Best practice for working with Community Based Groups

A review of NGO and UN Agencies approaches
to working with community based groups in the
Ayeyarwaddy Delta following Cyclone Nargis

Best practice for working with CBGs

The post Nargis period has seen a significant emergence of Community Based Groups (CBGs) both which have sprung spontaneously and those facilitated by various organisations. After the initial relief phase many of these CBGs are being promoted to take up a larger role in designing and implementing recovery activities.

In order to learn from the various approaches of agencies, a stakeholder meeting on good practice in Community-Driven Recovery met in Feburary 2009 with the objective of implementing a strategy to ensure that agency approaches when engaging with communities for 'community-driven recovery' were based on good practice. From this meeting the following outputs were agreed:

- Increased awareness of best practice from communities and agencies' perspective on how to work with and support communities for community-driven recovery.
- Increased knowledge of various approaches for community organising and capacity building being utilised in Myanmar
- Improved coordination of agencies/committees at village level

In line with the above objective and outputs, this review was undertaken with the following aims:

- Help practitioners understand the particular complexities of working with CBGs, and appreciate the diverse range of approaches in planning and implementing activities through them.
- Raise awareness of some of the problems associated with working with communities and CBGs.
- Establish some basic guiding principles and minimum standards for working with CBGs.

It is hoped that this review will complement other research in the areas and provide the impetus for LNGOs and INGOs to look critically at their approaches to working with communities and to consider principles of best practice going forward.

The following agencies have provided material to be used in this review and have been members of the steering committee overviewing it's content: ActionAid, Dan Church Aid, Local Resource Centre, Loka Ahlinn, Paung Ku and UNDP. The review has been produced with funding from Dan Church Aid.

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CONTENTS

Best practice for working with CBGs

Best practice for working with CBGs

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ACF	Action Contre La Faim
CBG	Community Based Group
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CPSC	Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERC	Early Recovery Committee
GAA	German Agro Action
HH	Household
IASC	Inter-Agency Steering Committee
IDE	International Development Enterprises
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRP	Integrated Recovery Planning
JEN	Japan Emergency NGOs (formerly)
LNGO	Local Non-Government Organisation
LRCSR	Local Resource Centre Study Report
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MNGO	Myanmar Non-Government Organisation
MRCS	Myanmar Red Cross Society
NFI	Non-food items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDC	Peace and Development Committees
PONJA	Post-Nargis Joint Assessment
PONREPP	Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan
PONSIM	Post-Nargis Social Impact Monitoring
RTE	Real Time Evaluation
SHG	Self Help Groups
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TCC	Township Coordination Committee
TCG	Tripartite Core Group
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VRC	Village Recovery Committee
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation
WV	World Vision

Best practice for working with CBGs

On 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis struck the coast of Myanmar. Over two days, the cyclone moved across the Ayeyarwady Delta and southern Yangon Division resulting in tragic loss of life and widespread destruction. The disaster hit townships with a total population of 7.6 million.

While the emergency response following Cyclone Nargis focused on the rapid distribution of supplies with little or no community participation, high levels of participation have been evident subsequently. As a consequence, the post Cyclone Nargis period has seen a significant emergence of community based groups (CBGs), both those that have sprung up spontaneously and those whose has been facilitated by a variety of external organisations. After the initial relief phase, many of these groups are now being promoted to take a larger role in designing and implementing recovery activities.

The experience of local NGOs (LNGOs) and international NGOs (INGOs) working in Nargis affected areas, and the findings of various assessments (LRCSR, PONJA, PONREPP, PONSIM, RTE) have observed this remarkable emergence of community groups and highlighted the valuable experiences of agencies in facilitating the formation of groups and building their capacity for sustainable development.   The objective of the present Review of Best Practices for working with Community Based Groups is to:

- Synthesise the findings of existing assessments examining the role of community-based groups.
- Review the approaches of a number of agencies presently working with community groups.
- Develop an outline of best practices for INGOs and NGOs working with community groups.

