

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

ASEAN-UN POST-NARGIS PARTNERSHIP



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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States of the Association are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia

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General information on ASEAN appears online at the ASEAN website: www.asean.org

Catalogue-in-Publication Data

Charting a New Course: ASEAN-UN Post-Nargis Partnership
Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, August 2010

363.34595

1. ASEAN – Disaster Management Partnership
2. Social Action – Disaster Relief

ISBN 978-602-8411-41-7

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Cover photo
ASEAN HTF Collection

Acknowledgements

The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for Victims of Cyclone Nargis (AHTF) expresses its deep gratitude and sincere appreciation to all those who collaborated with us in the coordinated effort to alleviate the suffering of survivors of Cyclone Nargis.

We thank the Government of the Union of Myanmar for its guidance and leadership in assisting the people of Myanmar during the relief and recovery response. We are also grateful to the United Nations agencies, international and national organisations and all others who contributed to post-Nargis relief and recovery activities.

We thank the ASEAN Member States for their unwavering support during such a critical juncture. Our experiences over the course of the Task Force's two-year mandate are certain to shape ASEAN's approach to disaster management and humanitarian relief for generations to come.

It is due to our collective efforts that two years after Cyclone Nargis we now see signs of recovery in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta. Rice farmers plant seeds where rice fields once stood fallow, brand new school-cum-cyclone shelters dot the landscape and bamboo plants and mangrove bushes are sprouting up around the once devastated areas.

This book is dedicated to the survivors of Cyclone Nargis, whose strength, courage and resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity is at once humbling and inspiring and, no doubt, will spur the ongoing recovery effort in the months ahead.

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Foreword by the Secretary-General of ASEAN

Death, destruction and despair followed in the path of Cyclone Nargis. As news spread that the Cyclone had flattened entire villages, killing or injuring hundreds of thousands of people, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) felt compelled, out of a sense of compassion, urgency and fraternity, to support one of our Member States. The ASEAN community immediately reached out to help Myanmar recover from the worst natural disaster in the country's recorded history.

The complexity of the emerging tragedy called for a cohesive and coordinated plan. ASEAN was urged to take the lead. Never before had we undertaken such an ambitious and large-scale undertaking. But buttressed by the Government of Myanmar and the international community, ASEAN's confidence grew and our association was "baptised" by the Cyclone that wreaked havoc on one of our Member States.

Cyclone Nargis occurred at a pivotal time, when ASEAN Member States were embracing the ASEAN Charter and the association was striving to become a more collective, dynamic and inclusive entity. The disaster provided ASEAN with a window of opportunity to make meaningful progress on the goals of the Charter to bring ASEAN closer to the people, enhance the well-being and livelihood of ASEAN peoples, and alleviate poverty and narrow development gaps through close cooperation with the Government of Myanmar.

Experience from Nargis demonstrates that ASEAN, with support from partners, can strengthen disaster risk reduction among Member States and provide an effective coordinating mechanism to facilitate the delivery of international assistance in a Member State during the post-disaster relief and recovery process. Our collective response in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis is an example of the benefits that broader integration and closer partnerships can yield.

ASEAN's response to Nargis, in cooperation and collaboration with the United Nations, the international humanitarian community and civil society, helped ease the pain and suffering that the Cyclone inflicted on people living in Ayeyarwady and Yangon Divisions of Myanmar. Since the region as a whole is prone to disasters, it is imperative, particularly as we reach the end of the mandate of the ASEAN-led coordination mechanism in Myanmar, to document and disseminate the lessons ASEAN has learned in the wake of Nargis.

This publication focuses on the unprecedented humanitarian partnership between ASEAN and the UN that Nargis necessitated, which included jointly assessing, planning and monitoring relief and recovery and mobilising funds for the ongoing effort. Through this novel coalition, ASEAN and the UN managed to accentuate our comparative strengths, transcend the sum of our parts and demonstrate what multilateral institutions can achieve when they work together in response to a disaster.

Through this publication, we wish to share within and across the region what we have gained from our experience carrying out ASEAN's first-ever large-scale humanitarian operation in a Member State. It is our sincere hope that our lessons will be of service to others and our best practices replicated in the event of future disasters.



SURIN PITSUWAN

Foreword by the Executive Secretary of UN-ESCAP and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

The human tragedy caused by natural disasters transcends national borders, institutional boundaries and distinctions between communities and people. The sheer scale of the devastation they wreak makes these differences unimportant. It reminds us that we, as humans, are ultimately interdependent. More than anything else, it is our capacity to trust one another that can bring quick relief to the people affected and help them begin to rebuild their lives. This is the central lesson from the experience of coping with Cyclone Nargis which unleashed its fury on the people of Myanmar in May 2008.

Asia and the Pacific has historically been the region worst affected by natural disasters globally. Between 1975 and 2006, 57 per cent of the people who lost their lives to natural disasters around the world were from the region, which also suffered 44 per cent of the economic losses. The mortality risk from tropical cyclones in low income countries like Myanmar is estimated to be 200 times greater than that in developed countries due to factors ranging from poor infrastructure and population concentrations in vulnerable areas to lack of resources and ill-equipped administrative structures. Disasters of the scale of Cyclone Nargis are simply beyond the capacity of any one government to cope with. They require concerted action by neighbouring countries and the international community to mobilise financial, technical, institutional and human resources of a proportion matching the magnitude of the damage wrought.

Myanmar is not only a low income country, it has also been isolated over the years from the Western world, resulting in a trust deficit inhibiting international cooperation. At the same time, it clearly needed outside assistance to cope with the enormous loss of life, injury and destruction of property due to Cyclone Nargis. Thus, three weeks after the disaster, when ASEAN leaders, including the Government of Myanmar, proposed the establishment of a regional tripartite mechanism comprising the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and the UN, the opportunity for a unique and historic humanitarian partnership was welcomed by the United Nations and the international community. This partnership led to the establishment of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force and the Tripartite Core Group (TCG). Over the next two years, the TCG guided the coordination of an unprecedented international relief effort that pooled together the resources of ASEAN Member States, UN organisations and the international community. It oversaw key actions, such as the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment, the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan, a series of monitoring exercises and social impact studies, and several model projects on disaster risk reduction, disaster management and early recovery.

During my visits to Myanmar from 2008 to 2010, I met with the highest levels of the Government as well as survivors of the tragedy on the ground. I conveyed to both the UN's readiness to bring its collective experience and expertise in partnership with ASEAN to not only help in immediate relief and recovery operations, but also to rebuild on a more sustainable basis. I emphasised the ASEAN-UN partnership as a vehicle to strengthen the nation's capacity to cope with similar disasters in the future at the levels of the Government, local institutions and communities. These exchanges resonated with the Government and contributed to the spirit of cooperation and trust. The ability of the UN system to come together and work seamlessly with ASEAN in Myanmar's hour of need demonstrated its capacity to deliver as one to its member states. In his statement to the 64th UN General Assembly in New York, the Prime Minister of Myanmar acknowledged the TCG as an exemplary mechanism for future disaster relief and rehabilitation.

Today, the communities affected by Cyclone Nargis have overcome its immediate impacts. Vital indicators of health, child mortality, nutrition, education and clean water availability have improved, and reliance on food aid has diminished. With the Government of Myanmar taking over medium- and long-term recovery efforts, the role of the TCG is officially ended. However, the spirit of cooperation among the UN, ASEAN and the Government of Myanmar should endure in further support to the country in its rebuilding and capacity development work.

By documenting the evolution of the ASEAN-UN partnership in the context of Myanmar, this volume lays the foundation for a closer relationship between the two for the benefit of all member states affected by future natural disasters. While I hope, and pray, the occasion for it will not arise any time soon, it is incumbent upon us to be prepared.



NOELEEN HEYZER



Chapter One

The Path to a New Model of Humanitarian Partnership

Cyclone Nargis

Cyclone Nargis was the deadliest recorded cyclone in the North Indian Ocean Basin and the second deadliest-named tropical storm of all time. The wake of Cyclone Nargis changed the lives of nearly 2.4 million people. On 2 and 3 May 2008, winds gusted up to 200 kilometres per hour, ravaging entire fishing and farming communities. The death toll was staggering. Nearly 140,000 people were killed or unaccounted for, and one third of the population of Ayeyarwady and Yangon Divisions was affected. The physical devastation of Nargis was enormous. It flattened 700,000 homes and 75 per cent of the hospitals and clinics in the Delta, severed power lines, disrupted communication systems, massacred three-quarters of the livestock and destroyed half of the fishing fleet. Seawater ruined at least a million acres of rice paddy. The destruction was most severe in the Delta region, the country's "rice bowl," where extreme winds, combined with a

three- to four-metre storm surge, inundated broad areas of the fertile land and submerged villages.

The national response following the Cyclone was immediate. The Government declared the Cyclone-affected regions a national disaster area, dispatched search and rescue crews, and began distributing emergency relief supplies. But the scale of the devastation soon proved overwhelming. Supply stocks of aid existing in the country were quickly exhausted, sparking fears of a second wave of deaths from starvation or disease. As the crisis unfolded, several high-profile members of the international community called on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to help broker agreements with Myanmar to open up space for humanitarian assistance.

Singapore, as the Chair of ASEAN, responded by calling for a Special Meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Singapore on 19 May, where they recommended establishing an ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism in which ASEAN would be

Community members work to repair footpaths as part of an employment programme in Mawlamyinegyune. Photo courtesy of ILO



ASEAN Chair (left to right), Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo, Myanmar Prime Minister Thein Sein and UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon at the ASEAN-UN International Pledging Conference in Yangon. Photo courtesy of Khin Maung Win

at the forefront of forging a partnership to assist Myanmar in its response to Cyclone Nargis. “The decision of the Singapore meeting was immediately conveyed to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and led to the ASEAN-UN cooperation that followed,” said George Yeo¹, Singapore Foreign Minister, who chaired the meeting. The Secretary-General of ASEAN met with the Prime Minister of Myanmar in Yangon on 21 May to convey the main messages from the meeting. Concurrently, United Nations (UN) officials advised ASEAN about how the aid delivery process had worked in Myanmar prior to the Cyclone and helped brainstorm strategies for securing a more sustainable pact with the Government on the acceptance and

coordination of aid. The UN Secretary-General also made an historic visit to Myanmar to meet with the Myanmar leadership to promote the non-political nature of humanitarian aid.

Dr Pitsuwan and Mr Ban Ki-moon officially launched the ASEAN-UN partnership on 24 May 2008 at the Don Mueang airport in Bangkok, which was used as a UN staging point for relief aid flowing into Myanmar. The two Secretaries-General also exchanged notes during the official launch, which followed their respective visits to Yangon, and discussed strategies to ensure the expeditious deployment of relief assistance from the international community to the Cyclone-affected population in Myanmar.²

The Tripartite Core Group (TCG)

For day-to-day operation, ASEAN set up a Yangon-based Tripartite Core Group comprising equal representation (three members each) from ASEAN, the Government of Myanmar, and the United Nations. During the first three months, the TCG met at least once a week and sometimes more often, in a spirit of mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. It also worked closely with the National Disaster Preparedness Central Committee (NDPCC) chaired by Myanmar Prime Minister Thein Sein. Its aim was to facilitate trust, confidence and cooperation between Myanmar and the international community in the urgent humanitarian relief and recovery work in the Delta after Nargis hit Myanmar. It was tasked with coordinating the distribution and utilisation of international assistance in support of the Government's ongoing relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Given the unprecedented scale of the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, which broke many records in the history books, it's no surprise that the partnership between ASEAN and the UN marked many firsts in multilateral cooperation in a large-scale humanitarian response. It was the first time for ASEAN and the UN to work together on the ground in response to a disaster and it was ASEAN's first-ever collective engagement in a disaster management and humanitarian assistance mission. The post-Nargis relief and recovery effort allowed ASEAN and the UN to fully utilise their respective national, regional and global advantages for the good of the partnership and the advancement of humanity. Girding the partnership, in all its complexities, was the purpose to reduce the loss of life and suffering among Cyclone-affected peoples, and to foster closer relations and bridge trust and understanding between the international community and the Government. These goals superseded differences and drove the partnership.

An innovative humanitarian coalition for the people of Myanmar

In the response to the havoc wrecked by Cyclone Nargis, the unique ASEAN and the UN partnership was successful in paving the way for unprecedented international support to humanitarian efforts in Myanmar. ASEAN gained a storehouse of lessons in disaster management that can be passed down to Member States required to draw up national plans on disaster management in accordance with the ASEAN Agreement on

Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). Both ASEAN and UN officials have expressed confidence in the durability of relationships that have been built, and are keen to define ways in which they can cooperate with each other in future disasters. Both benefitted strategically from the collaboration.

One cannot talk of the ASEAN-UN partnership in isolation from the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) comprising ASEAN, the Government and the UN. The partnership provided the backbone of the unique tripartite group, and in the first year of the TCG operation, the group achieved several milestones. The TCG would not have existed or been able to carry out its strategic post-Nargis functions without the ASEAN and UN partnership. "ASEAN supplied the cover that allowed the Government to allow international assistance while the UN was able to back that up with its expertise and material resources," said Dan Baker, then Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar.³ "A lot of this was built on strong personal relationships and trust."

One key milestone with implications for disaster assessments worldwide was the TCG-led Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA). This assessment provided a basis for comprehensive understanding on the magnitude of damage and the resources needed to carry out post-disaster relief and reconstruction activities. It is described in detail in a section in Chapter IV entitled "The Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA)."

