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SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Disaster Management Systems in Burma

USAID provided technical support to Burma's EOC to enhance disaster response coordination and increase emergency preparedness.



Photos by Don Price, USFS

In addition to improving disaster response, the Burma EOC is increasing emergency preparedness. With USAID support, the EOC conducted a drill in February 2016 that included responding to various disaster scenarios, testing communications equipment, and liaising with the AHA Center and other EOCs in the region.



Burma faces a number of natural hazards, including cyclones, floods, and earthquakes, that can cause significant loss of life, livelihoods, and assets and require a national or international response. For example, Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Burma's Irrawaddy Delta in May 2008, resulting in more than 140,000 deaths, displacing 800,000 people, and devastating the agriculture and fishing sectors. The severe effects of Cyclone Nargis and other natural disasters underscored the need to strengthen national emergency preparedness in Burma and highlighted the importance of coordinating relief activities among Government of Burma (GoB) agencies, local and regional relief organizations, and the international humanitarian community.

To help the GoB improve disaster response at the national level and better coordinate regional and international assistance, USAID has worked closely with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to provide technical support to the GoB Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which officially began operations in 2015. In 2013, USAID facilitated conversations between GoB representatives and disaster management experts from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). In subsequent years, USAID supported the placement of a USFS advisor at the EOC to improve center operations and assist GoB leadership with implementing a national disaster management system. USAID, USFS, and other U.S. Government officials also facilitated several workshops and events to support GoB efforts to strengthen EOC coordination, management, and operations. The workshops and events reached representatives from more than 20 GoB ministries and departments, the UN, non-governmental organizations, and private sector partners.

When storms, floods, and landslides affected 12 of Burma's 14 states and regions from July–September 2015, EOC staff implemented the newly developed disaster management system for the first time. The EOC enabled 24-hour emergency assistance, facilitated greater inter-governmental coordination than in any previous disaster, produced comprehensive and transparent situation reports, and expedited travel authorizations that afforded relief actors unprecedented humanitarian access. Additionally, the EOC pioneered the coordination of GoB activities with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Center), the Myanmar Red Cross Society, and UN agencies. Following the initial floods response, EOC staff met with GoB Vice President U Nyan Tun and local government officials to develop a national recovery framework. Recognized for its success by the GoB and international humanitarian community, Burma's EOC, with the support of USAID and JICA, has improved the quality and speed of disaster response in the country.