



MISSION REPORT

Subject: Monitoring mission – Sittwe, Rakhine State, MYANMAR

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Date: 17 – 20/05/2016

Participants:

- ECHO: Sai Nandar, ECHO Yangon, & Luc, ECHO Islamabad
- Partners: UNHCR, RI, SI, DRC, ACF & IOM

Places visited & Interlocutors:

Mye Bon – RI office, Township Administrator and camps

Nget Chong 1 & 2 with SI

Pwar Yar Gone camp with DRC, Baw Ga Di village with ACF & IOM

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / HIGHLIGHTS

Displacement to close sites but impossibility – by government & for security reasons - **to return to places of origin.**

With the first rains starting, **difficult conditions continue, particularly in Pauktaw.**

Partners carry out satisfactorily their WASH – Shelter projects, although slowly by IOM for their shelter construction.

2. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

WASH – Shelter monitoring mission – previous such mission mid-November 2015, see corresponding report for reference.

3 key points:

- The **CMCs critical issue – corruption hampering or preventing quality services - and some NGOs like SI & DRC, especially, together with donors, mainly ECHO, try to have that situation changed & improved** through NGOs having a common position & ECHO asked the Security Minister to address that issue **with the change, replacement of CMCs** as he is the only one who can achieve that;

- The **delays in repairing the shelters since August 2015 – by IOM** funded by ECHO, unfortunately without good reasons other than **poor organization or management**;
- The **cyclone preparedness**: at the onset of the cyclone season, unfortunately, **little is done**, fatalism seems the fate, with no better explanation than **poor management / commitment from the UN lead clusters**.

3. ISSUES DISCUSSED, COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Day 1 Mye Bon with UNHCR & RI

Briefing at RI, Relief International, office by Ann Reiner, Head of Rakhine Programs, RI, based in Sittwe.

Access not every day, Travel Authorization needed & not always granted for restriction reasons, to limit services. Currently, authorization for 3 days per week, Wednesday to Friday, from 9 to 12; then, we are going to the camp that Tuesday with Jack, a Sittwe staff member. **Access is restricted**, censored to avoid fueling tensions.

Illustrating that, health referral is to be to Sittwe, up to 3 h away, 2 times that if the boat is in Sittwe, although a hospital does exist in Mye Bon.

Meeting with Township Administrator, TA, in his office

The TA reminds the government is responsible for IDPs with the agencies.

The government had one pond rehabilitated & works are ongoing on a second one.

To the attention of UNHCR, the TA mentions that material is to be delivered timely; UNHCR replies there are currently problems with iron sheets, not available in Sittwe, then having to come from Yangon.

The TA mentions **the government allowed people to go fishing**.

He further mentions a pond used by the community that needs rehabilitation.

Requested by RI, pumping time extension was agreed for 30 min.

Ann asks about latrine pits that need to be secured in a site, previously occupied by Rakhine IDPs, decommissioned: the TA answers it is planned but action was not taken yet. Some 42 Rakhine households got displaced & now relocated after a fire.

Meeting with CMC – Camp management committee; its leader was appointed by the government

Displacement by some 300 m since 2012. People were first settled in tents, then so-called long houses built by UNHCR in 2013.

Food is provided by WFP, shelter by UNHCR, currently conducting rehabilitation: out of 89 long houses, 79 are completed; the remaining 10 should be completed before the main rains by the end of May. The government takes care of walls & floor, made of bamboo netting while UNHCR reinforces footings & caters for roofing.

The design by UNHCR was for a 2-year duration (in 2013). The UNHCR Shelter engineer stated that yearly maintenance is needed because of weathering material used & the life expectancy of the current major rehabilitation is expected 1.5 to 2 years.

Regarding permanent housing, a site, proposed by the government, a bit remote according to Muslim IDPs but especially low land flooded during rainy season, was rejected. They counter proposed a site by the camp, for which they got no reply from the government – the positive aspect is they did not get a negative reply – but the Rakhine community do not accept.

Water is taken care of by RI, financed by UNICEF; **no water supplied is treated** (possible future plan of sand filtration). Some ponds are used for drinking, some for domestic use; water for drinking is scarce while water for domestic use is adequately available.

The CMC requests ceramic filters – such filters were supplied in 2014 but only lasted for 6 months; probably poor quality. We were brought filtered water that looked like tea; I tasted it and it tasted of bad earth...