The TCG also provided guidance to the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP) that served as a strategic



Plastic sheeting is distributed to families in urgent need of temporary shelter, with extra attention on vulnerable groups such as single-headed households. Photo courtesy of UNHCR

framework for the recovery phase. Four monitoring exercises and three social impact studies were conducted under the banner of the TCG. The TCG also executed several model projects rooted in the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) scheme. Most of all, the TCG bridged mutual respect between the international community and the Government. “The TCG has helped show donors that aid has come in, been delivered and helped to make a difference,” said Mr Robert Chua, Ambassador of Singapore to Myanmar.⁴ “By and large, most of the donors who have contributed are convinced that the aid has been delivered.” With the wind against its back, the TCG has delivered—and has flourished in its role as the coordination mechanism for the post-Nargis operation.

The resilience and resourcefulness of the people living through the disaster has been remarkable, evidenced by their efforts to rebuild their lives, homes and communities. “ASEAN worked closely with the UN and encouraged the Myanmar Government to be more accepting of humanitarian aid and foreign relief workers, especially health and medical personnel,” said Mr Yeo⁵. More than two years after the Cyclone, the emergency relief phase is officially over and actions have expanded to the medium- and long-term recovery needs of the affected population. Positive impacts on health are visible, as measured by improvements in child mortality, child nutrition and the availability of health care and clean water. Overall, educational opportunities for Cyclone-affected children had improved and reliance on food aid had diminished.

Speaking at the 64th UN General Assembly in New York 16 months after the Cyclone, Prime Minister Thein Sein expressed appreciation for the support to post-Nargis survivors. “The Myanmar Government and the people of the affected areas will always remain grateful to the individuals, organisations, and the international community at large for the generous help and assistance extended to them during their hour of need.”⁶ The ASEAN-UN partnership facilitated the inflow of an unprecedented level of international assistance and contributed

to the efficient, transparent and accountable provision of relief and recovery support.

Serendipity juxtaposed the landfall of Nargis with Myanmar’s ratification of AADMER and the passing of the ASEAN Charter. These two documents put more emphasis on the need for ASEAN Member States to proactively assist one another. The complex situation in Myanmar and the timing of the disaster would test its resolve. UN officials said that ASEAN provided a political solution to the looming humanitarian crisis, as survivors awaited aid that had been snarled. ASEAN officials said that the UN supported the partnership with technical expertise, a vast resource network, international credibility, fundraising and decades of institutional memory in responding to disasters. The unprecedented partnership was effective because ASEAN and the UN harnessed their comparative advantages for the benefit of the partnership and worked effectively with the Government for the common goal of saving lives and reducing the suffering of Nargis survivors.

ASEAN: Culturally astute coordination, resource mobilisation and disaster response

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations was established on 8 August 1967, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration by the founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Myanmar joined the group on 23 July 1997. As of 1999, the total number of ASEAN Member States was 10. ASEAN was founded on a set of core principles: non-interference in its members’ affairs, consensus, the non-use of force and non-confrontation. The Cyclone Nargis thrust ASEAN into the centre stage, spurring unprecedented action. This baptism by fire is the oft-repeated metaphor used to describe ASEAN’s rapid evolution from a political organisation to one that led the coordination of a response to a major natural disaster for the first time.

A tense international mood vis-à-vis the Nargis response, necessitated the involvement of an organisation that could lead negotiations with the Government, and also play a meaningful role in the subsequent disaster management and humanitarian mission. “ASEAN was able to do both —advocating and negotiating with the Government, mobilising ASEAN volunteers, mobilising ASEAN countries — and in those perspectives they moved on from the usual political rhetoric,” said Ramesh Shrestha, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Country Representative in Myanmar. ASEAN offered assurances that the sole purpose for the deployment of foreign aid workers was to assist in the relief effort. The political goodwill between the TCG Chair and both his ASEAN and UN counterparts on the TCG undoubtedly sustained the flow of visas and travel authorisations that allowed relief and recovery personnel to carry out their work.

The comfort zone

A critical factor in the success of the international humanitarian response to Nargis was ASEAN’s role in building bridges between the Government and international donors. “The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis (AHTF) and the TCG played an important role in giving donors greater confidence to provide funding to the humanitarian effort, as well as facilitating access and aid delivery,” said Paul Whittingham⁷, head of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) in Myanmar.

An unprecedented flow of humanitarian funds in support of Cyclone survivors followed. “ASEAN served as a bridge between the international community and the Myanmar Government. ASEAN played a critical role by working with the UN and the Myanmar authorities to create an innovative mechanism, the TCG, to expedite the humanitarian response, in particular by facilitating access,” said Michelle Chan, Australian Ambassador to Myanmar.⁸

While donors commend the support that ASEAN brought to the post-Nargis aid relationship, sources say that ASEAN was

a trusted liaison for the Government as well. The Government is sometimes reluctant to make requests directly to donors, said Srinivasa Popuri, Country Programme Manager of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) in Myanmar. “Therefore, ASEAN is also a comfort for the Government.”⁹

Resource mobilisation

ASEAN Member States were among the first to provide relief goods, medical supplies, food and water. ASEAN’s mobilisation of regional expertise and resources has been praised as a model of success that can be built upon in the future. “This journey to creating a caring and sharing ASEAN community by the year 2015, exemplified through the collective response to the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis which may be seen as a successful demonstration of the benefits of closer cooperation, broader integration and multistakeholder partnerships,” said Mr Chavarat Charnvirakul, Minister of Interior, Royal Kingdom of Thailand, in the opening statement at the Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference (PONAC) in Bangkok.¹⁰

Technical assistance

The ASEAN-Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT) was dispatched a week after the Cyclone by the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) to assess critical needs. The team comprised experts with specific knowledge in coordination, water and sanitation, health, logistics and food. Members of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team served as resource persons. The ASEAN-ERAT conducted the first official post-Cyclone assessment of the situation on the ground. Its key recommendation, which was later endorsed by Foreign Ministers of ASEAN in their meeting on 19 May in Singapore, was to immediately establish a humanitarian coalition to coordinate and facilitate relief, recovery and future reconstruction efforts. This was later known as the ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism. A comprehensive review, the



The ERAT team meets in Deydaye before deploying to the field for the PONJA, 9 June 2008. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

PONJA, followed to determine the magnitude of the damage, its impacts on the affected population and their immediate, medium- and long-term needs. Findings from the PONJA informed the PONREPP, which guided the recovery efforts.

Cultural capital

ASEAN Member States share similar histories, values and societal norms. These commonalities provided a platform from which to negotiate an understanding between Myanmar and the donor community, and to ease the fears of a Government that had been battered by its response to the deadly Cyclone.

ASEAN's cultural capital was essential in brokering the immediate response to Nargis, said Chris Kaye, then Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Country Representative for World Food Programme (WFP) Myanmar. "ASEAN's role in explaining the nature of humanitarian assistance and to use terms, language or an approach that was easily understood by the Government was invaluable."

In recent years, Myanmar has received less Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) than any of the 50 poorest countries in the world, including North Korea, Zimbabwe or Sudan. The year before the Cyclone struck, in 2007, Myanmar

Food aid is provided in Bogale. Photo courtesy of WFP

received US\$4 per person in ODA, according to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Cambodia and Lao PDR received US\$47 and US\$65, respectively, for the same time period. In 2008, Myanmar received US\$10.68 per person in ODA, according to the OECD; Sudan and Lao PDR received US\$57.72 and US\$79.83 respectively¹¹. Compared to other similarly impoverished countries, Myanmar had little experience with humanitarian assistance and the concept was not widely understood in the country at the time Nargis struck.

Initially, some of the offers of assistance to Myanmar and Myanmar's reaction to them sparked confusion. As a consequence, some Western countries, such as France, suggested invoking the "Responsibility to Protect" clause as a means to deliver aid without Government approval¹². Additionally, the presence of United States (US) and French naval ships stocked with supplies off the coast of Myanmar created uncertainties as to the nature of the international humanitarian intervention, and were possibly perceived as a threat to the integrity of the State rather than a lifeline to Cyclone-affected peoples.

"In the first two weeks after Cyclone Nargis, there was a tense stand-off between the international community and the Myanmar Government. While there was great willingness from members of the international community to help the victims and survivors, the Myanmar Government was suspicious of their motives. Some countries had dispatched warships carrying supplies to the region, and even talked openly about invoking the 'Responsibility to Protect,'" said Mr Yeo. ASEAN "rallied around" a Member State and quickly convened an emergency meeting of Foreign Ministers in Singapore. The decisions at the meeting set the stage for the cooperative response that followed and opened the door for the flow of humanitarian assistance.¹³

The dynamics of the developing crisis prompted Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Under Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the

Pacific (UNESCAP) to call on Dr Surin Pitsuwan, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, to advocate for ASEAN's intervention. "I realised that the Government, while implementing their own response to the massive disaster to the best of their abilities, could not imagine how a large-scale international aid effort might be managed without risking unwanted interference in domestic affairs," she said. "What crossed my mind immediately was how isolated the country had become, that there was a lack of trust of the outside world that had to be bridged, and I felt that ASEAN and the UN could play a very strong role behind the scenes to build trust and facilitate humanitarian cooperation."¹⁴

Ensuring that Cyclone survivors received assistance remained the most pressing humanitarian imperative and ASEAN's resolve to take collective action prompted it to urge the Government to accept aid on assurances that the assistance would not be politicised. In a closed-door session, ASEAN led negotiations that ultimately proved to be the catalyst for unprecedented tripartite cooperation involving ASEAN, the Government and the UN. That meeting led to the birth of the AHTF, which created the TCG to oversee day-to-day operations of the post-Nargis relief and recovery effort. ASEAN's intuitive understanding of the local context and its nuanced, culturally appropriate response to the crisis was key to achieving agreement on a way forward.

It was the most appropriate and, ultimately, most potent response, noted John Holmes, UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, in an editorial published 6 August 2008 in the Washington Post. "From the first, the aid operation in Myanmar ... had to be about helping the vulnerable people in need, not about politics... Was there a realistic alternative to the approach of persistent negotiation and dialogue that we pursued? I do not believe so. Nor have I met anyone engaged in the operation who believes that a different approach would have brought more aid to the more people more quickly."¹⁵





Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN (left), Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Under Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of UNESCAP (centre) and U Kyaw Thu, Chair of the TCG (right) during their visit to the Delta, June 2008. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

Coordinating the relief and recovery effort

The launch of the AHTF, which coordinated the policy that supported the Government's post-Nargis relief, recovery and reconstruction effort, necessitated the establishment of the Coordinating Office in Yangon. It was a watershed in ASEAN's history because it was the first field office to be set up and operate outside the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia. The office's operational framework was characterised by two phases. The first focused on managing relief and early recovery; the second centred on maintaining momentum during recovery. The Coordinating Office supported several achievements in the post-Nargis effort over the two years it existed and included staff members who had worked on the Indian Ocean Tsunami relief and recovery effort.

UN: International networks, fundraising support, decades of disaster management experience

The UN has operated in Myanmar since the country's independence in 1948. Through a number of UN agencies and funds, the UN is assisting the Government of Myanmar in promoting social equity, economic progress and better standard of living for the people of Myanmar. All UN members focus on the needs and the rights of the people with a view to overall human development. The focus of the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Myanmar is on the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, improved service delivery and the creation of a better and more enabling environment.

The UNCT, coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), contributes to UN efforts to advance the socio-economic conditions of the people of Myanmar, including areas like healthcare and education, labour standards, the control of human trafficking, social protection, food assistance, and support to improve agricultural production and livelihood throughout the country in a coordinated manner. Activities uphold the international humanitarian norms of equality, transparency and accountability. Besides strong operational partnerships with authorities, international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other humanitarian partners, the UN offered the post-Nargis effort decades worth of experience in managing relief and disasters. In Myanmar, the UN was already on the ground and had pre-positioned supplies and capacity to assist Cyclone-affected peoples.

Technical expertise

Thirteen UN agencies and funds are operational in Myanmar, they include: the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations - Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Office for Project Services, WFP, and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Additionally, the UNCT is supported by the International Organisation for Migration, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN Inter-agency Project on Human Trafficking, UN Department of Safety and Security and the UN Information Centre (UNIC). Each agency implements and executes its programmes and projects in line with its mandate, in cooperation with national authorities as well as international and national humanitarian partners.

Besides providing technical support through cluster leadership, the UN drew upon its institutional knowledge base and know-how to advance the goals of the partnership. Its technical inputs and financial support were important in the planning and implementation of the PONJA, PONREPP and Prioritised Action Plan. "Without the help of the UN it would be difficult for ASEAN to work in Myanmar," said Adelina Kamal, Head of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance Division of ASEAN Secretariat, who set up and headed the AHTF Coordinating Office for the first six months of the operation.

An emergency specialist from UNDP was seconded to oversee the design and process of the PONJA. To assist with the input and analysis of PONJA data, UNESCAP seconded statisticians. At the regional level, UNESCAP together with ASEAN convened a High-Level Expert Group Meeting on Post-Nargis Recovery and Livelihood Opportunities in Myanmar in October 2008. The findings of the Expert Group Meeting informed the PONREPP. In the planning of the PONREPP, UN experts were mobilised to review and provide input to the Sectoral Recovery Plans of each ministry. Finally, the heads of UN operational agencies who sat on the TCG advised their TCG counterparts on the technical aspects of the issues affecting the clusters and sectors.¹⁶

Political weight and mobilisation of funds

On 18 May, John Holmes travelled to Myanmar for a three-day work visit. Mr Holmes discussed with the Myanmar Government the goals of UN agencies to conduct a humanitarian relief operation in response to a major catastrophe that most countries would be unable to manage on their own. A week later, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Senior General Than Shwe in the capital Nay Pyi Taw to negotiate improved access for all humanitarian efforts.