Although the present review makes reference to emergency relief groups, its main focus is on the community groups that were still functioning one year after the cyclone and the approaches of NGOs and INGOs to working with them. The focus areas and methodology of the review are:

- Approaches to working with community groups
- Activities of community groups
- Accountability of community groups and aid agencies
- Best practice for working with community groups

Approaches

Following Cyclone Nargis, NGOs and INGOs have adopted a number of varied approaches to working with communities and CBGs. These approaches have resulted from the programming norms of the assistance agencies involved and this suggests that agreeing on common approaches is crucial, both for effectiveness and for perceptions of equity. One of the most common cited mistakes in post-disaster planning has been the lack of consultation with the affected communities.

Village CBGs can be categorised into those established by communities themselves and those set up by external agencies with the majority being formed by NGOs post Nargis. NGOs generally preferred to use emergency committees rather than formal village government institutions as they felt that they were more representative of different groups in the villages. For many activities, community groups were not formal or permanent but in some cases, multiple committees have in some cases created confusion and conflict in villages.

Most of the self-initiated village committees consisted of only male leaders and male members when they were first formed. There was a noticeable influence of NGO ideas in membership selection and international NGOs often specifically asked that women be included in the committees. CBG leaders, or a powerful people such as a members of village-level government or monks usually made decisions with other groups members as well as villagers having little

voice in the decision-making process.   Research has found little evidence that CBGs have taken the lead in prioritisation, implementation and monitoring with CBGs tending to play a larger role in distributing assistance than in identifying beneficiaries and priorities.

Relationships between the CBGs and communities were found to be positive in most of the villages reviewed. 'Villagers relied on the committee to help them rebuild their communities. Even though there were some misunderstandings, communities perceived committees as doing their best for the village. Committees often served to explain and clarify projects to the villagers, or launch projects in ceremonies. In addition to their project-related tasks, committees often explained the finances after a project was concluded, found solutions to conflicts arising over distributions, and acted as agents between funders and the village' (LRCSR).

Activities

CBGs have acted as a crucial distribution mechanism for NGOs and INGOs working in the Delta, although NGOs and other aid agencies normally pre-identified the types of assistance they would give and what groups should receive it.   Research suggests only rarely did aid providers considered needs and priorities as identified by the village committees or individual villagers. However, further consultation and involvement of local communities in the assessment and implementation stage was increased following the immediate relief stage. Participatory decision-making processes and organising collective activities have led to the development of social capital. This contributes not only to broader development aims but reinforces community capacity and cohesion for disaster response. CBGs have been particularly effective in providing support during the recovery period, such as livelihood support, disaster risk reduction and psychosocial support.

The wide range of mechanisms that have been employed for targeting aid make it more difficult to assess accurately what aid has already been provided to whom. Whether aid was delivered directly by an LNGO/INGO or through a community based groups has tended to be largely dependent on the policy of the aid provider.   The aid provider has commonly made most decisions about which members of the community would receive assistance. Where aid has gone through the village leadership structures, there have been more reported cases of the vulnerable not receiving their full share.

Accountability

CBGs have served as a critical distribution mechanism for LNGOs and INGOs working in the Delta with communities willing to participate in the implementation of village wise development activities such as road renovation, rebuilding schools, clinics and pond cleaning. Trained volunteers from the local communities have been identified as an essential resource in overcoming the challenge of effective community participation in the midst of the urgency and scale of the disaster. The relief effort has expanded the number of people, particularly young people, working both formally and voluntarily within the humanitarian sector. However, in many areas the status of women as members in CBGs is still low and their voices are not yet heard.

As a result of the large number of actors involved in the relief effort, the degree of participation has varied, ranging from minimal levels of consultation at one extreme to an explicit transfer of decision-making at the other. The array of mechanisms used has also led to some confusion amongst aid recipients.   In some cases, there has been little or no communication or coordination between NGOs before they came to the villages and set up their projects leading to confusion among the villagers. Committees have been found to be more concerned with upward-accountability towards the donor agencies rather than downward-accountability towards the beneficiaries or community. In general, villagers have not been informed about eligibility criteria, and lack information about aid flows, which can raise perceptions of inequity.