We ask about **WASH related public health problems**. RI in charge of health in the camp with a health center, Ann replies she is not aware of special problems; the CMC confirms there used to be problems, diarrhea & mortality, back in 2012 – 13 but since, thanks to hygiene promotion, **the situation has been ok**; I say loud that **immunity must be good**, which the CMC meant to tell.

There exists no water supply system deserving the name: water is pumped through firefighter-type plastic flexible piping from a pond into open plastic containers and that's it(!)...

Sanitation – latrines – seemed fine, with pits well fenced. Dirty water is stagnant in many channels – cleaners waged by RI do what they can, given the task.

The camp, known population of 3200 people, looked crowded – no registration or census was ever made.

A long house shelters 8 families, each in a small room – UNHCR proposed 6 families per long house, the government had previously made similar long houses for 10 families each; the reached agreement was for 8 families.

While walking in the camp, we could see a pile of **iron sheets, cigarette paper-like thick**: we emphasized that was **inacceptable substandard**; the UNHCR engineer replied the gauge was supposed to be 32 by contract, which is already weak, & he would make sure it is respected.

Also to balance, we paid a visit to the site where the government built decent & seemingly adequate new individual houses for 42 Rakhine households. RI installed some 5 water distribution points.

Significant good rain in the night of 17 to 18 May

Sittwe was previously called Akyab

Day 2 Nget Chong (NC) 1 & 2 with Solidarités International (SI)

Because of security issues, the planned visit to Ah Nauk Ye was cancelled. After TA Pauktaw appointed a new CMC – just before he himself left his position -, **tensions & fights started between former & new CMCs & their followers.**

Land problem: according to SI, NGOs used to pay for the use of land & prices kept going up – SI is proud to have achieved now not to pay anything.

Water supply: since April, remote pumping from ponds located in the villages of origin, between 3 to 7 km away, distribution of treated – flocculated, sedimented & disinfected – water @ **5 l/cap/d** through 4 4-tapstands, 2 distributions per day for half the population for each of the 2 camps. Control with recording sheets where people sign / affix their fingerprints.

WASH related public health problems, skin disease, diarrhea, followed closely by MSF, have increased but not hugely & that is a seasonal phenomenon every year.

Request from SI NC team & CMC representatives: **hygiene kits & items, especially soap – or cash;** SI management present replied they have unfortunately very limited resources that will only enable very targeted distributions.

SI decreased working hours to half time & 80 % depending on positions and that is not understood or well received by the hired staff, they want full time positions &, especially, salaries; SI is going to keep on explaining & communicating.

Rainwater harvesting, gutters, containers, almost completely disappeared 2 years ago and have never been replaced because they would surely disappear again quickly.

Mass cleaning campaigns used to be carried out with daily workers, now through sensitization & incentives with soap.

Sea / salty water is not used for body washing as it is not pleasant & causes skin problems, it is only used for cleaning latrines.

An anthropologist was present with SI & carried out a study, the report is getting finalized & will be shared with ECHO; the main findings cited would be:

- Women are supposed to stay at home, being an issue as they are mainly in charge of fetching water; SI considers more water distribution in the evening to take care of that aspect with closer distribution points;
- Women go to latrines in the evening: need for torches;
- Children are left on their own during the day in the camp setting & do a lot of open defecation; SI will put up child friendly designed latrines, which will be decorated & more open.

Bladders & onion tanks got systematically cut & destroyed; they will be replaced by Oxfam type tanks, T45, 45 m3 capacity tanks, greater capacity & protected with corrugated galvanized iron sheets.

Two additional ponds were dug by the government in addition to the previously existing 2, which should secure better the water situation for the next dry season.

In NC 2, the community do not want certain ponds to be used by SI anymore; the reality is that **the autochthone community do not want to share their ponds with communities come from farther origins;** SI will need to negotiate, communicate & convince more.

NC 2 requests an extra pond: SI will try to get funding but that would anyway only address the 2018 dry season.

After the rain during the night, rain started again mid-day, which is rather good news regarding water supply with ponds drying up; the current reserves should be able to serve until mid-June. A cyclone is forecast for coming Friday 20 May with strong winds & possibly heavy rains.

The current coverage is 1 latrine per 100 cap, without taking into account the household latrines that were put up after the government provided with the material to have those built; unfortunately, the latter were very poorly constructed, pretty much with open pits that are a real hazard, which will worsen during the rainy season. After the ongoing rehabilitation, the coverage will tend towards 1 latrine per 25 to 30 cap, if they manage to complete the rehabilitation.