The UN mobilises financial resources through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Flash Appeal. The CERF acts as a donor while the Flash Appeal forms a framework for a coordinated strategic response. The flash obtains funding

long after and beyond the CERF, which allows for a quick, reliable and equitable humanitarian assistance.¹⁷ In response to the Cyclone, the CERF helped agencies respond to these needs. Two allocations were made in May and July 2008 under the Rapid Response window.

One week after the Cyclone made landfall, the UN launched a US\$187 million Flash Appeal for the initial emergency relief response to Nargis.¹⁸ Although information was scant at this time, the appeal was based on early estimates, focusing on urgent humanitarian needs plus whatever early recovery projects that could be assessed and implemented during the early phase of the crisis.

After the PONJA elucidated the needs of the Cyclone-affected peoples, the UN launched a Revised Flash Appeal on 10 July for US\$477 million, which resulted in US\$349 million. In addition, contributions recorded outside of the appeal amounted to US\$256 million. The presence of the TCG and the PONJA gave credibility to the revised appeal by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the scale of the disaster and longer-term needs.

Later in 2009, the humanitarian community identified an additional US\$691 million under the three-year Post Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP). As of 2010, US\$180 million has been pledged for recovery and preparedness efforts in the Delta.¹⁹

Institutional capacity to respond to emergencies

International aid workers from UNDP, WFP, UNICEF and Save the Children – who were already all in Myanmar — responded to Nargis within the first days following the Cyclone.

UNDP, WFP and UNICEF were able to quickly reach the affected areas without any restrictions to assess the damage, deliver relief items and provide support to the affected populations within 24 hours of the Cyclone. The UNCT provided office and logistical support to the ASEAN-ERAT while the UNDAC team served as resource persons.

Pond cleaning is one of the cash-for-work activities in Bogale Township. Photo courtesy of UNDP

While waiting on travel authorisations and visas for international staff, the UN agencies in Myanmar deployed national staff members, who were reassigned from other parts of Myanmar. Even though many of the workers' homes had also been damaged by the Cyclone and were compromised by a lack of electricity or water, they were committed to assisting Nargis survivors.²⁰

"ASEAN couldn't have played their crucial role without the close collaboration of the UN and other humanitarian partners," said Dr William Sabandar, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of ASEAN for Post-Nargis Recovery in Myanmar. "ASEAN and the UN have complemented each other in providing both institutional and operational support that ensure the effectiveness of the effort".²¹

Inter-agency cluster coordination (IASC)

The UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (UNRC/HC) activated the Interagency Cluster Response as the humanitarian crisis went well beyond the scope of any one agency's mandate, and the needs were of a sufficient scale to justify a multi-sectoral response. It facilitated partnerships and a shared responsibility for the humanitarian response.

The WFP, as cluster lead of logistics and emergency telecommunications, worked with other clusters to establish the "Logistics Augmentation and Coordination in Support of the Humanitarian Community" operation. This was created to establish an uninterrupted supply chain of life-saving relief items to Cyclone-hit areas. WFP was instrumental in facilitating an air bridge for humanitarian cargo from Bangkok to Yangon, setting up the logistical hubs in the Delta, and building up transport services for interagency use, free-of-charge. 🇲🇲





Chapter Two

Launching the Post-Nargis Humanitarian Response

International and national aid workers from the UN and NGOs who were already on the ground quickly responded to the emergency needs of the Cyclone survivors. A few days after the Cyclone, the ASEAN-ERAT was dispatched to assess critical needs. As the first official international assessment team to enter Myanmar to evaluate the situation in Nargis-affected areas, the ASEAN-ERAT recommended for the immediate establishment of a humanitarian coalition to assist survivors. This recommendation validated a suggestion from Dr Pitsuwan that a “Coalition of Mercy” for the Myanmar relief efforts be formed.²²

The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis (AHTF)

ASEAN Foreign Ministers endorsed the recommendation at an emergency meeting in Singapore on 19 May. An agreement was reached

that provided the framework for collaboration and cooperation among ASEAN, the Government, the UN and regional and international agencies to respond to the disaster in a systemic, efficient and responsible manner. To operationalise the mechanism, the AHTF was established, comprising high-level officials from ASEAN Member States and chaired by the Secretary-General of ASEAN. It marked the first time since ASEAN’s inception that it had taken the helm of a large-scale humanitarian operation in a collective manner.

The AHTF was tasked with facilitating the effective distribution and utilisation of incoming international assistance, including the expeditious and effective deployment of relief workers, especially health and medical personnel. The AHTF coordinated the policy that supported the Government’s post-Nargis relief, recovery and reconstruction effort. The AHTF convened seven meetings where high-level strategic policy decisions were made and priorities and targets set to guide the overall initiative. One of the

Rice and other emergency relief items are distributed after Nargis. Photo courtesy of UNDP



Former Thai Ambassador to Myanmar and Senior TCG member Bansarn Bunnag (left to right); UN Resident/ Humanitarian Coordinator Bishow Parajuli; TCG Chair U Kyaw Thu; and Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN commemorate the handover of a TCG project in Seikgyi Village. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

AHTF's first decision was the establishment of the TCG, which provided the operational umbrella to facilitate and lead the relief and recovery effort.

Thus, from having no history of operational ties, ASEAN and the UN were able to work effectively with the Government to launch, within a short period of time, a joint humanitarian response to the worst natural disaster ever to strike Myanmar. The TCG played a pivotal role in the coordinated effort of humanitarian response in the Delta.

The Tripartite Core Group (TCG)

The TCG coordinated the multi-sectoral and multi-agency response required in response to such a destructive disaster. It was made up of nine members, with equal representation from ASEAN, the Government and the UN. It was carefully crafted as a smaller entity with the flexibility and agility to carry out the ASEAN-led coordinating mandate on the ground through the swift resolution of challenges and elimination of obstacles that impeded progress.

*Dr William Sabandar (top to bottom),
Singapore Ambassador Robert Chua and Viet
Nam Ambassador Chu Cong Phung.*

The TCG had difficult tasks; namely: 1) Opening up humanitarian space; 2) Helping the international community engage with the Government; 3) Coordinating a humanitarian response, which was burdened by delays and bottlenecks; and, 4) Demonstrating to donors that humanitarian aid was needed and would be used in a transparent way.

In spite of the challenges, the TCG has been credited with many noteworthy achievements. Prime Minister Thein Sein stated at the 64th UN General Assembly in New York that, “The success of the TCG has been given due recognition by the international community. It has been acknowledged as an exemplary mechanism for future disaster relief and rehabilitation undertakings.”²³

Although ASEAN and the UN each had its own separate experiences and perspectives, collaborating as “one” was uncharted territory. “The biggest challenge was to seek complementarities within the TCG mechanism to achieve humanitarian action,” Dr Sabandar said.

UN representatives on the TCG said that the purpose drove the partnership although the roadmap was not well defined. “Although it [TCG] started with no previous experience and no knowledge of how to go about it, the best thing is that we had a goal – to deliver aid effectively to the people and help the people and we found a common way forward in doing so, by various means,” said Bishow Parajuli, UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (UNRC/HC).²⁴

“We needed to work to find the complementary roles amongst the agencies and we did this through trial and error, but we finally found our way,” Mr Chua said that group drew upon a hodge-podge of personal and professional backgrounds to tailor solutions to a unique situation. “This was the first time something of this sort has been created internationally, so we improvised. “I often used the analogy that we were like a jazz band, improvising trying to make things happen together like a band.”²⁵

Though the members of the TCG joined under different organisational mandates and flags – ASEAN, the Government and the UN – its members pledged allegiance to the victims of Nargis. “I believe that has always been a hallmark of the TCG mechanism – although we had organisational or governmental differences, I think we had the same heart,” said Mr Chua. “We wanted to help the Cyclone victims and that has been a common message.”²⁶





Viet Nam Ambassador to Myanmar Chu Cong Phung said, “The TCG worked as a bridge to help UN to understand the Government more and the Myanmar Government to also have a better understanding of the UN. Relations between the UN and Myanmar Government did improve during this time, so this was an important cooperation.”²⁷

The big three

The ASEAN component of the TCG comprised a senior ASEAN member (serving on a rotational basis), an official from the ASEAN Secretariat, and an expert on disaster management. The senior ASEAN member was the ambassador from the ASEAN Member State chairing ASEAN during the period. It was agreed that the senior ASEAN member would have to be based in Myanmar so that he or she would be familiar with the conditions on the ground. The then Deputy Foreign Minister Government, appointed by the Central Coordinating Board, and two senior members of MoSWRR and Ministry of Agriculture, represented Myanmar. The UN component of the TCG comprised the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, and the heads of two UN operational agencies (UNICEF and WFP).

Ambassadors carried significant political weight with their respective nations and as members of the TCG. “Beyond that, there was also a personal dedication from these ambassadors.

They were on the ground. They were aware of what was happening, and they relayed what they were seeing and hearing back to the ASEAN Secretariat, while at the same time seeking support from the Government of Myanmar,” said Mr Parajuli.²⁸

The unique composition of the humanitarian partnership drew lessons from previous disasters, particularly that coordination activities should buttress the national leadership and its relief and recovery efforts. The TCG Chair was a Myanmar senior Government official, who ensured a greater sense of ownership and also could advocate on the behalf of the TCG directly with the Prime Minister of Myanmar. “No disaster will be successfully managed without strong leadership of the Government,” Dr Sabandar said. “ASEAN and the UN worked together to try to build trust and support the Government to coordinate this process.”

Among the TCG’s most significant achievements was establishing a mechanism with the authority to make strategic decisions. The mechanism provided a venue for the international assistance community to confer and negotiate directly with the Government of Myanmar about the post-Cyclone Nargis response.

“Previously, and in other relationships, the connections with the Government were ad hoc and it was never clear how much authority Government partners had,” said Mr Baker.



TCG members included (from left to right) Dr Anish Kumar Roy, Dr Puji Pujiono, Ms Adelina Kamal, Mr Daniel Baker, Mr Ramesh Shreshta, Mr Chris Kaye

Officials who served on the TCG

Myanmar	ASEAN	UN
Names and Dates served	Names and Dates served	Names and Dates served
U Kyaw Thu, Chair of the TCG and Chair Civil Service Selection and Training Board	Singapore Ambassador Mr Robert H K Chua	Mr Bishow Parajuli, UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator
U Aung Htun Khaing, Deputy Director General, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Welfare and Resettlement	Thai Ambassador Mr Bansarn Bunnag	Mr Daniel Baker, then Acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator
U Than Aye, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. Director General of the Department of Agricultural Planning	Vietnamese Ambassador Mr Chu Cong Phung	Mr Ramesh Shreshta, UNICEF Country Representative
	Dr Anish Kumar Roy, then Special Representative of Secretary-General of ASEAN in 2008	Mr Chris Kaye, World Food Programme Country Representative
	Ms Adelina Kamal, Head of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance Division of the ASEAN Secretariat	Mr Thierry Delbreuve, Head of UNOCHA in Myanmar
	Dr Puji Pujiono, Senior UNDP officer seconded to the ASEAN Secretariat	Mr Bhairaja Panday, UNHCR Country Representative
	Dr William Sabandar, Special Envoy for Secretary-General of ASEAN for Post Nargis Recovery	Mr Srinivasa B. Popuri, Country Programme Manager of UN Habitat in Myanmar

Only three members per party served at any given time



*Periodic Review emunerators
reach far and isolated areas.
Photo by AHTF Coordinating
Office*

Case study for collective problem solving: Opening up channels for assistance

Efforts to improve access for humanitarian workers and hasten the flow of aid supplies will likely go down in history as the TCG's crowning achievement. In fact, the TCG's first order of business was to free the bottleneck of relief supplies and humanitarian personnel. The task required delicate negotiations that reassured the Government of the intentions of aid workers while respecting the Government's concerns. The second TCG meeting on 2 June 2008 was essentially dedicated to opening up channels for assistance. "I think we functioned effectively as a trouble shooting mechanism because we were there to make things happen – we were not there to make policy," Mr Chua said. "We just wanted to make sure that the humanitarian operations moved quickly on the ground from the relief to the recovery."³⁹ The solutions, advocated to the Government by the TCG Chair, allowed the flow of international assistance, and branded the TGC as a group that could effectively resolve challenges for humanitarian agencies operating in Myanmar.

The traditional visa issuance policy was replaced by a streamlined policy overseen by the TCG Chair. TCG members were effusive in their praise of the TCG Chair, U Kyaw Thu. The TCG has contributed significantly to improved access, to obtaining visas and travel permits for people. The humanitarian access that was granted made

the large-scale delivery of international aid possible.

The strategic importance of the opening of humanitarian space was recognised by humanitarian actors and donors alike. "The streamlined TCG process resulted in the granting of nearly 4,000 visas and unprecedented access. "We had access to anywhere we wanted to go in the Delta. As long as we have had the right visa, there has never been a problem in getting travel authorities for international staff. Relatively, we have had a lot of freedom to move around," said Dan Collison, Director Programme Development and Quality, Save the Children in Myanmar.