The response to Cyclone Nargis has clearly demonstrated the ability of communities and local organisations in Myanmar to respond rapidly and flexibly to needs on the ground. However, capacity limitations are a major constraint to the development of CBGs. Building the capacities of local groups is an issue of empowerment and sustainability. Although CBGs have the capacity to work in groups, only a few members have the capacity for initiation and decision-making. More international support is also required for capacity building, of national staff in international organisations, and of local partners.   More could be done to support and strengthen local capacities in program cycle management and especially in reporting, monitoring and evaluation. There is little or no long-term planning for the continuity and future of CBGs. It has been

recommended that NGOs and INGOs that facilitate the founding of committees should provide them with training and information on how to function long-term, for example, by teaching them how to do fund-raising or by providing capacity-development training.

Best Practice

NGOs/INGOs should seek to support existing community groups that have already demonstrated their commitment and have credibility in the community. Where existing organisations do not exist, or are inappropriate for external support, NGOs/INGOs should focus on mobilising communities to develop their own self-help groups. They should also ensure CBGs include a wide range of representatives and are not dominated by a few power holders. Roles and responsibilities should be well defined and CBGs should be assisted in developing the power and capacity to effectively manage community projects. External agencies should promote the view that CBGs, NGOs, INGO and the UN are equals and each have an invaluable contribution to make to the relief, recovery and development efforts. Synergies among different actors should be maximised through efficient coordination of stakeholders in the recovery process.

CBGs should work with NGOs/INGOs to conduct effective assessments of need and capacity to determine objectives and priorities for recovery. External agencies should recognise that CBGs can be particularly effective in providing support during the recovery period, especially in the areas of Livelihood support, Disaster Risk Reduction and psychosocial support. CBGs should be involved in a participatory and transparent selection process as this empowers villagers, ensures communities are engaged and aware of the programme selection criteria and minimises potential tension and conflict.

Both NGOs/INGOs and CBGs should use and promote participatory practices to identify needs, build capacities for empowering communities and create the foundations of a sustained, free, active and meaningful participation throughout all phases of the recovery process. External agencies should consult communities on a regular and continuous basis throughout the project lifecycle and ensure their approach is trusted, transparent and equitable. Community feedback mechanisms should be implemented in conjunction with CBGs that allow communities to voice their concerns, and link them with those organisations responsible for responding to complaints.

Conclusions

This review highlights the diversity of CBGs that have been involved in providing relief in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta since the impact of Cyclone Nargis. It illustrates some of the similarities and differences in the ways that humanitarian actors have responded to working with communities and CBGs, and outlines some key points for NGOs and INGOs to consider when working with communities and CBGs in the future.

Each setting is unique, and it is not possible or appropriate to recommend a uniform approach for working with CBGs. The intention of this review is not to identify a specific model, but rather to share approaches adopted by a number of different agencies with the view of creating better practice. In many ways, there is not a prescriptive way of working with CBGs, but rather there are many tensions which communities, CBGs, NGOs and INGOs have to reconcile together in order to provide assistance in a participatory and effective manner. It is hoped that this review will provide the impetus for NGOs and INGOs to look critically at their approaches to working with communities and to consider principles of best practice.

1

Introduction

SECTION ONE

Introduction

On 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis struck the coast of Myanmar. Over two days, the cyclone moved across the Ayeyarwady Delta and southern Yangon Division resulting in tragic loss of life and widespread destruction. The disaster hit townships with a total population of 7.6 million. Many of those affected suffered devastating losses of family members, homes and livelihoods. The response to this tragedy has involved a large number of actors: the government as well as the private sector, religious groups, local and international aid organisations, ASEAN and its member countries, UN agencies, local and international NGOs and several bilateral donors.[1]

Prior to Cyclone Nargis social capital and cohesion were strong in Delta villages. The relative scarcity of outside development resources, and limited interaction with the state at higher levels, meant that communities had to find ways of working together to improve their villages and manage public goods.[2] While the emergency response following Cyclone Nargis focused on the rapid distribution of supplies with little or no community participation – necessary after rapid-onset disasters when time is of the essence – high levels of participation have been evident subsequently. As a consequence, the post Cyclone Nargis period has seen a significant emergence of community based groups (CBGs), both those that have sprung up spontaneously and those whose has been facilitated by a variety of external organisations. After the initial relief phase, many of these groups are now being promoted to take up a larger role in designing and implementing recovery activities.

