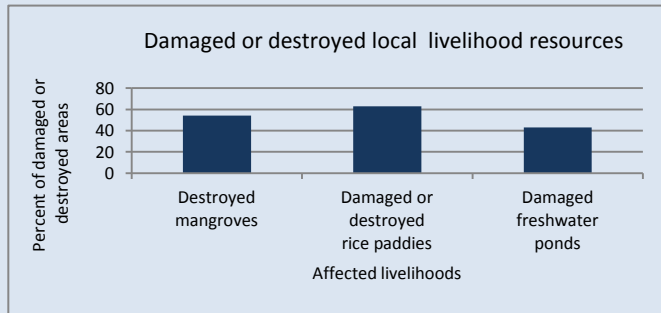


Project background

This project takes stock of the combined disaster relief effort in Myanmar (Burma) after the devastating Cyclone Nargis which struck this developing south-east Asian nation May 2-3, 2008. It was the worst natural disaster to befall Myanmar (Burma) in the country's history, and resulted in an estimated 140,000 deaths and 2.4 million lives affected. The cost of the cyclone stood at an estimated 4.5 billion dollars – a comparable impact economically on this small nation to the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami had on Indonesia. The cyclone made landfall in the Ayeyarwady Division, and as a category 3 cyclone, Nargis affected more than 50 townships, mainly in the Yangon and Ayeyarwady Divisions, including the country's largest city of Yangon.

Cyclone Nargis not only destroyed and damaged lives; it caused devastating damage to the environment as well. The two Divisions severely affected by Nargis are areas where the local population were heavily reliant on the natural resource base, such as fishing and the natural and replanted mangrove areas, as a source of income and livelihood. The locals' livelihoods were also heavily dependent on the fresh water ponds found in the Ayeyarwady Delta region, which were severely damaged or destroyed by Nargis (chart below).



The disaster zone left in the wake of Cyclone Nargis, and the unprecedented global assistance that was needed, was overwhelming and caused confusion, misunderstandings and suspicion between the Government, local and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international aid agencies. In response to this early confusion, the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) was formed, consisting of members from the Government of Myanmar (GOUM), the United Nations (UN) and the Association of South-East Asian Countries (ASEAN). The TCG was formed to become the core reporting and evaluation centre for NGOs' aid accountability, coordination and communication.

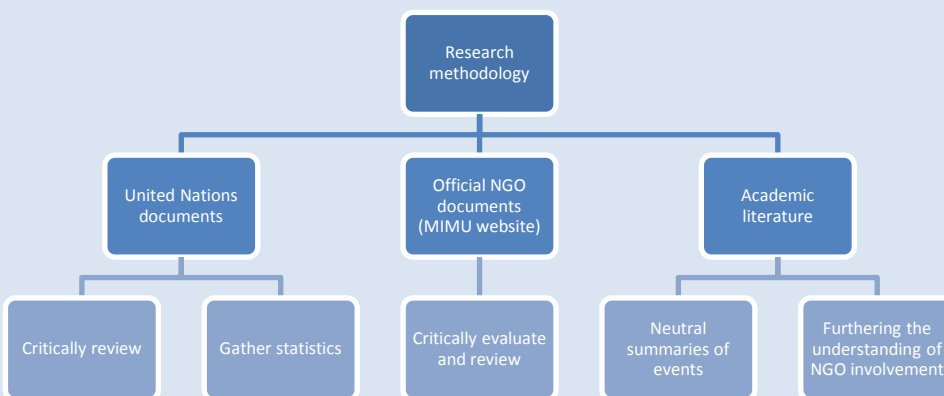
The TCG also instituted a process of social impact surveys to evaluate the results of the recovery and aid effort to assist all NGOs and agencies in further planning of their aid. TCG reports and official NGO publications, as well as other material sourced from the official Myanmar Government website (MIMU) for Cyclone Nargis reporting, are the sources used in this project.

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to investigate the disaster response effort to Cyclone Nargis by local, national and international NGOs, providing a report that will outline the achievements and the lessons learnt during the immediate recovery process and the longer-term aid and relief effort.

Objectives

- To investigate what local, national and international NGOs were involved;
- To investigate how these NGOs collaborated and organised themselves, and how they reported their activities and aid efforts
- To investigate the achievements, and the lessons learnt, during the disaster relief efforts of the NGOs.