The TCG's ability to respond to the international community's request for improved access while at the same time responding to the wishes of the Government had a positive effect on fundraising. "I believe the donors, through interactions I had with them, could see the credibility of the TCG and it was trying to do something unique under difficult circumstances and it achieved success," Mr Chua said.⁴⁰ The harmonious sound of "three voices rather than one ... brought higher credibility, higher assurance, transparency and trust," Mr Parajuli said.⁴¹ The mechanisms put in place by the TCG provided a foundation for "new relationships" to develop between the Government and the international community, said Dr Sabandar.⁴²

Community participation in hygiene training in Labutta. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

The TCG was also instrumental in providing a bridge between technical experts and Government ministries. This had both immediate and long-term consequences for the UN. The UN benefitted from its active involvement in the TCG with increased engagement with various Government Ministries. The trust established with technical Ministries facilitated access for UN and international NGO staff and their operations.²⁹

A considerable amount of humanitarian work was completed quickly because the high-level representatives serving on the TCG had the mandate and/or authority required to circumvent administrative entanglements. "Through the TCG and through UNICEF — we were able to move a larger number of trucks on daily basis, sometimes more than 100 trucks from Yangon to the Delta, and transport 75,000 large ceramic jars [for rainwater collection] in boats downstream for distribution," Mr Shrestha said.³⁰ "We were able to do a lot in such a short amount of time, and that was good for everyone."

Three months after its launch, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes praised the tripartite arrangement in an editorial published in the Washington Post. "Nargis showed us a new model of humanitarian partnership, adding the special position and capabilities of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to those of the United Nations in working effectively with the Government. This may prove the most important – and, I hope, enduring – lesson of the Cyclone response, with implications for how we respond, anywhere, in the future."³¹

The task at hand

In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, the Government authorised then Deputy Foreign Minister U Kyaw Thu to oversee the response. Driven by the common goal of helping to save lives and reduce suffering, the TCG worked tirelessly to coordinate resources and operations for the Nargis response. TCG members said that the TCG was the mechanism that gave the operation fuel. The meetings were a place where the members could apprehend and solve common issues. "We were able to solve key issues and build the trust between the

Government and the international community," Dr Sabandar said.³²

The TCG process was praised for elucidating the needs of Cyclone-affected peoples as the mechanism led to greater transparency and understanding amongst the donors and contributed to a greater level of support and generosity.

The establishment of the TCG resulted in several key strategic outcomes. But it was tasked to carry out three core functions: In the area of "resources coordination" it was to establish agreed upon channels for the expeditious and effective deployment of assistance from the international community into the Cyclone-affected areas; facilitate logistical chain for delivery of international assistance to the Cyclone-affected areas and resolve any practical and logistical issues in the delivery of international assistance to the affected population; and coordinate the UN Flash Appeal and other mechanisms for relief and recovery efforts. "At the end of the day the value of the TCG was that it was able to get problems solved," said Dr Heyzer. "This tripartite partnership meant that there was a strong awareness of interdependency, that one could not achieve results without the other."³³

In its "operations" coordination role the TCG coordinated and facilitated incoming international assistance to support the Government's ongoing relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts and ensured the distribution of relief supplies and the deployment of humanitarian personnel. These have been key achievements, in terms of negotiating with the Government, convincing them to have free humanitarian space in the Delta, and allowing access to aid workers.³⁴

Dr Paul Sender, Country Director of Merlin in Myanmar commented at a post-Nargis conference in November 2009 that the TCG was a mechanism for joint collaboration and it was a model that worked "effectively in the Delta. Within a complicated context, it enabled us to focus upon addressing humanitarian needs...as well as enable and maintain access to the Delta."³⁵





Thailand's former Ambassador to Myanmar and then Senior ASEAN member to the TCG Mr Bansarn Bunnang (right) and Chairman of the TCG and Chairman of the Civil Service Selection and Training Board U Kyaw Thu (centre) deliver aid to Cyclone Nargis survivors. Photo courtesy of Thai Embassy

In its “Monitoring and Reporting Coordination” capacity, the TCG ensured the flow of information related to international and national relief efforts among all parties involved; established a mutually-acceptable mechanism for monitoring the delivery and accountability of international assistance to the Cyclone-affected areas; and conducted a detailed assessment and analyses of the situation in the affected areas.

During the first year of the TCG’s mandate, humanitarian activities enjoyed solid financial support. But agencies in the Delta region in particular, faced funding challenges to implement the PONREPP. “That brought frustration to the whole TCG membership and the efforts of the TCG for the aspiration and hope [for Cyclone-affected peoples],” Mr Parajuli said.³⁶

In spite of the TCG’s best efforts to communicate the needs to the international community, shoring up adequate resources to fund the relief and recovery effort was challenging, confirmed Dr Sabandar.³⁷ The policies of donor countries vis-à-vis financial contributions to Myanmar, outside of the health and education sectors, occasionally made it challenging to secure funds for the post-Nargis humanitarian effort.

Communicating the post-Nargis effort

The relationship between Government and the international media was tested in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, when foreign reporters could not access the disaster sites, and the world was hungry for news. Still, news coverage of the Cyclone surged almost immediately. Stories took a variety of forms, from general reports on the impacts of the Cyclone and official

tallies of casualties to human-interest stories about individual victims of the disaster. Much of news related to Cyclone Nargis, however, focused on the difficulty that international agencies had in providing aid to Myanmar and of reporting from the field in Myanmar due to the above restrictions.³⁸

While delays in authorisation to enter Myanmar resulted in a bottleneck of humanitarian workers and supplies in Bangkok, the UN system there facilitated press conferences for the international media. The reports from the UN Communications Group in Myanmar provided information about the situation on the ground and ongoing activities for these meetings. Restricted information flows were worsened by the Cyclone's destruction to communication systems.

The establishment of the TCG not only increased humanitarian access in the country it also addressed the communication needs of the media and operating agencies. The proceedings of TCG meetings provided the bulk of information for TCG press releases, which were widely circulated. To convey a cohesive, unified message, the statements were written and approved jointly by representatives from ASEAN, the Government, and the UN. As members of the TCG, the joint press releases allowed the Government, which seldom comments on the record, a rare communiqué with the media.

ASEAN-UN International Pledging Conference

Financing and coordinating such an immense multi-sectoral and interagency disaster response required trust between the main stakeholders and the Government. Interagency disaster response had to be gained virtually overnight to prevent the needless deprivation and suffering of hundreds of thousands of Cyclone-affected people. ASEAN and the UN were tasked with this vital task. "We had the issue in the beginning with very low trust between the Government of Myanmar and members of the international community; ASEAN and the UN worked

together to build trust and support the Government so that it was able to coordinate this process," Dr Sabandar said.⁴³

The ASEAN-UN International Pledging Conference launched post-Nargis partnership between the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and the UN. The Pledging Conference, held in Yangon on 25 May 2008, brought together delegations from 51 countries, including ASEAN Member States, as well as 24 United Nations agencies, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and NGOs. Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo, as ASEAN Chair, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened the conference. The donor conference had the immediate effect of raising money for Cyclone-affected peoples. It symbolised the joint cooperation and commitment that would be needed to make humanitarian assistance effective in the following months, and it demonstrated in a world theatre, that engagement leads to results.

A new plan developed from key assessments expanded the original flash appeal into 103 projects in 13 key sectors, submitted by 13 UN agencies and 23 NGOs to assist 2.4 million people most severely affected by Cyclone Nargis, with a planning horizon until April 2009. The total amount requested to address the needs identified in this appeal amounted to US\$481.8 million, of which US\$178 million had already been committed in response to the original flash appeal.⁴⁴ The pledging conference generated about US\$349 million in new pledges under the revised Flash Appeal on 10 July for US\$481.8 million, based on initial estimates of the UN.

While there was a unanimous agreement on the need to urgently scale up relief efforts to ensure that all those in need were reached quickly and with adequate relief supplies, many countries expressed a need for reassurance that the restrictions on the delivery of relief supplies would be eased and that relief workers would have unhindered access to Cyclone-affected areas. The conference also stressed the need and importance of a credible assessment, which led to the commissioning of the PONJA.



A doctor in Bogale performs a general examination of a child, with her mother by her side. Photo courtesy of IOM

Strategic results

- **A regional body and the UN can partner to produce favourable results for disaster-affected population, and improve relations between the Government and international community.** Regional support and resources can be leveraged to rapidly deploy assistance, particularly in environments where there are tenuous aid relationships, understanding of international humanitarian assistance operations are poorly understood, and the disaster exceeds a nation's capacity to respond.
- **Relations between the international community and the Government improved** as a result of UN and Myanmar officials serving together on the TCG; dialogue between the Government and in-country humanitarian actors increased. This novel tripartite coalition may be worth repeating for the benefit of the people of Myanmar.
- **Cooperation between ASEAN, the Government, and the UN helped to clarify the needs of Cyclone-affected peoples, which demonstrated that there was an urgent humanitarian need.** The elucidation of the situation in the Delta allowed for the depoliticisation of aid in the Nargis context, and a subsequent increase in funding. The TCG distinguished between the political and the humanitarian aspects of Myanmar and thereby opened up the window for meaningful engagement with the international community in the context of humanitarian assistance. The UK doubled its assistance and Australia has almost tripled its assistance compared to previous years.
- **Increased humanitarian space in Myanmar.** Through the establishment of a streamlined visa process, the TCG facilitated unimpeded access for humanitarian workers, granting nearly 4,000 Nargis-related visas. As a result, aid and humanitarian assistance was provided to a greater number of Cyclone-affected people, even those in remote, hard-to-reach areas. This access facilitated dialogue between humanitarian workers and the Government, and has made it easier for stakeholders to discuss common concerns.
- **Government authorities have a greater appreciation of what it takes to lead a disaster response.** Shortly after floods and landslides killed dozens and displaced thousands in western Myanmar in June 2010, high-ranking Government officials assessed the damage first hand, conferred with UN agencies and NGOs and adjusted their plans accordingly, delegated duties for aid delivery and quickly authorised aid delivery. When a cyclone once again threatened Myanmar from the Bay of Bengal in April 2009, MoSWRR appealed for assistance. They alerted Save the Children, World Vision and UNICEF and requested support before it made landfall.⁴⁵
- **The Government, ASEAN and the UN could speak with "one voice" about the post-Nargis relief and recovery efforts.** The messages regarding the needs of Cyclone-affected people were strengthened through joint advocacy efforts such as TCG press releases and other collaborative communication initiatives. The TCG reports, reviews, assessments, press releases required authorisation from all three counterparts and helped dispel misinformation about the operation.

Chapter Three

Collaborative Coordination

From Relief to Recovery

Negotiating a framework for coordination

During the period immediately following the Cyclone until early October 2008, the work of the TCG focused on assessing the situation on the ground as well as identifying and quantifying the needs of the affected communities. The ASEAN-ERAT conducted the first official international assessment, which was followed by the more comprehensive PONJA. ASEAN took initiative to bring together for the first time the World Bank and UN assessment tools to be merged into one PONJA report. Meanwhile, international and national NGOs and various UN agencies continued to carry out relief activities, providing life-saving support to Cyclone survivors.

The PONJA demonstrated that the TCG umbrella allowed for the opening of humanitarian operational space through joint planning and engagement with

various stakeholders. With recent memories of this largely successful multi-agency and multi-sectoral assessment, the group agreed to establish joint regional coordination hubs to manage the recovery coordination. Throughout the PONJA exercise, township authorities demonstrated receptiveness to information sharing and expressed a need for such support. The TCG believed it could play a key role in establishing the hubs that facilitate the coordination of relief and early recovery responses and address operational issues.

Donors and NGOs pressed for the creation of a monitoring tool, uniquely tailored for Myanmar, to gauge needs at the household level using PONJA as its baseline. This resulted in the launch of the Periodic Review. (These innovative and novel assessment tools are described in detail in CHAPTER IV: Assessment, Planning & Monitoring). Carrying out the various assessments required considerable

A health education meeting, one of numerous conducted in the affected areas. Photo courtesy of WHO



Health
ion

negotiation and compromises among TCG members. During this period, TCG members also debated the framework for coordinating the post-Nargis relief and recovery effort at the community level, which resulted in the PONREPP.

Based on his experiences as the Director of Nias Recovery for the Indonesian Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias (BRR Aceh-Nias), Dr Sabandar understood the need for continued coordination of field operations, and he believed that ASEAN, in collaboration with the Government and UN under the auspices of the TCG, had the responsibility to ensure the accountability of the recovery. "ASEAN said it would be responsible for the coordination and we had to see it through," he said. Dr Sabandar proposed to the Secretary-General of ASEAN that ASEAN support the AHTF in coordinating the funding for recovery.

Dr Sabandar called Mr Parajuli and suggested that ASEAN and the UN share the responsibility of establishing the coordinating mechanism, as outlined in the PONREPP. Both partners agreed to redirect resources to kick-start the RCC in Yangon. "ASEAN's involvement was a spontaneous response to start the recovery process," Dr Sabandar said. "ASEAN stepped in, the UN contributed, and it became a joint operation."

ASEAN and the UN developed an innovative cost sharing mechanism so that each funded 50 per cent of the coordinating mechanism, as outlined in the PONREPP. Both partners worked together to initiate Recovery Coordination Centre (RCC) in Yangon.

UNOCHA in Myanmar extended their field presence that began in October 2008 for an additional six months until December 2009. This added up to a total of more than one year. "We couldn't have done it without UN support," Dr Sabandar said. "It was a peculiar situation that required an innovative solution to meet the needs on the ground."⁴⁶

ASEAN and the UN at the hub level, building sustainable community relationships

The TCG's coordinated post-Nargis relief and recovery response at the community level evolved over two phases.

From October 2008 to May 2009, community-level coordination centred on establishing the UNOCHA hub structure that is traditionally put in place to facilitate international humanitarian assistance following disasters. To support coordination and cluster mechanisms at the field level, UNOCHA established six hub offices. The UNOCHA staffed each hub with a Recovery Liaison Coordinator, national professional or assistant, database officer and administrative support. ASEAN personnel were co-located in all of the hubs to coordinate the implementation of the Periodic Reviews. They performed complementary functions, liaising with the local Government through the Township Coordination Committees (TCCs). A desk was reserved for the TCC Secretary (or nominee), to encourage informal interactions and problem solving, and to give local government access to the technology, information and facilities of the hub. ASEAN provided human resources to fill gaps in the hubs during the transition from relief to recovery.