The experience of LNGOs and INGOs working in Nargis affected areas, and the findings of various assessments (LRCSR, PONREPP, PONSIM, RTE) have observed this remarkable emergence of community groups and highlighted the valuable experiences of agencies in facilitating the formation of groups and building their capacity for sustainable development. The objective of this Review of Best Practices for working with Community Groups is to:
- Synthesise the findings of existing assessments on the role of community based groups
- Review the approaches of a number of agencies working with community groups
- Develop an outline of best practices

for INGOs and LNGOs working with community groups

1.1   Definitions and Focus Areas

The present review uses the term 'Community Based Groups' as generic term to cover all groups that have been active in providing relief to their communities following the cyclone. It does not differentiate between different types of community-based groups using the terminology that is commonly used by external agencies i.e. committee, community based organsation (CBO), or civil society organisation (CSO).

It is important to note that the majority of communities in the delta do not differentiate between different types of community-based groups using the above terminology but rather will use the terms, "committee", ahpwe" or "ahtin", for any 'group of people with similar interest or background to work for the same objective'[3] regardless of whether it is externally identified as a committee, community based organsation (CBO), or civil society organisation (CSO). It is also of interest to note although 'many informal village emergency groups were transformed into 'committees' the composition and structure remained somewhat the same'.

However, given the wide range of community based groups that have been active in providing support, it is helpful to identify some key factors through which one can distinguish types of groups such as method of formation, structure and source of funding. Figure 1 details these key factors and outlines the variables that exist within them. Understanding the characteristics of different groups in these areas is the basis upon which the review assesses best practice for external agencies working with CBGs.

Since Cyclone Nargis, a range of different types of community-based groups have been established to respond to the evolving phases of the relief effort, from immediate emergency life saving interventions, through an early recovery period, to a longer-term recovery and reconstruction period.

Many of these groups that were established in the emergency life-saving phase were not formal or permanent but rather only existed for the duration of a specific activity. For example, some Food Management Committees

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1 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, i.

2 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.33

3 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

existed for only a short period during the emergency phase, with the single of objective of distributing food from one or more donors. Others, however, were formed with broader objectives of facilitating longer recovery and reconstruction and building capacity for sustainable development. Although the present review makes reference to emergency relief groups, its main focus is on the latter type of community groups and the approaches of LNGOs and INGOs to working with them.

The focus areas and methodology of the review are:
• Approaches to working with community groups
• Activities of community groups
• Accountability of community groups
• Best practice for working with community groups

1.2 Methodology

This review addresses the focus areas outlined in section 1.1 through reviewing and evaluating:

1. Existing reports and studies
    • Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis
    • PONJA
    • PONREPP
    • Real Time Evaluation
    • Social Impacts Monitoring
2. Interviews with agencies with experience of facilitating the formation of community based groups and building their capacity for sustainable development
    • Action Aid
    • Local Resource Centre

    • Loka Ahlinn
    • Paung Ku
    • UNDP
3. Local Resource Centre Study Report on Committees: Effective Community-Based Responses to Cyclone Nargis
4. Collection and analysis of additional case studies from agencies and community based groups.
5. Field research in villages supported by a number of the above agencies.

1.3 Review Structure

The structure of the review reflects the main areas of focus as outlined in section 1.1. : Approaches to working with community groups (Section 2), Activities of community groups (Section 3), and approaches to accountability (Section 4). Each of the above sections contains a synthesis of existing literature relevant to the areas of focus followed by a number of examples of the approaches adopted by a variety of humanitarian organisations. Each section concludes with an appraisal of key findings focusing specifically on best practice.

Section 5, Best practice for working with community groups, uses the the summary of key findings from each of the previous sections to provide recommendations for how INGOs and LNGOs can approach working with community groups in the future. It concludes with a brief discussion of possible future steps in this area of research.

Please note, all the names of villages that participated in this review and that have been used in the case studies have been replaced by ficticious names to protect the identities of the villagers involved.