Methodology

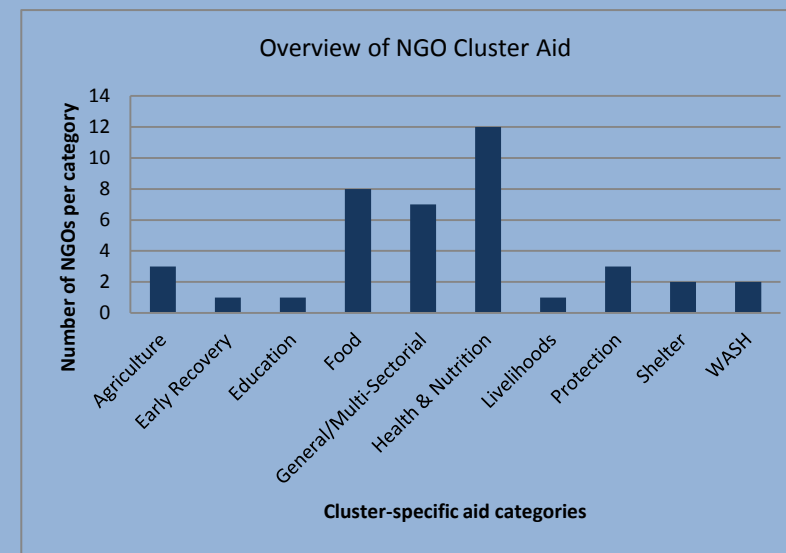


Tropical Cyclone Nargis – Myanmar (Burma) Disaster Relief Response



Key findings to date

- The initial confusion – exacerbated by the lack of a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plan or disaster framework in Myanmar (Burma) – hindered NGOs in the early days of recovery and relief; but was slowly resolved by the formation of the TCG.
- The report released in November 2010 by the IID and its associates suggests that the international response was swift and immediate, and mounted on a large scale (bilaterally and multilateral) through international NGOs and other mechanisms such as ASEAN and the UN. Despite the immediate and willing response, the activities took some time before they became coordinated and the efforts reached the local populations in Nargis affected areas.
- The TCG's aim was to '...act as a mechanism to facilitate trust, confidence and cooperation between Myanmar and the international community in the urgent humanitarian relief and recovery work...'
- The initial humanitarian response, implemented by the UN, was initially organised under the 'cluster' approach (chart below), which was broken into the categories of: agriculture, early recovery, education, shelter, emergency telecommunications, food, health & nutrition, protection, water/sanitation/hygiene (WASH), livelihoods, and logistics.



- NGOs were encouraged to report and review their aid programs and progress to the TCG in this cluster system in order to avoid duplication and to ensure little or no gaps in the coverage of the aid effort.
- The most recent Social Impact Monitoring (SIM) report suggests that by April 2010, aid to Nargis-affected townships had significantly declined, and the clusters receiving the most amount of aid were: water & sanitation, community infrastructure and education. Support and assistance for local farmers and fisherman in the Yangon and Ayeyarwady Divisions was found to be limited and insufficient.
- The 2010 SIM report also suggests that a significant emphasis is placed on the role of the local, national and international NGOs; but these statistics and findings underplay the importance of religious groups in society, whose assistance and support within their local communities are invaluable.
- Due to cultural misunderstandings, constant communication breakdowns and a lack of trust, the Cyclone Nargis international relief effort stalled continuously throughout the longer-term aid effort; but also international NGOs were unable to participate in the immediate search and rescue and recovery efforts due to political injunctions.

Expected outcomes

- The objectives of this project have been formulated in order to produce a final report that outlines the positive activities and aspects of the joint local, national, international NGOs disaster relief response; but also to uncover where there are lessons to be learnt for future natural disaster relief efforts, particularly in Myanmar (Burma).
- The findings will help to improve the overall joint international response to natural disasters, through learning from the achievements and the shortcomings of the recovery effort in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.
- To highlight the efforts already undertaken by the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP) in December 2008, which outlined a three year strategy (2009 – 2011) based on the findings and assessments of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) of May 2008.
- Some of PONREPP's sentiments and findings have been implemented and consolidated into the Myanmar Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (MAPDRR) of 2009; and this final report will echo many of these sentiments and the lessons learnt through the Nargis experience.
- Finally, this report will consolidate the belief that a pre-existing DRR framework is vital to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications, like was the case in post-Nargis. With a DRR in place, international disaster relief efforts and aid will be undertaken without delay in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and beyond.