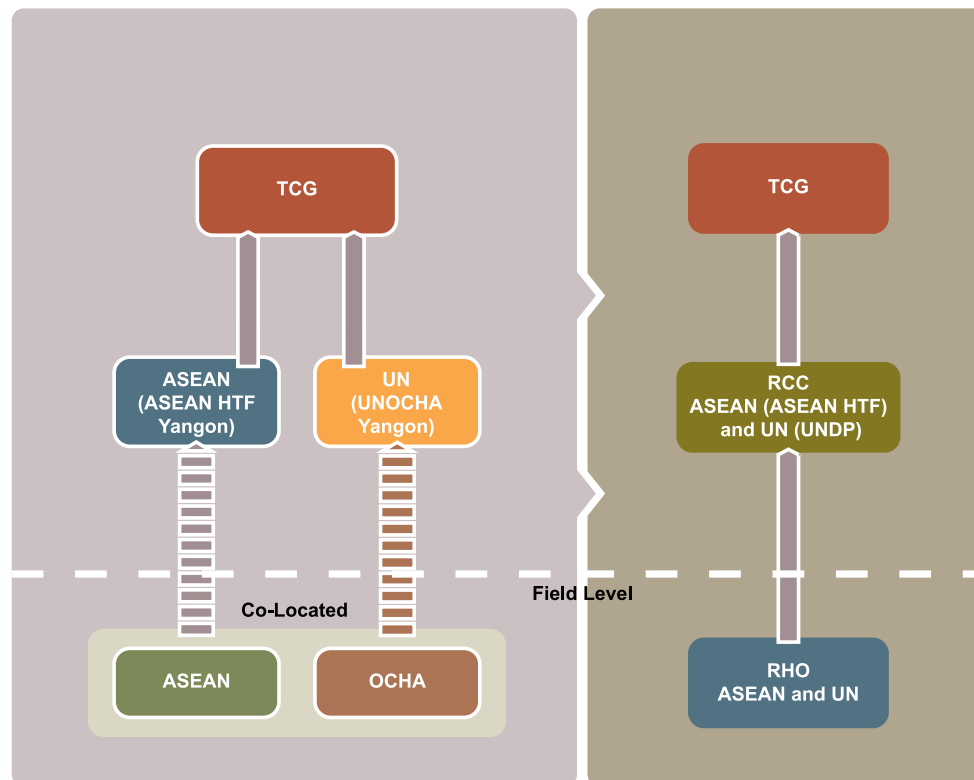
From June 2009 to the end of the AHTF mandate, the co-hub system merged into a unified system called the Recovery Hub Office (RHO) that was led by the TCG, with administrative assistance from ASEAN and UN. In the interest of maximising and harmonising the effort, the AHTF Coordinating Office and UNRC/HC negotiated the establishment of the RHO. The process involved the re-selection of human resources from ASEAN and UN into the RHO structure (both international and national staff) and finetuning the terms of reference to ensure TCG coordination was extended to the field.

As the hub structure evolved, it was imperative that trust be maintained between the TCG, which included the Government, donors and the vulnerable populations, which was made more challenging given a spike in agencies working in the Delta following the Cyclone. As of April 2010, 114 organisations had reported activities in the Delta. The sudden influx of foreigners and Myanmar nationals from other parts of the country, who needed to interact with local authorities to carry out their activities, required delicate facilitation. Ultimately, the hub offices proved to be an effective mechanism to enhance communication, cooperation and harmonious relations among the various stakeholders.⁴⁷

Field Recovery Working Groups (FRWGs)

As the hub structured evolved, the Field Recovery Working Groups (FRWGs) were integrated into the coordinating framework to ensure that recovery assistance, proposed under PONREPP (detailed in CHAPTER IV: Assessment, Planning & Monitoring), was provided in a coordinated, integrated, and transparent manner. The FRWGs were a forum at the township level for agencies involved in recovery work to discuss matters related to implementation, including coordination with other stakeholders, and to identify emerging needs, gaps and overlaps. The RHOs hosted FRWG meetings, which provided a

Evolution of TCG Operational Coordination



Helicopters are of vital importance to the distribution of relief supplies and transport of humanitarian workers in the Delta. Photo courtesy of WFP

Case study in compromise: Negotiating helicopter flights

Obtaining permission for the WFP to use helicopters as part of the overall emergency response required a multilateral push from ASEAN, UN officials and other diplomats in Yangon. A helicopter fleet in Myanmar was a critical asset to the effort. The Ayeyarwady Delta is a complex maze of rivers and creeks spread out over 23,500 square kilometers, from scattered islands along the coast to low-lying floodplains on the outskirts of Yangon. The deluge from monsoon rains made ground travel on the few roads that led into the Delta arduous. Aid delivered south of Bogale and Labutta had to be delivered by boat since there was no access by road. But the waterways also presented logistical challenges as the Cyclone damaged or destroyed many boats, and rivers and canals were clogged with debris.

Helicopters are a critical mode of transport during the first few days and weeks of an emergency operation, as they can be used for immediate delivery of emergency aid, to Medevac injured or sick survivors and deliver aid quickly to areas difficult to reach by land or water. But

as of 2 June 2008, only one helicopter was being used; nine others were in Thailand awaiting clearance to enter Myanmar. John Holmes, UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, arrived in Yangon on 18 May 2008 to negotiate improved access, pointing out that the humanitarian relief operation to such a catastrophic disaster would be well beyond the capacity of many countries to manage.⁴⁸

The helicopters were managed by the Logistics Cluster led by WFP, and made available free-of-charge for aid agencies and NGOs in Myanmar to transport aid supplies and staff to the Delta. Although the Government eventually agreed that all 10 helicopters could be deployed, initially flights would be restricted to three days. But TCG members stressed the importance and urgency of the helicopter flights, particularly the deluge of monsoon season made roadways impassable and convinced the Government to relax the restriction.⁴⁹

venue for solution-oriented engagement between aid agencies and local government and locally tailored relief and recovery responses. The RHO footed the bill to build a training hall after stakeholders there had difficulty finding a space large enough to accommodate their gatherings. The hall was regarded as an excellent contribution to the community.⁵⁰

Still, while coordination meetings are great in principle, in practice there are barriers to attendance. Time tended to be an issue for all involved, and without proper facilitation, the meetings could appear trivial. The collusion of these factors led to poor and sporadic attendance by humanitarian actors and Government officials in some hubs, but in others, the coordination meetings provided a safe venue to exchange

information that was invaluable.⁵¹ Hub officers concluded that humanitarian actors should not rely exclusively on a formal mechanisms to interact with the Government; rather, informal coordination was sometimes more efficient and effective.⁵²

The Recovery Coordination Centre (RCC)

Past experiences in post-disaster recovery efforts suggest a strong correlation between the level of international community support and its trust in the coordination and implementation architecture. For instance, the establishment of a transparent, accountable coordination structure by the national government, with support from the international community, was key to securing 93 per cent of US\$7 billion



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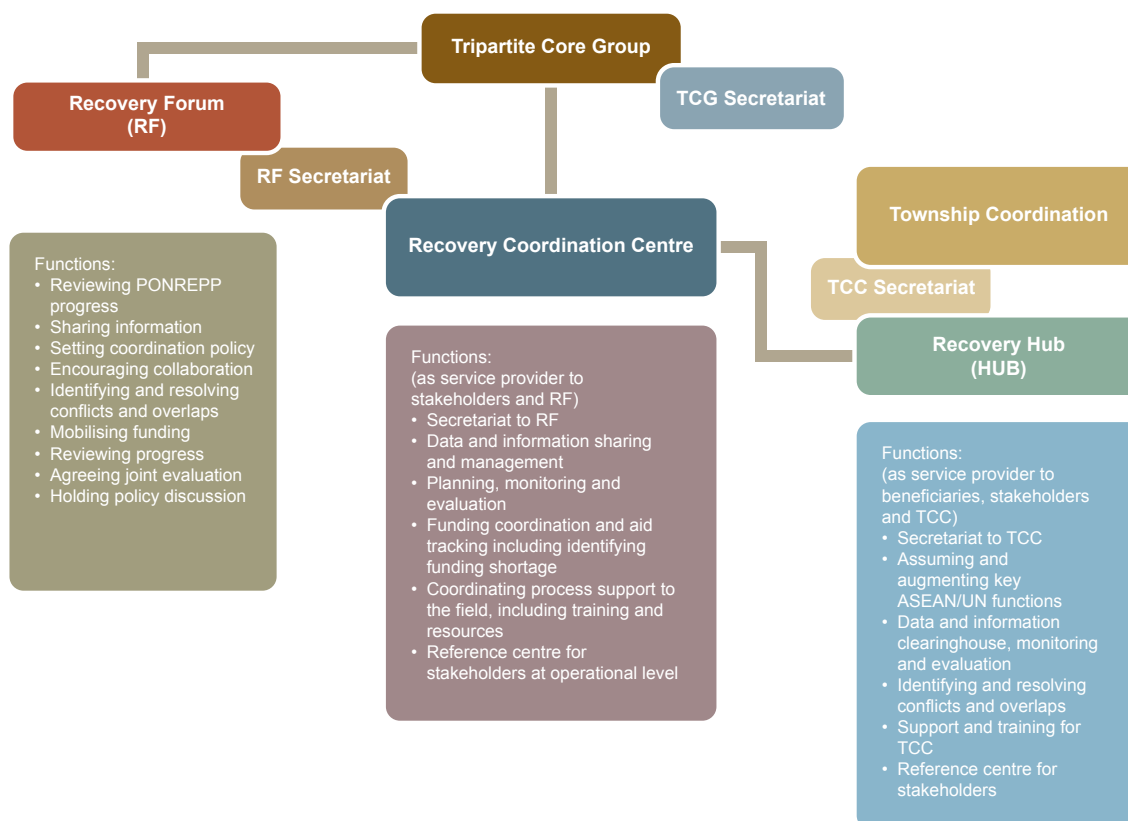
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pledged for the post-tsunami recovery effort in Aceh and Nias, Indonesia, noted Dr Sabandar. "I was keenly aware that before donors put money into a recovery process, it was important for us to establish a structure that warranted accountability and transparency in the planning and execution of the international donor programme," he said.

To this end, ASEAN and the UN conceptualised and initiated the recovery coordination framework and the RCC became operational on 10 June 2009. Generous support from Australia, Norway and DFID and others, enabled ASEAN and the UN to deploy and initiate the RCC. Seconded personnel from

ASEAN and the UN staffed the RCC, which assumed overall Delta recovery coordination responsibility following the discontinuation of the IASC-mandated Cluster Coordination mechanism roughly one month later. It was the TCG's operational forum at the Yangon level that carried out planning, monitoring and evaluation of PONREPP-related initiatives; tracked aid pledges, contributions paid in and disbursements to implementing agents; identifies funding shortages; managed and shared data and information; and serves as a centre of reference for actors seeking information and guidance on matters relating to recovery and the PONREPP.

TCG Recovery Coordinating Structure





Survivors in Labutta rebuild homes with the support of international donors. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

The RCC reported to the TCG, and provided secretariat services to the Recovery Forum (RF), a multi-stakeholder group. The RCC represented a cross-section of those involved in the Nargis response and was a conduit for the flow of information and analysis from and to the various field coordinators. It supported the Yangon Recovery Working Groups (YRWGs) and the Field Recovery Working Groups — primarily the three Delta Recovery Working Groups (DRWGs): Livelihoods, Basic Services, and Physical and Social Protection. Another important function of the RCC was the provision of oversight, including support, guidance and training for the work being undertaken in the field hubs.

Given the magnitude of Nargis and the subsequent humanitarian response, stakeholders required quick and easy access to accurate information. Put simply, donors needed to

know what to fund, agencies needed to know where to work, and the Government needed to know how to support the work of the agencies, said former RCC Manager Joern Kristensen. Based on reports submitted by field hub offices and FRWGs, the RCC informed policy, programming and finance decisions. The experience broadened understanding about disaster response among Government and NGO staff.⁵³

The RCC and the Recovery Working Groups (RWGs)

The RWGs brought together managers and technical experts from implementing agencies to review Delta-wide trends, challenges and gaps and to backstop field endeavours. Their deliberations were conveyed to township structures and to the

Vulnerable households receive poultry. Photo courtesy of FAO

Recovery Forum via the RCC. Sectoral problems identified at the township level that required the attention of Yangon or beyond were discussed at the YRWG and if they were not resolved, raised at higher-level forums such as the TCG or RF.

Monthly hub reports, which highlighted field-level issues that required technical support, service gaps and funding needs, provided fodder for discussion at the Yangon level. Based on the reports, the RCC prepared an agenda for the three DRWGs, which comprised staff from UN agencies and international NGOs. Every effort was made to resolve issues at the local level, but intractable challenges were raised at higher-level forums.

ASEAN and the UN seconded staff to run the hubs, which the RCC negotiated issues related to the harmonisation of policies and joint visibility. Compromises were reached on issues such as pay, holiday time and the sharing of office space.

The Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference (PONAC)

At an AHTF meeting in early July 2009, it was recognised that measures would be needed to address recovery effort funding shortages. The meeting agreed that the PONREPP, which covers the period up to December 2011, should be reviewed to establish priorities to cover the critical needs of Cyclone survivors up to July 2010, which was the end of the ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism mandate.