Figure 1: Differentiating Factors of Community Based Groups

2

Approaches

SECTION

TWO
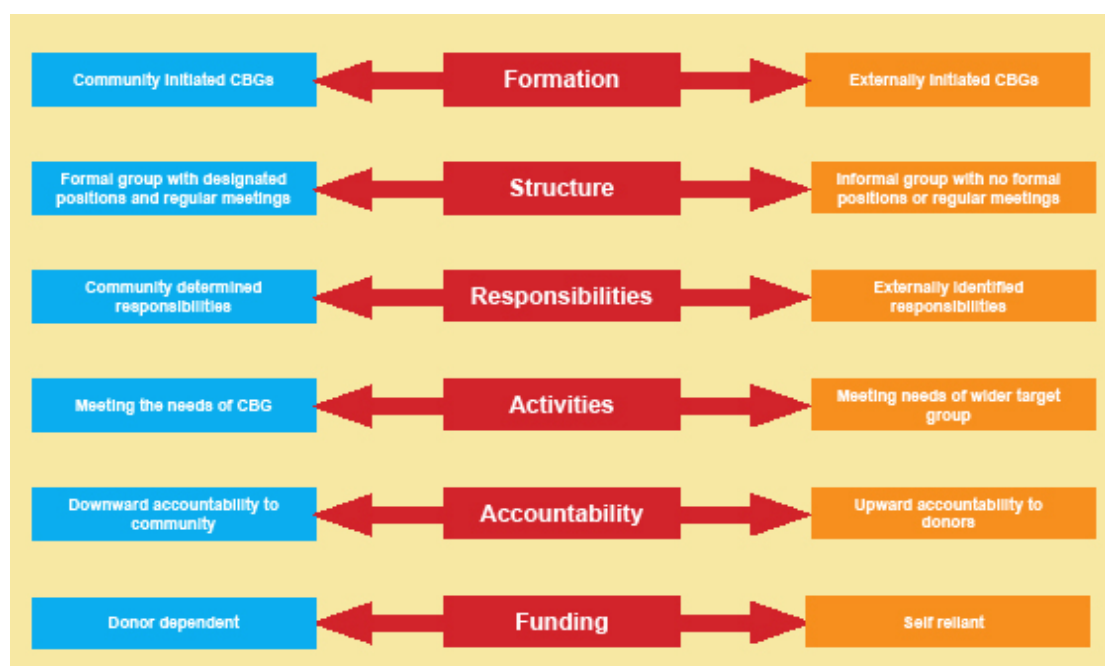
Approaches

Following the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis, aid agencies have adopted a wide range of approaches to working with communities and distributing relief assistance. The experience of many LNGOs and INGOs has highlighted importance of a participatory approach to humanitarian assistance and the capability and willingness of communities to be active in the relief effort and to have a say in the decisions that affect them. As a result, many LNGOs and INGOs have either set up CBGs or have supported ones that previously existed.

The role of community-based groups before Cyclone Nargis

Before Cyclone Nargis, social capital and cohesion were strong in Delta villages. The relative scarcity of outside development resources, and limited interaction of villages with the state at higher levels, meant that communities had to find ways of working together to improve their villages and manage public goods. The Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) therefore hypothesised that Nargis could create potential for social capital to increase further at least in the short term, as communities faced the collective challenge of cyclone recovery.[1]

The Local Resource Centre Study Report (LRCSR) found that the 'majority of the villages in the study had informal social groups in their communities before the Cyclone' and that 'members of these groups were the main basis upon which communities worked to rebuild themselves immediately after Nargis'. The role of these social network groups varied from helping in religious activities to assisting in traditional ceremonial occasions such as marriage, funerals and *shinpyu* (entering the monk hood. These groups are also known as *thayei nayei ahpwe*, groups for "social occasions of joy or grief".'[2]

The community response to Cyclone Nargis

The emergency response to Cyclone Nargis 'clearly demonstrated the ability of communities and local organisations in Myanmar to respond rapidly and flexibly to needs on the ground.[3] The Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring (PONSIM) found that in most villages, social capital was strong and growing. Villagers

in the communities studied had worked together to overcome immediate post-Nargis challenges and employed survival strategies requiring a wide range of forms of collective action and problem solving. It found that a wide cross-section of the population (men and women, young and old) participated in renovating paths, rebuilding schools, cleaning debris, renovating ponds and restoring purified drinking water. In most villages reviewed by the PONSIM, respondents believed that inter-group relations were normal or good and that villagers were more or similarly united six months on from Nargis compared to before the cyclone.[4]