The newly built or/& rehabilitated latrines seem ok with walls made of flat iron sheeting & access with earth filled bags covered with bricks – those are laid in line; it was reminded & advised to have them offset by a half, enabling to bond them better. Mosquito **wire mesh** covers the opening over the doors but it **is quite useless** as significant openings exist all around; when asked about it, SI management said that was the cluster recognized design, which I questioned, all the more with stagnant dirty water everywhere around; I asked to have that point raised during a next cluster meeting; SI promised they would & feedback us.

The sludge treatment units are non-functional & discontinued, replaced by 2 ponds, first retention, the second one for infiltration – **in spite of significant investment, that is unfortunately a technical failure**, due to under sizing, poor engineering, poor quality construction +, partly, the chemical quality of the lime found in Myanmar. During the rainy season, they will pump the sludge into the sea / river connected to the sea with significant tides; that was accepted by the cluster & the authorities, communication is still needed towards the population.

In general, the camps looked ok, not 100 % clean but showing some efforts & progress compared to previous visit 6 months ago.

People get more allowed to move out of the very camp boundaries, enabling to go fishing & do prawn farming.

Some people, not registered, have not received food ration, for up to 2 years; have LWF, as camp manager, & WFP reminded.

Eventually, SI reminded they are stretched, they always struggle for funding from every possible donor; the decrease of the ECHO funding obliged them to cut hygiene kit / item distributions, which are always requested by the population; they have no contingency at all to face emergencies that would be caused by severe weather, cyclone, strong winds, heavy rains, floods; they wish they could have some WASH material & equipment stored that they could use when needed & that could be replenished as necessary, for example from grant contract to the next.

SI added they currently have a good staff team, both national & expatriate, stable, motivated & committed – that was also our impression.

Together with Sai Nandar, regional WASH – Shelter would support that request for hygiene items & contingency WASH material, top up would be supported for the very difficult & challenging NC camps.

Meeting with Richard Tracey, **CCCM lead**, & Boyet Wilfredo Jr. Tiangco, shelter cluster lead

Richard was clear that, according to him, SI do not have the right approach with **CMCs** ignoring them or bypassing them, being culturally non sensible. The currently exclusively Western & French young staff are not given the same respect & credit as more senior or Asian expatriates can develop with time.

Richard did actually state, quote '**Corruption is normal, it is part of it, there is nothing wrong with it**' (!)

SI & DRC who decided to fight against corruption naturally have a hard time with the cluster lead, they try to remain diplomatic but unfortunately do not find easily allies within the UN system.

Met on 20 May in Yangon, SI head of mission Marie-Alice Torré confided that their strategy is to gather all INGOs to a common position to fight against & refuse corruption; she added it was difficult with other NGOs not caring so much or willing their activities to continue like previously or not willing to take any risk, like, possibly, to be blocked, as SI has been experiencing since 11 February in 4 of their camps; they have been multiplying & intensifying their communication with good notes & briefs they send to & share with the international community. SI acknowledged they had made the mistake to fight alone together with DRC since the beginning of the year & they realized they were isolated & too weak to change anything although all the members of the WASH cluster had agreed during a WASH cluster retreat at the beginning of the year that they would all align to fight & refuse corruption. SI hopes to have their consortium partners Oxfam & Save the Children & other donor DFID join their fight & refuse corruption. A possible next escalation step would be suspension, to denounce they cannot work, but that would only be possible & should be done at the right time, while the situation has kept deteriorating.

Corruption is to be systematically fought against; in the case of the Rakhine state, it prevents or hampers the delivery of quality services, the greater share of the investments not actually reaching the camps.

ECHO & particularly Myanmar Head of office Nicolas is also particularly active at advocating, lobbying all actors & **the one able to change the situation, the Security Minister**; met lately with Head of unit Cees, Nicolas seized the opportunity to boldly ask to change the CMCs 'because he was the only one who could do it'; Cees promised he would come back immediately when that would happen to thank & congratulate the Minister.

Significant rain during the early morning of 19 May

Day 3 Pwar Yar Gone camp with DRC, Danish Refugee Council, Baw Ga Di village with ACF & IOM

Pwar Yar Gone camp with DRC

Meeting with DRC WASH team, made of 47 members

Camp population: 2924

Water supply: 33 manual pumps fitted on boreholes, 6 non-functional but repair scheduled for following week; 10 boreholes were dug deeper and pumps were installed deeper by 3 ft last month after running dry -> **advice to dig deeper in future for a greater margin of water column; try to compare water levels of each borehole**, probably tapping in the same aquifer; **try to follow water level in time**.