The TCG supported ASEAN's decision to organise the PONAC with support from the UNESCAP in Bangkok. "We didn't have the money we needed so we had to take action," recalled Dr Sabandar. There was an urgent need to quickly inject US\$103 million to the affected communities in the Delta with most urgent critical needs.⁵⁴

The UN agreed that action was needed to meet remaining critical needs. "After the initial generous funding response from the donor community, money to support the three year Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan had only just begun trickling into the Delta," Mr Parajuli said. "There was an

urgent need to quickly inject US\$103 million to the affected communities in the Delta with most urgent critical needs although the full amount identified by PONREPP would still be needed."⁵⁵

The conference was co-chaired by Dr Pitsuwan and Dr Heyzer, who said that the conference was important to maintaining the trust that had been established between the Government of Myanmar and the international community. The donor conference mobilised funds against that plan, "and was an important milestone to renew the commitment of all stakeholders in supporting recovery in the Delta," added Dr Heyzer.

Dr Pitsuwan asserted that addressing the outstanding needs of Cyclone-affected peoples was a moral imperative. "It is both our collective humanitarian responsibility and our moral duty to take action and increase assistance to those still struggling to get back on their feet - we must finish the job we embarked upon together."⁵⁶

Funds raised from the conference allowed some organisations to continue funding activities in the Cyclone-affected areas through to 2010.⁵⁷ But the activities of other international NGOs were curtailed by a lack of financial support. "The levels of funding available would not allow organisations to match assistance and actions to where even the most critical needs and gaps in provision have been identified," said Dr Sender, Country Director of Merlin in Myanmar. He appealed for support from donors to meet these gaps and emphasised that the aid agencies supported the Action Plan.⁵⁸

The economic sanctions against Myanmar created a complicated backdrop for donors, who struggled to fund the activities beyond the immediate relief effort. While donors inside the country appreciated the complexity of the situation, their counterparts outside of Myanmar tended to be bounded by the political will of their respective countries. "I know they [donors] are trying to encourage engagement but they are tied to their own national and regional policies, which



Villagers from Seik Gyi carry a boat donated by ASEAN Member States. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

severely limit what can and cannot be done. So they are caught between humanitarian relief, early recovery, and longer-term recovery plans. Many donors were able to commit funds for the humanitarian phase, but raising funds for early and longer-term recovery has been very challenging,” Dr Heyzer said.⁵⁹

Donors have said that they are comfortable providing the humanitarian assistance that has an immediate impact on the lives of affected people. But recovery projects often require significant (and costly) improvements to infrastructure. Most donors operate throughout Myanmar and not strictly in Nargis-affected areas and they must balance the needs in the Delta with programming needs in other areas of the country.

Historically, longer-term funding appeals following a natural disaster are not fully funded for a myriad of reasons: Competing disasters; the sense that longer-term needs are not a matter of life or death or, in other words, they are development projects as opposed to humanitarian support; and the belief that the needs have been overestimated.

Those factors notwithstanding, donors initially pledged 85 per cent of the total requested at the PONAC, enabling the recovery effort to continue. Seven months after the conference, the total amount pledged had increased to more than 90 per cent of the US\$103 million requested at the conference. Out of the total pledged, almost 80 per cent had been released to implementing partners by the end of the AHTF mandate in July 2010.

Strategic results

- The overall management of humanitarian projects improved in Myanmar as a result of the innovative ASEAN-UN partnership.** The post-Nargis relief and recovery effort proved that direct and accountable delivery of assistance is possible in Myanmar with careful planning and well-designed projects. The novel tripartite partnership helped to enhance understanding of post-disaster and emergency operations among a myriad of
- stakeholders. In particular, the experience reinforced the Government’s knowledge and expertise in managing humanitarian projects and it helped build mutual trust and confidence among all stakeholders.
- Knowledge on the coordination of field operations in a large-scale disaster increased** among stakeholders, both on the Government side and local NGO side. This will benefit the people of Myanmar in the event of future emergencies. Moreover, coordination meetings provided a forum for local humanitarian actors and township authorities to discuss common concerns. The formal coordination mechanism made it easier for informal communication to take place, and facilitates greater cooperation.
- Knowledge in technical aspects of disaster coordination and recovery** was transferred to the Government. Township authorities are more aware of the technical and financial assistance available from aid agencies and seek help when needed.
- Strengthened communication and advocacy work.** The Nargis experience underscored the need to take a strategic approach to advocacy, external outreach and communications. Humanitarian partners in Myanmar have integrated public information in contingency planning and developed joint communication and advocacy strategies. Both the UN and ASEAN cooperation in publishing press releases, high profile media trips with dignitaries from donor capitals and the Myanmar Humanitarian Partnership Group meetings ensured that the public in Myanmar and overseas were informed about the progress and concerns in the Delta.







Chapter Four

Assessment, Planning and Monitoring

A remarkable assortment of groundbreaking assessment and monitoring tools were designed and executed under the auspices of the TCG during its mandate. The TCG agreed at its first meeting to carry out the PONJA; the Periodic Reviews (PRs) and the Social Impact Monitoring (SIM) followed. These pioneering assessment tools have already had an impact are likely to influence disaster management and response practices in the years ahead. Since the last census meeting international standards was carried out in the 1930s⁶⁰, the information gathered no doubt will also prove useful to the country's ongoing recovery efforts as well. The first official assessment following Cyclone Nargis was completed by the ASEAN-ERAT.

ASEAN-Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT)

Cyclone Nargis captured headlines around the world, triggering a tremendous willingness to help. But the international humanitarian community did not have a clear picture of the extent of the damage or the needs of those affected. ASEAN, through its AADMER, mobilised the ERAT to conduct the initial assessment in Myanmar.

The primary objective of the ASEAN-ERAT mission was to provide recommendations on advancing the support of the Cyclone-affected people. The AADMER specifies that ASEAN Member States may help an affected Member State assess damage and make recommendations on the type and scope of assistance required.⁶¹ "The ASEAN Secretariat

*Periodic Review team
conducts a household
survey in the village.
Photo by AHTF
Coordinating Office*

made suggestions in our daily situation reports to the Member States (including Myanmar), to activate and deploy the ASEAN-ERAT," Ms Kamal said. "Myanmar responded to our recommendations, and then worked with us to facilitate the deployment." Members of the ERAT comprised experts from the ASEAN Secretariat, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. ASEAN facilitated the deployment of the UNDAC team to join ERAT as resource persons. Other members of UNOCHA and UNDAC, who were in the field, also supported the ERAT.

The joint assessment mission, carried out from 9 to 18 May 2008, was the first international and official assessment team to provide an independent review of the situation on the ground following Nargis. Information for the report was gleaned from field assessment missions in Yangon, interviews with key Government representatives from the MoSWRR, UN officials, and members of the humanitarian community. "We worked closely with the UNDAC team using their available tools and questionnaires and we worked with [the Myanmar Information Management Unit] and the UNIASC clusters in using its findings and field reports," Ms Kamal said. The inclusion of multi-stakeholders in the fact-finding mission and report lent credibility to the document.

The ASEAN-ERAT report warned of the possibility of a second wave of deaths due to disease and nutritional deficiency if relief was not effectively negotiated between the international community and the Government.⁶² This finding provided the humanitarian imperative for the ASEAN-UN partnership in Myanmar and the creation of a coordinating mechanism to bridge the humanitarian gap between the affected population and the international community. The report recommended that a 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' immediately be established to coordinate and facilitate the ongoing relief, recovery and future reconstruction efforts. It was proposed that the membership of the task force include ASEAN (including the Government), neighbouring countries to Myanmar, the UN and other international organisations.

Community participation in DRR Workshop in First Aid Application. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

Based on the report's recommendations, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed on 19 May to establish the AHTF at an emergency meeting in Singapore. The decision led to the launch of the AHTF and TCG. The assessment also recommended that a more detailed and comprehensive assessment be conducted. This recommendation, coupled with calls by donors at the ASEAN-UN International Pledging Conference for a "comprehensive rapid joint assessment of recovery needs," resulted in the PONJA.

The Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA)

With millions of dollars in urgently needed donations for the post-Nargis relief and recovery effort hinging on the PONJA, the TCG and AHTF were under intense pressure to rapidly deploy assessment teams. But the process was complicated by differences of opinion over the choice of a methodology that would glean the most comprehensive results possible and yield irreproachable credibility. The UN proposed a Village Tract Assessment (VTA) to determine the needs for relief and recovery; the World Bank suggested a damage and loss assessment (DALA) to evaluate the longer-term macroeconomic implications of the disaster.

Through a series of delicate negotiations, ASEAN managed to strike a compromise at the end of May: The VTA and DALA would be integrated into a pioneering joint exercise that would draw on the strengths of both methodologies to determine the immediate and long-term effects of the Cyclone and the immediate and medium- to long-term recovery humanitarian needs.

To facilitate and coordinate the PONJA, the TCG formed a three-person Assessment Oversight Committee, comprising experts from ASEAN, the UN and the Government, which was tasked with reconciling the technical aspects of the assessments. "The UN's agencies each have their own methodology, and they are quite strict," said Dr Puji Pujiono, a





Constructing tube well as part of a water, sanitation and hygiene project by UN HABITAT in Kungyangon. Photo courtesy of UNHABITAT/Veronica Wijaya

Recovery Needs Assessment Programme Specialist seconded from UNDP Geneva.⁶³ “And the World Bank also has its own assessment, which is also very strict. The challenge was reconciling the different interests and parameters, and translating this reconciliation into approval.” However, once the World Bank and UN assessment teams were harmonised, the PONJA went smoothly, said a World Bank official.⁶⁴

The TCG protected the credibility of the process and final PONJA report. The PONJA was crux of the post-Nargis operation because international financial assistance depended on unimpeded access to the affected areas, and a credible

assessment of needs. The Committee addressed concerns of credibility with the structure of the assessment teams, which mirrored that of the TCG, and later on, at the suggestion of ASEAN, through the appointment of senior Myanmar advisors to participate in the process. These senior advisors or “Eminent Persons” were highly regarded by both the international community and the Government. The advisors played a critical role in providing an interpretation, without changing the substance of the findings of the assessment, and explaining it in such a way that the Government could trust the process and contents.

PONJA established a baseline upon which the effectiveness of post-Nargis activities could be measured in subsequent assessments such as the Periodic Reviews. The PONJA report was regarded a valuable resource because it was endorsed by the Government and provided a common reference point that donors could use to gauge how activities were supporting the PONJA and PONREPP.⁶⁵ The PONJA represented a milestone in humanitarian response, for some, providing an “incredibly useful jointly agreed picture” of the situation on the ground following the Cyclone. This allowed all stakeholders to work from the same assumption in terms of needs and priorities.⁶⁶

The PONJA was one of Mr Chua’s most gratifying experiences serving on the TCG. “I felt a great sense of satisfaction to have contributed to getting that whole exercise done ... it was a difficult but a touching and memorable experience in all round cooperation,” he recalled. Others praised the unprecedented level of collaboration that went into the PONJA, particularly among the Government and the United Nations and the humanitarian community at large.⁶⁷

The PONJA was a joint venture in every sense of the word:

- 350 people were involved in carrying out the PONJA, including staff of national and international NGOs, the World Bank, ADB, ASEAN, the UN and officers from 18 Government Ministries. They were trained from 2 to 3 June 2008 in the established data gathering templates of the VTA and DALA. A deployment of 85 DALA members and 245 VTA members, supported by 20 members of the AHTF Coordinating Office in Yangon followed. Advance teams were dispatched to Labutta and Pyapon, two severely-affected townships in the Ayeyawardy Division to test questionnaires from 4 to 7 June 2008.⁶⁸
- ASEAN coordinated and mobilised experts from ASEAN Member States under the ASEAN-ERAT. ASEAN also sought support for the assessment from the ADB, World Bank and other International Financial Institutions.

- The Government facilitated and provided access to the identified areas, assigned and made available national experts, data and information; facilitated visa issuances, and assigned liaison officers to facilitate the joint assessment process.
- The UN coordinated the inputs and processes required to develop the immediate relief and early recovery components of the joint assessments; trained and made available data enumerators among field staff and counterparts; and coordinated the contribution and participation of other UN agencies and members of IASC (the UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international NGOs).

The preliminary findings of the PONJA were presented at an ASEAN Roundtable in Yangon on 24 June 2008 and provided the basis for a Revised Flash Appeal, launched in New York on 10 July that requested US\$477 million⁶⁹. ASEAN and the UN jointly launched the final report of the PONJA at the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore. It was the presence of the TCG and the PONJA that gave credibility to the revised appeal. Following the release of the PONJA report, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes highlighted the importance of the PONJA to donors and the international community at large during a visit to Myanmar. “In May donors requested access for international relief workers and a credible, objective assessment: these are both now in place,” Mr Holmes said.⁷⁰

The Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP)

To complement the Government’s long-term recovery efforts, the humanitarian community under the TCG developed the PONREPP. The TCG agreed that the PONREPP would utilise a sectoral approach in implementing the long-term recovery

strategy. The group identified the following five sectors based on need and possible donor interest: Livelihoods (Agricultural and Non-agricultural), Education, Health, Water and Sanitation and DRR. It was also agreed that the PONREPP would review Government response plans to encourage complementarities. Using the existing cluster structure, technical working groups (TWGs) were tasked to begin formulating concept notes, which were later developed into sectoral plans. The TWGs were also in charge of ensuring that consultations were inclusive and that cross-cutting issues were fully integrated. Government participation was encouraged at all stages of the process. Two recovery planning advisors were deployed under the auspices of the UNRC/HC's office to provide overall guidance. Several agencies provided technical experts to aid the drafting of sectoral plans. A PONREPP Consultation Meeting took place on 4-5 November 2008 in Yangon so that the PONREPP could be presented in conjunction with an ASEAN/UN summit scheduled that take place in mid-December.