In addition, the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP) found that the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis demonstrated the resilience of the affected villages and their capacity to help themselves and organize and implement relief and recovery activities. At the village level the traditional social welfare support systems, including existing associations (youth, women, livelihood, cultural) and faith-based structures (Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Hindu) all played a role, and survivors formed new self-help groups spontaneously. It also found that the 'numerous initiatives that emerged in the initial stages following the cyclone were continuing to contribute to recovery and reconstruction 6 months after the cyclone'.[5]

The PONSIM commented that strong social solidarity also led to the (relatively) rich and the less affected helping the marginalised and most affected. Many landowners lent money to and shared food with landless villagers, who also helped each other with what little they had. Village heads provided assistance to widows, the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill. Villagers also helped vulnerable and marginalised people in their communities by building homes, contributing to funeral expenses and arranging accommodation for old people with no relatives.[6]

Approaches of LNGOs and INGOs to working with communities

The relief effort initiated in response to Cyclone Nargis has created the opportunity for engagement between communities, LNGOs and INGOs that previously was unimaginable. Local and international organisations including the UN have been able to extend their reach

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1 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.33

2 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

3 UNDP (2008) Output 3 of the Integrated Early Recovery Programme: Capacity Development, p.1

4 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.33

5 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

6 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

and build strong relationships with communities in the Ayeyarwady Delta. However, despite this opportunity to work in partnership with communities, research indicates many actors have not adopted participatory approaches to relief distribution.

The PONREPP identified three levels of recovery intervention: Level (1) - At the household or village level, Level (2) - At the Township level, and Level (3) - At the central level. In conclusion, the PONREPP argued that the majority of interventions should take place at the household or village level (level 1) 'with the direct participation of the village or households as target beneficiaries, taking into account the different needs of men and women within the household. It also stressed that villages should have 'full participation in making choices, activity design, implementation management and accountability'. Its sector plans emphasised both community participation and a focus on vulnerable groups, building on existing relief and early recovery efforts and taking into consideration recommendations from villagers.[7]

However, the PONREPP found that as a result of the large number of actors involved in the relief effort, the degree of participation has varied ranging from minimal levels of consultation at one extreme (usually limited to a small number of dominant men), to an explicit transfer of decision-making at the other (with trusted and transparent village level institutions).[8] The PONSIM argued that although this variance was understandable, especially during the relief phase when speed is of the essence, it has raised some problems within villages. Firstly, as the array of mechanisms used has led to some confusion amongst aid recipients, and secondly as it may have increased opportunities for diversion of funds.[9]

Further analysis of these different approaches in the PONREPP suggests that rather than resulting from particular local circumstances, the different approaches adopted by LNGOs and INGOs are largely a consequence of the programming norms of the assistance agencies involved. In summary, the PONREPP concluded that agreeing on common approaches was very important, both in terms of effectiveness and in terms of perceptions of equity.[10]

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7 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

8 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

9 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.16

10 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

BOX 1: Community based groups – are they the way forward?

In line with the PONREPP recommendation that relief activities should employ 'transparent mechanisms to enable households and villages to convey their priorities', many LNGOs and INGOs have distributed assistance in consultation with, or directly through, pre-existing or newly formed community based groups. For some activities such as food distribution, these groups have not been formal or permanent where in other areas such as water and sanitation, more formal and durable groups have been required in order help design, maintain and manage projects.

Outlined on pages 16 and 17 is an overview of a number of different approaches adopted by LNGOs and INGOs to working with CBGs. All of the LNGOs and INGOs have worked with CBGs as a method through which to distribute assistance to communities in the Delta following the impact of cyclone Nargis. The main difference in approach is the extent to which these external agencies have partnered with existing or pre-formed groups, as opposed to forming their own groups to undertake relief activities. In all approaches outlined overleaf the agencies have highlighted community participation, representation and capacity building as being key elements of their approach.

