutting it, trimming it, especially at the beginning of the dry season where it will not grow much anymore, leaving the ground bare, unprotected from erosion.

No big deal again, a poster to illustrate a safe environment shows pigs to be kept in a given area for cleanliness; in an exclusively Muslim context, the animal could be rather a goat.

Walking in the camp, we met at least 1 visibly malnourished kid with an abnormally big belly and 2 kids with badly abnormally swollen genitals – they were naked -, a little boy and a little girl, who would need, require urgent medical care. The DRC deputy happens to be a medical doctor too and, after my insisting, eventually called IRC, in charge of health in the camp with Mercy Malaysia, for them to take care of the poor little kids.

Health is a big problem, a big issue, it is not well addressed in general, at the cluster level with WHO who does nothing much and nothing in terms of strategy and at the camp level with little presence, little competency, the impossibility or great difficulty to get out of the camp to a proper clinic in Sittwe for ethnical-religious reasons.

Education and especially higher education is out of reach for Muslims. There is only one high school for Muslims in Sittwe township, less than 200 places, out of which a small share for displaced. Then, there are very few trained qualified teachers and health personnel.

A study was conducted among the 2 communities about the possibility of living together: a great majority of Muslims are willing while a great majority of Rakhine are not. That kind of mindset will be extremely difficult to change and would take a lot of time. Rakhine used to be independent and quite some Rakhine people would still want independence.

Krishnan showed quite critical of SI on WASH and LWF on camp management. He mentioned high turnover for SI with little attractive salary conditions for international staff; he noted the ambiance may currently not be as good as it used to be, with individuals on their own and not as a team. Himself has been in his position, first time with DRC, at age 35, for a year. He has extended for 6 months and considers extending another 6 months.

The government systematically decreases camp population figures by 30 % - WFP uses those decreased figures; they seem to have budget limits.

In comparison with Nget Chaung, OTG S would be like a 5 star hotel.

The greatest concerns that Helen Salvestrin, WASH Cluster Coordinator Rakhine, sees:

- corruption, bribery, even more vigorously denounced by DRC Krishnan, of CMCs that get more or better shelter, latrines for themselves, who would get a share of all that gets into camps, contract money, construction materials, hygiene kits, food... and then, other IDPs have less of everything, construction quality is also less and sometimes well below standard. They are appointed by the government and are untouchable;
- lots of ponds were emptied after the floods, by a number of organizations, UNICEF supported the government – unclearly, they were believed contaminated, although quality tests showed that the flooded ponds, not dewatered, are rather less contaminated than those that got emptied; then, they did not fully fill up.

It would be good to provide our national colleagues, in the given case Sai-Nandar, with airtime as he made quite a number of phone calls to partners. When shared with Nicolas, he said that Sai only needs to ask.

Conclusion – recommendation

Follow up will be needed / advised after a few months.

Kachin State and other regions, not covered during this mission, will need to be visited.

The Pauktaw sites, Nget Chaung 1 and 2 visited during this mission, present the greatest humanitarian needs and priorities. The INGO Solidarités International has been experiencing difficulties with sanitation, technically and regarding human resources, which they are aware of and they acknowledge. At the same time, they have knowledge, competence, drive and will and want to correct and improve their performance.

LWF is a good alternative to possibly replace them and they told they would agree to take over.

The bottom line is that support should not be discontinued in those camps.