Inputs and wide consultations with the Government of Myanmar, the AHTF Coordinating Office in Yangon, the UNCT, donors and international and national NGOs assisted in the preparation of the plan. The PONREPP reflected, to the extent possible, the perspectives of the affected communities. It outlined a three-year recovery plan, from January 2009 to December 2011, and advocated a people-centred approach to promote productive lives, healthy lives, and protected lives.

At this stage, the interface between the national and regional level authorities was critical. An ESCAP-ASEAN Regional High-level Expert Group Meeting on Post-Nargis Recovery and Livelihood Opportunities in Myanmar held in October 2008 explored lessons learned from the region and enhancing regional cooperation to promote dialogue and provide support. "We were able to present the best examples from the region of how Governments successfully managed complex post-disaster reconstruction efforts to help Myanmar come up with guiding principles in preparing recovery plans," Dr Heyzer

said.⁷¹ "We emphasised things like focusing on vulnerable groups, community participation, making sure that we build the capacity of institutions to deliver and also the need for effectiveness and transparency and accountability."

TCG Chair embraced the idea of drawing from regional experience to support the recovery planning process. In an UNESCAP press release he stated, "We have again found ourselves at crucial crossroads nearly six months after Cyclone Nargis hit the Ayeyarwady Delta, and that the reason for this important regional meeting was to concentrate our knowledge and experience to outline a set of commitments and actions to boost early recovery efforts and bridge the gap between reliance and self-sufficiency for the affected populations of the Cyclone Nargis."⁷²

Fresh from the recovery planning session in Bangkok, the TCG Chair reviewed the Sectoral Recovery Plans from 16 line ministries. The TCG Chair sought advice from the two PONJA advisors before submitting proposals to the TCG for further action. A strategic component of the PONREPP planning process was the use of the cluster system. The TCG agreed that the UN clusters would review each ministry's Sectoral Recovery Plan to identify gaps and provide feedback.

In essence, the PONREPP envisaged a recovery framework that was more attuned to the needs of the community and better positioned to support the township authorities. Later on, this was concept was translated into Field Recovery Working Groups.

The multilateral process included collaboration with donors, the Government and TCG members. This multi-stakeholder collaboration was attractive to donors and generated a lot of buzz. The high level of Government support was evidenced by continued access to Cyclone-affected areas and local coordination in the hubs. The extended coordination with township authorities also allowed donors to fund activities in the Delta since funding restrictions on activities carried out by the central Government do not apply for township projects.



Villagers repair footpaths as part of a cash-for-work activity. Photo courtesy of UNDP

The Periodic Review

Following the PONJA, the TCG was mandated to “establish a mutually-acceptable mechanism for monitoring the delivery and accountability of international assistance to the Cyclone-affected areas.” While it was not specified how the TCG would fulfill this directive, AHTF members, who had experience in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami recovery suggested the Periodic Review. “The idea of Periodic Review was essentially to monitor the humanitarian assistance in the field,” Ms Kamal said.⁷³

“This is one of the key tasks of the TCG, and this is why PR was needed by the TCG to perform this task properly. Without this, how would the TCG know the progress on the ground?”

The PRs were designed to provide objective, credible data to measure the degree to which humanitarian relief and early recovery efforts were succeeding. The TCG launched the first PR in August 2008. The findings from the PRs were published in December 2008, July 2009, January 2010 and July 2010.

The findings helped decision-makers formulate strategic decisions about the allocation of funds. The large-scale common needs assessments were a wealth of information, providing essential details about the changing needs of Cyclone-affected populations.⁷⁴ Donors said the PRs provided empirical justification to boost funding to Myanmar.

Programmers used the PRs as the basis of proposals and prioritising activities; donors and policy makers who used them to allocate funding and engage in advocacy. As it was the most comprehensive source of information coming out of the Delta, the potential for overuse existed, but they also delivered a coherent message about the outstanding needs of Cyclone-affected peoples in the Delta, which was invaluable.

Technical consultations were conducted with the Government, aid agencies and local NGOs, using the UN cluster system as the consultative venue, in the development of the methodology for the PRs. A Technical Advisory Group (TAG), appointed by the TCG, provided technical oversight.

Stakeholders had the opportunity to participate in the PR in at least two ways:

- Friday Open Forum meetings: The open forum meetings took place weekly during Periodic Review I, and bi-weekly during Periodic Review II. Individuals or agency representatives could inquire about the process and make suggestions about the design of the questionnaires directly to the PR technical team.
- Cluster and sector consultations: The clusters assisted the PR team in writing the questionnaires, training enumerators, and analysing data. Each sector deployed a battery of experts who advocated for many sector-specific questions, which sometimes made it challenging for the team to balance inputs within the bounds of the multi-sectoral document. Some sectors had difficulty paring down the number of questions they deemed necessary for a comprehensive assessment. While the

cluster consultations increased transparency and the technical soundness of the document, it resulted in a sizeable number of wide-ranging requests. The diversity and volume of demands made it difficult for the Review team to provide sufficient and timely explanations for why input was not included; this caused frustration for some.

The findings were presented in three interlinking chapters – Healthy Lives, Productive Lives and Protected Lives – which were theme consistent with the PONREPP. Based on the results of the PR II, ASEAN proposed devising a Prioritised Action Plan. The TCG endorsed the idea and organised the PONAC to raise funds to support it. The international community pledged US\$88.4 million against the US\$103.60 million appeal. Donors have said that the PRs helped to prioritise funding needs, and were an excellent strategic tool.

Social Impacts Monitoring (SIM)

In addition to the Periodic Review, the TCG approved a community monitoring assessment, known as the SIM. It was designed to complement the ongoing quantitative Periodic Review assessment work, which measured progress against recovery indicators in a wider set of affected villages. The AHTF Coordinating Office, with the support of the World Bank and local partners, was the leading TCG component in the initiation and delivery of the SIM. The post-SIM was carried out to deepen the understanding of how the needs and priorities of Cyclone-affected communities evolved. It consisted of three round of field work in the same 40 villages approximately six, 12 and 24 months after the Cyclone struck the Ayeyarwady Delta, using focus group discussions, key informant and conversational interviews, and participant observations. Its key findings were broadly divided into three categories: aid-effectiveness; socioeconomic impacts and social impacts.



Construction of a school in an affected village. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

The PONREPP Prioritised Action Plan

The US\$691 million PONREPP was well received by the international humanitarian community but continued to be underfunded towards the end of the TCG mandate. As a consequence, some agencies and organisations did not have the resources required to implement project activities in the Delta. “There had been all this effort for the thematic working groups and clusters to put together its three-year recovery plan,” Mr Collison said. “But basically there was no money coming through – grants were coming to an end – and the outlook for 2010 was looking quite bad.”⁷⁵

Financial support waned in spite the PR II, which concluded that many affected communities across the Delta had

made little or no recovery, and pressing and/or critical needs remained unmet for many. While the PR results were compelling, a trip to Pyapon by Dr Sabandar, with colleagues from the ASEAN Secretariat, Mr Dhannan Sunoto and Ms Kamal, led him to take urgent action. “I saw firsthand the poor living conditions of the survivors, and I felt that we couldn’t treat the recovery like business as usual.” This field visit reminded him of his post-Tsunami experiences, in which the emergency-like state in which people existed, defied any semblance of recovery. “Every day, I woke up there were people knocking on my door asking for support, so the sense of urgency was there – even in the recovery,” said Dr Sabandar.⁷⁶



One of the outcomes of the PONREPP Prioritised Action Plan, a school funded by Japan, a PONAC Donor. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

Confronted with the realities in the Delta, ASEAN invited major donors and representatives from international NGOs to attend the Sixth AHTF meeting in Jakarta. This meeting would prove to be a turning point as ASEAN, major donors, the UN, and international NGOs all made commitments to support the Prioritised Action Plan and subsequent donor conference. "While the recovery work will continue beyond the mandate of the TCG, Cyclone-affected people with pressing needs cannot wait," said Bansarn Bunnag, Ambassador of Thailand to Myanmar. "It was highly critical that we secured the support urgently required to meet these outstanding critical needs."⁷⁷

As part of its supplementary relief programme, DFID funded an advisory post on location, to support the TCG in delivering the Action Plan. "The relationship has been extremely constructive and productive," Mr Whittingham said.⁷⁸

To create the Prioritised Action Plan, the TCG coordinated a review of PONREPP outcomes against outstanding critical needs. This was undertaken through a series of intensive multi-stakeholder consultations, involving the Government, UN agencies, and local and international NGOs over several weeks in August and September 2009. "We all worked together with ASEAN to put this together," Mr Popuri said.⁷⁹ "I don't think

anyone could come up with that sort of prioritised [plan] in a month or two. Without the help of each partner it would not be possible.”

The Prioritised Action Plan sets out a practical plan for assistance to be delivered in the sectors of Shelter, Livelihoods, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Education and Health by the end of July 2010. The plan provided a window of opportunity to meet critical needs and contribute to the recovery of the most vulnerable survivors of Cyclone Nargis. The Prioritised Action Plan accounted for the capacity to deliver assistance to end July 2010.

Major donors supported the conceptualisation of the Prioritised Action Plan and its attempt to elucidate needs. Separating the PONREPP into a smaller prioritised appeal was strategically important.⁸⁰ The US \$103 million Prioritised Action Plan was part of the overall recovery plan outlined in the PONREPP, which sought US \$691 million over a three-year period, from 2009 to 2011. It should be noted that the Prioritised Action Plan did not replace or supersede the PONREPP. The PONREPP, with US \$691 million recovery needs identified, remains the over-arching framework for post-Nargis recovery until December 2011.

Strategic results

- **Built trust with donors and international community** by providing an objective and credible needs assessment, through the PONJA, to determine the scale of the impact of the Cyclone, and outlining the requirements for immediate humanitarian assistance and medium- to long-term recovery.
- **Provided solid evidence of humanitarian needs.** PONJA enabled the donor community and multilateral organisations to provide evidence that humanitarian aid was indeed required in Myanmar, and the scale and manner it should be provided. The VTA worked, and when combined with the DALA provided a powerful tool for

humanitarian and recovery practitioners, policy-makers, national governments and donors.

- **Planning tool that lent itself to multi-agency and multi-sectoral use.** The comprehensive, multi-sectoral assessment provided through the PONJA gave humanitarian actors the ability to jointly qualify needs, and plan using a shared data set. Disaster officials on the global level are looking at creating a multi-sectoral needs assessment as the default exercise because of the success of the PONJA. Through the use of liaisons and “Eminent Persons” in the PONJA process, the Government gained confidence in the assessment process, content and product.
- **The Periodic Reviews are a strategic tool for donors.** Donor governments can refer to a document, endorsed by the TCG, to highlight humanitarian needs that persist long after the relief in Cyclone-affected areas. The PR provided one voice on the needs of the Cyclone-affected population, helping to prevent conflicting messages on advocacy and fundraising.
- **Engaging with a Government that is unfamiliar with international humanitarian assistance activities** may provide the catalyst for longer-term development, particularly if done so inclusively and sustainably. Such processes help prevent future humanitarian crises and build more resilient communities.
- **Tracking aid.** Aid tracking undertaken by ASEAN and the UN ensured that donors had an appropriate tool to track and monitor aid inflows into the country and also ensured that underfunded sectors could be highlighted. The lack of funding in the agriculture and shelter sectors were identified and highlighted at high-level donor meetings in Myanmar, Australia, Europe and the US.





Chapter Five

ASEAN-UN Partnership Moving Forward

Concluding the post-Nargis operation

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed to officially end the operations of the AHTF and TCG in Myanmar by 31 July 2010 at the 43rd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting 19-20 July 2010. During the meeting, the Foreign Ministers recognised the "assistance and cooperation rendered by the Government and people of Myanmar in these efforts" and noted that the MoSWRR would take over the responsibility of coordinating and utilising the assistance from the international community in the post-Nargis recovery efforts. The Foreign Ministers expressed their "highest appreciation and gratitude to the UN, Dialogue Partners of ASEAN, donor agencies/ countries and the international community for their generous contributions and full support to the ASEAN-led post-Nargis operation in Myanmar." They also "underlined the importance to institutionalise

the experience and knowledge gained and agreed that the AHA Centre to be established in Jakarta and the ASEAN Secretariat should be the repository of good practices and lessons learnt."⁸¹

After the handover, it was clear that all partners have learned lessons and have a cache of best practices from which to draw. The PONREPP will continue until 2011 as there are many unmet needs remaining in the Delta, and the Government has acknowledged that it will lead the recovery efforts. "The Myanmar Government is willing to receive the knowledge, the management skills, the experiences, the documentation and the management assistance and ASEAN will provide this,"⁸² Dr Pitsuwan said. Furthermore, it has acknowledged that it cannot do this alone. Key figures in the MoSWRR, the focal point for the handover, have expressed an eagerness to learn from key actors in the humanitarian community on how to best operationalise a disaster response, Dr Sabandar said.

Children walking together in the rain after school. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

ASEAN officials said that although the mandate of the AHTF and TCG officially expired at the end of July 2010, the mechanism could be reactivated if the Government requires assistance bridging to the international community in a disaster response. "After July 2010 this AHTF and TCG will be like in a sleeping mode, as troubles have subsided and we have gone into recovery phase and will be in the good hands of the Myanmar Government," said Mr Bunnag.⁸³ "But this sleeping mode can be active and awakened again whenever there is a crisis or national disaster, and I strongly believe that this mechanism will definitely work because it has proved successful before."