Sanitation: 117 latrines – **coverage ok** -, 6 collapsed because of strong winds & repair works are going to be carried out soon. **Mosquito wire mesh above doors**, which were mainly open, **was agreed quite useless & that could be saved**. We could observe that **many covers and ventilation pipes were missing on the pits & a lot of plastic waste was present in pits: those need to be addressed as thoroughly as possible; covers need to be put in place, vent' pipes replaced & sensitization is needed to prevent from throwing any waste, particularly plastic, into the pits**, which can block, disrupts the treatment process & makes desludging more difficult.

Points raised by the WASH team:

- Solar lighting by latrines: stops by around 23:00 when batteries turn dead; DRC head of office stated that solar torches would be a better alternative;
- Some latrines got filled with sand & need to be emptied: caused by erosion during rains; emptying needs to be done;
- Staff ask for an increase in salaries; reply by DRC head: a salary increase would imply a decrease of the staff number, which is not a preferred option;
- Request for core hygiene kits, buckets, mosquito nets, which were distributed last year: will be provided corresponding to budget possibilities.

Solid waste, among others lots of tin cans, was observed collected in holes / pits after the population used sand to reinforce the protection of their shelters. The WASH staff explained they gathered rubbish before backfilling: needs to be managed & addressed properly.

HR: WASH coordinator identified, British lady specialized in software, behavior change, to start soon, currently consulting with Save the children in Sittwe; she will reinforce & lead the team & will try to address better the behavior changes needed.

The situation in general was good but attention & sensitization need be maintained.

Baw Ga Di village with ACF & IOM – rain the whole visit

Population # 1300

Visit with ACF WASH coordinator Tara based in Yangon, filling the gap, after WASH project manager left end of April.

11 boreholes fitted with Dagon manual suction pumps were rehabilitated, including flushing, repair / change of pump, concrete platform & drainage into soakaway pit & fencing – the soakaway pits are little efficient during the rainy season with water all over anyway but should be maintained during the dry period – difficulty to be actually achieved by the population who do not see much need for it. When asked about possible other needs, a representative asked for 10 more boreholes with manual pumps – the

coverage is actually already pretty good, sufficient & adequate. Visible improvement with pumps working better, immediately, without needing to be reprimed.

7 latrines got constructed, in compounds selected for their vulnerability, by the beneficiaries who received the material & design advice from ACF.

17 **good new shelters** were constructed by IOM for households who got their dwelling destroyed or severely damaged last year with structural reinforcement improvement techniques – binding straps, screws & bolts, additional bracings. Outside painting with used oil provided was carried out by beneficiaries. Dimensions: 13 ft 9 inch x 14 ft 9 inch # 18.8 m2 area to be in line with 3.5 m2/cap based on a 5-member family. The IOM technicians estimated the shelter duration for 5 years, probably optimistically, maintenance & small repair having to be carried out regularly. The shelters are greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries who showed grateful to ECHO & IOM.

Besides being **pretty late with no good reasons other than poor management & organization, project seemingly well carried out by IOM.**

Dinner with ACF Tara & Cyclone shelter project designer Emeline

Emeline is in charge to design a cyclone shelter / evacuation shelter for Rakhine state for a capacity of up to 200 people for up to 3 days. Unlike a few existing shelters, kind of concrete blockhaus, she wants it to be able to be used the rest of the time, ideally as a school. ACF France has 72 000 EUR from Race against hunger raising money event & they want to build 2 shelters, # 36 000 apiece.

Meeting with WASH cluster coordinator, UNICEF, James Robertson, on 20 May in Yangon

- Drought <- water shortage, flagged by UNICEF & DRD after less rainfall in 2015. UNICEF supported authorities with fuel for pumping & trucking & people with containers / jerrycans.
- Preparedness on storm / cyclone: low preparation; maybe, the greatest danger / risk is tidal surge with a lot of land below sea level; some contingency stock in regions with DRD, for some 10 000 cap in Sittwe, pumps, purification items, pipe...

Explanation by James of poor functioning of cluster: lack of funding, for WASH & Shelter.

Seemingly, lack of data & info, for example, including rainfall; then, request by ECHO WASH to have **all partners install rain gauges at least in all their offices & daily record.**

Meeting with SI

SI are going to review their strategy: they strongly consider no more intervention, in Pauktaw, unless including coverage of livelihood (proposal submitted to France).

SI WASH coordinator Emmett is ending his mission. Bruno Carpentier from SI HQ - whom I had a chance to exchange with extensively lately about Afghanistan, he seems pretty good technically - will bridge part of the gap until a permanent replacement.