Meanwhile, the UN's role in coordination of recovery under the PONREPP and beyond continues. The majority of responsibilities related to the TCG and post-Nargis coordination were transferred to the MoSWRR. Additional line ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races Development Affairs as well as the NDPCC will be involved. Township authorities will play an important role in coordinating recovery activities on the ground.⁸⁴

"Our priority is to ensure that the people still affected by the Cyclone continue to be assisted through the extended coordination between the Government and humanitarian partners," said Mr. Parajuli.⁸⁵

Dr Sabandar said he has full confidence that the Government shall lead the process to longer-term development. "It is time for the Myanmar Government to take full charge," he said.

Moving partnerships beyond Nargis

Following its entry into force on 24 December 2009, AADMER will be the cornerstone and the main reference document used by ASEAN in promoting regional cooperation in disaster management. Having ratified the Agreement, ASEAN Member States are now legally-bound to work closer together in developing and implementing measures to reduce disaster

Village woman dries prawn from the daily catch in Pyapon. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office





Preparing a fish trap as part of a livelihood project. Photo by AHTF Coordinating Office

losses and to jointly respond to disasters occurring in the ASEAN region⁸⁶. AADMER also affirms ASEAN's commitment to the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA) and is the first legally-binding HFA-related instrument in the world. In this regard, ASEAN's relationship with the UN in the years ahead will be guided by these two major documents.

Prior to Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN and UN had already been cooperating in the area of disaster management, mostly through capacity building, joint activities and projects. Since its inception in late 2003, the ACDM, which is the main sectoral body in charge of regional cooperation on disaster management,⁸⁷ has been working with a number of UN agencies. In the area of DRR, ASEAN Secretariat signed a five-year tripartite Memorandum of Cooperation with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and

World Bank in early May 2009 to strengthen partnerships to mainstream DRR in the development processes of ASEAN Member States⁸⁸. The UNHCR has since 2004 supported the ACDM in strengthening its capacity through training and other capacity development projects. ACDM has also worked closely with UNOCHA through joint training and exercises. WFP has worked together with the ACDM in conducting joint training in the area of emergency logistics management, and has expressed its interest to explore other means of collaboration. Other UN agencies, such as UNFPA, have been discussing possibilities of engaging closer with ASEAN. Thus far, ASEAN has established working arrangements individually with the respective UN agencies, usually based on the specific technical expertise that these UN agencies can offer ASEAN its individual Member States.

Apart from the above, ASEAN and the UN have also signed a number of instruments, which are more generic (not only pertaining to the issues on disaster management). ASEAN's relations with the UN system go back to the 70s. In 2000, the first ASEAN-UN Summit was held in Bangkok, where issues related to peace and security, human resources development and future of the role of the UN in the region were discussed. In 2002, ASEAN Secretariat entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the ESCAP Secretariat, agreeing to yearly consultations at the senior official level to identify possible joint activities in a wide range of areas.⁸⁹

The Second ASEAN-UN Summit in September 2005 in New York reaffirmed the need to further widen ASEAN cooperation, highlighting a range of thematic issues, including disaster management. In 2006, the UN General Assembly granted ASEAN an observer status⁹⁰. In September 2007, the Secretaries-General of ASEAN and UN signed a MoU, agreeing to exchange information and expertise and to cooperate on international and regional peace and security as well as development. The MoU calls for the need to make appropriate administrative arrangements to ensure effective cooperation and opportunities for liaison between the two secretariats and encourages the two organisations to hold regular consultations on issues of strategic importance⁹¹.

Cyclone Nargis intensified the opportunities for ASEAN and the UN to work together both at the policy level and on the ground. The disaster challenged both sides to work hand in hand to achieve the mutual goal of helping Nargis survivors recover from the disaster. The complexity of the disaster required both sides to work together in all areas of response, from joint planning and execution of assessment missions to monitoring the recovery. The partnership greatly benefitted from the respective organisational differences, and flourished because each organisation was able to rely on its individual strengths and support one another while planning activities for the good of the Cyclone-affected peoples. Appreciating the

magnitude of the success and building on it should be central to any future ASEAN and UN agenda.

Besides Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, other ASEAN Member States have also experienced major disasters in the past six years. These include the Indian Ocean Tsunami that affected four ASEAN countries in December 2004, and multiple disasters in September and October 2009 that hit five ASEAN countries almost simultaneously. Due to the experience gained and expertise built over the past six years, ASEAN has improved its capacity as a whole to respond to disasters occurring within the region. Coupled with ASEAN's collective response to the Cyclone Nargis, all these experiences have boosted ASEAN's confidence in managing future large-scale disasters.

At the 43rd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Ha Noi on 19-20 July 2010, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said that, "Cyclone Nargis has provided a great opportunity for ASEAN to draw lessons from the entire exercise. With the lessons learnt, we feel assured that we will be in a better shape to respond to future disasters."⁹² Earlier in October 2009, Dr Pitsuwan noted in front of Dr Heyzer and heads of UN agencies in Bangkok that, "with the entry into force of AADMER, ASEAN needs to have a stronger role in responding to natural disasters in the region."⁹³ As indicated in the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Leaders reaffirmed their aspirations for ASEAN to continue to be in the "driving seat," and maintain its centrality and proactive role. In the area of disaster management and humanitarian assistance, this requires ASEAN to be more proactive, collective and effective in its response to major disasters that occur in the region.

This evolving regional humanitarian architecture also requires humanitarian actors, including the UN, to adapt and refine how they support humanitarian coordination in the region and how they engage with ASEAN Member States, collectively and individually. A closer and more constructive engagement that supports both national and regional capacities to assist and protect citizens in times of disaster should be the key strategy of the UN and other humanitarian actors in the region.



A group of school children playing coloured cubes – one of the items from a teaching aid kit. Many schools received study materials and teaching kits such as here in Labutta in October 2008. Photo courtesy of UNICEF

Take-stock, review and document the experience

Prior to Cyclone Nargis, both ASEAN and the UN had invited one another to attend exercises, meetings and other activities that were deemed necessary for maintaining mutual cooperation. After Cyclone Nargis, there have been efforts by both sides to take stock of and document the experiences and lessons gained so far. In March 2009, secretariats of ASEAN and the UN met in Jakarta to share experiences from Myanmar. Both secretariats agreed to develop an Action Plan, to meet on a regular basis, to

move the Action Plan forward and to continue to identify ways to strengthen collaboration. In early October 2009, Dr Pitsuwan met with Dr Heyzer and heads of UN agencies in Bangkok for informal talks on the need to devise systems that are comfortable and interoperable for both ASEAN and UN. At the end of January 2010, ASEAN Secretariat and UNOCHA held their first meeting to review the status of cooperation and discuss coordination and operational aspects relating to assessment, preparedness and response.



*A villager dries chillies. Photo by AHTF
Coordinating Office*

At the conclusion of ASEAN's humanitarian mandate in Myanmar, there was an urgent need for ASEAN and UN to take stock of, review and document the two-year post-Nargis partnership and lessons that had been gained. ASEAN and UN should lock-in and build on the joint success of the post-Nargis humanitarian operation in Myanmar. The formal conclusion of the partnership presented an excellent opportunity to brainstorm lessons on the collaboration in Myanmar and to identify good practices that could be utilised in other complex, large-scale humanitarian operations in the region and beyond. For ASEAN, these experiences and good practices will also be useful to inform and expedite ASEAN's intention to operationalise the AADMER and establish the AHA Centre.

Work on a collaborative framework for cooperation

Based on stock-taking exercises and the lessons learnt, ASEAN and UN may wish to draft a collaborative framework specifically for disaster management as compared to the 2007 MoU, which is quite general and encompasses all other sectors.

This collaborative framework, however, would not replace other agreements and instruments that ASEAN and UN agencies (such as UNISDR) have achieved in the past. Technical cooperation with various UN agencies in different aspects of disaster management (such as DRR, preparedness and response and recovery) ought to continue based on these specific documents. However, since there are many other UN agencies working in the area of disaster management, any future collaborative framework should ideally allow ASEAN to work with these various UN agencies in a more coordinated manner.

The collaborative framework should provide guiding principles for ASEAN and the UN to work together in the area of disaster management and humanitarian assistance, taking into account current developments, regional trends and challenges. The evolving nature of ASEAN vis-a-vis the ASEAN Charter, the entry into force of AADMER, and the changing humanitarian landscape in the region should be taken into consideration. The

collaborative framework should be accompanied with a more systematic consultative mechanism to ensure a more effective and strategic cooperation between the two organisations. The Action Plan proposed in March 2009 should be materialised, and both secretariats of ASEAN and the UN should continue to meet on a regular basis to move the Action Plan forward. The collaborative framework should also set the stage for the development of more detailed procedures to guide response on the ground in the event of a major disaster occurring in the ASEAN region.

Agree on joint procedures at the operational level

Based on past experiences, misunderstandings tended to occur in the relief and recovery stage. These could be minimised or at least, anticipated, if ASEAN and UN were to agree to a set of operating procedures to facilitate relief and recovery operations on the ground. Officials and people at the frontlines from both organisations would have to be made aware of such collaborative framework and operational procedures. Based on the experience from Nargis, misunderstandings often occurred due to lack of appreciation and understanding of each other's mandates, roles and responsibilities.

Following a meeting at the end of January 2010, UNOCHA proposed a joint SOP to spell out the operational details in terms of assessment, preparedness and response. The SOP could be useful in terms of sorting out the interface between the ASEAN-ERAT and the UNDAC team, and coordination issues associated with OCHA and the AHA Centre, in the event of a major disaster occurring in the ASEAN region.

For the recovery stage, in line with the principles under the AADMER, Member States are to lead, manage and coordinate the overall recovery process, while ASEAN through AADMER mechanisms will provide full support, based on the need and request of the affected country. In the case of Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN through the TCG provided support to Myanmar for the conduct of joint assessments and associated monitoring, and the development of a recovery plan and mechanisms to

mobilise resources to support the recovery process. In the event of future large-scale disaster that would require some years of recovery efforts, ASEAN and UN should strategise on how both sides could improve collaboration in supporting the affected country's recovery programmes.

In terms of working together on the ground at both the relief and recovery stage, there is also a need to identify how ASEAN's mechanisms mesh with the UN systems, such as the UNIASC and its cluster system, and how the operational mechanisms such as the AHA Centre would interface with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the UNCT in the affected country. At a higher level, there is also a need to identify how the Secretary-General of ASEAN, as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, would coordinate with the Emergency Relief Coordinator in providing coordination support to the affected Government in times of disaster emergencies.

Pursue technical cooperation in all aspects of disaster management

While efforts are underway to take stock of the experience and develop a collaborative framework and relevant operational procedures, ASEAN and UN should continue to pursue technical cooperation in all areas of disaster management. As a start, the relevant UN agencies, who are working in the fields of disaster management and humanitarian assistance, could identify respective technical expertise that could be offered to ASEAN in four strategic components under the AADMER Work Programme (i.e. Risk Assessment, Monitoring and Assessment; Prevention and Mitigation; Preparedness and Response; and Recovery) as well as in the building blocks (i.e. Institutionalisation, Partnership, Resource Mobilisation, Outreach and Mainstreaming, Training and Knowledge Management, Information Management and Communication Technology)⁹⁴. UN agencies that have formalised collaboration

with ASEAN in certain areas of disaster management, such as UNISDR, should continue to forge cooperation in agreed areas.

For ASEAN and UN to move forward more strategically and effectively, there is a practical need for both to pool their existing organisational capacities, where possible, and to identify complementary arrangements, based on a clearer understanding of comparative advantages. Collaboration in post-Nargis response in Myanmar worked because of complementarity in roles, flexibility in implementation and leadership personalities and, to a large extent, the extraordinary circumstances that created pressure for success. Many have suggested that the tripartite collaboration worked only in Myanmar and there would never be a similar situation in the region necessitating an exact replication. Still, if the two-year partnership proves anything it is that elements of collaboration can be extracted and modified to be used elsewhere, not only in this region, but also in other parts of the world. 🇲🇲

These children can again walk safely to school on a path repaired as part of an employment programme in Mawlamyinegyune. Photo courtesy of ILO



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AADMER	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response	RIAS	Recovery Information and Accountability System
ADB	Asian Development Bank	RWG	Recovery Working Group
ACDM	ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management	SASOP	Standard Operating Procedure for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations
AHA	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management		
AHTF	ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis	SIM	Social Impacts Monitoring
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	TCC	Township Coordination Committee
BRR	Bureau for Recovery and Reconstruction Agency	TCG	Tripartite Core Group
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	UN	United Nations
DALA	Damage and Loss Assessment	UNCT	United Nations Country Team
DFID	Department for International Development	UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
DRWG	Delta Recovery Working Group	UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ERAT	Emergency Rapid Assessment Team	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
FRWG	Field Recovery Working Group	UNHC	United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
MoSWRR	Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement	UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
NDPCC	National Disaster Preparedness Central Committee	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
ODA	Official Development Assistance	UNRC/HC	United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	US	United States
PONAC	Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference	VTA	Village Tract Assessment
PONJA	Post-Nargis Joint Assessment	WFP	World Food Programme
PONREPP	Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan	WHO	World Health Organisation
PR	Periodic Review	YRWG	Yangon Recovery Working Group
RCC	Recovery Coordination Centre		
RF	Recovery Forum		
RH	Recovery Hub		
RHO	Recovery Hub Office		

Government refers to the Government of the Union of Myanmar



ISBN 978-602-8411-41-7