KEY FINDINGS

- Before Cyclone Nargis, social capital and cohesion were strong in Delta villages with the majority of the villages having a pre-existing informal types of social network groups built within the community.
- Cyclone Nargis demonstrated the resilience of the affected villages and their capacity to help themselves and organise and implement relief and recovery activities.
- LNGOs and INGOs have adopted a number of varied approaches to working with communities and CBGs. The different approaches adopted have found to be largely a consequence of the programming norms of the assistance agencies involved. This suggests that agreeing on common approaches is very important, both for effectiveness and for perceptions of equity.
- One of the most common mistakes in post-disaster planning as the lack of consultation with the affected communities.

BOX 2: UNDP - Early Recovery Committees (ERCs) and Self Reliance Groups (SRGs)

The establishment of village community institutions is an anchor of the Human Development Initiative in Myanmar. Traditionally UNDP has promoted two forms of community organisations: (i) village development committees to organize and implement social development and small-scale village physical infrastructure activities; and (ii) Self-Reliance Groups (SRG), consisting of 15-20 members in a group, primarily aimed at developing the collective strength of the poor to improve their livelihoods, income earning capacity and skills in selected areas. After Nargis these groups were revived and the village committees took the form of Early Recovery Committees and new SRGs were formed.

The ER Committees were set up in villages where UNDP was implementing the ER Programme as the nodal village body for planning of activities and channelling of funds from UNDP to the beneficiaries. Since Cyclone Nargis, 707 ERCs have been formed in 5 townships in the Delta with over 10740 members. In order to build the capacity of the ERCs in management of the delivery aid as well as to identify and plan for development needs of the village a training pilot was initiated in Bogale. This helped in increased awareness of 663 ERCs members from 250 villages on formation, roles and responsibilities, accountability and transparency, book keeping and proposal development. Based on this experience, the training of ERCs was scaled up into the other four townships in partnership with a local NGO- Capacity Building Initiative (CBI).

BOX 3: Loka Ahlinn – Working in cooperation with local communities

Loka Ahlinn formed Food Management Committees and Village Development Committees in cooperation with the local communities. In the first phase of the response, food (WFP and non-WFP) and NFI distribution was generally distributed to the whole population in the selected villages. Targeting of most vulnerable individuals for the WFP food distribution was introduced in August-September 2008.

Early recovery activities focused on replacement of fishing equipment and targeted one-person lead households, landless and other most-vulnerable households. Much time was spent ensuring that the selected members of the committees were seen as trustworthy, had the support of the community and included women. During the implementation period Loka Ahlinn consulted with other the committees but also formally and informally with other community members to ensure that distribution was fair, met the needs of the population and that potential problems or conflicts were dealt with.

BOX 4: Paung Ku – Combining disaster response with capacity building

The Paung Ku Nargis Response is seen as an innovative and experimental approach, attempting to combine immediate disaster response with longer-term capacity building for civil society action within a challenging political context. This strategy used a three phase approach that allowed Paung Ku to move from provision of grants for immediate life saving interventions (May/June 08, phase 1), through a stabilisation period during the monsoon (Phase 2) to a focus on longer term recovery and reconstruction (Phase 3, Oct 08 – Dec 09). The goal of Paung Ku Nargis Response (PKNR) is to support CSOs to 'provide effective and coordinated relief and recovery interventions in such a way that civil society is also better able to contribute to longer term development and future disaster preparedness and response'.

A key focus for phase 3 is an increased focus on provision of several project cycles to grantee CSOs. Not only will this allow for a more significant impact on target communities, it will also allow a more significant investment in CSO capacity development. The core approach remains the learning opportunities offered to grantees through the whole process of applying for grants, demonstrating mechanisms of downward accountability, implementing their own projects, being monitored and being facilitated to carry out participatory evaluations.

BOX 5: ActionAid – The "Fellowship" Programme

ActionAid's core approach in Myanmar is to strengthen the capacity of communities for social and economic development. Central to this is the "Fellowship Programme" whereby young women and men who have demonstrated leadership potential, and who are prepared to commit to living and working in poor villages for 12 months are provided with intensive training. The Fellows, selected and supported by ActionAid's partner organisations, are equipped with the knowledge and skills to facilitate participatory development processes in their placement villages. The success of this approach lies in the strong relationship of trust the Fellow builds with the entire community and through her/his ability to mobilise the community to analyse their problems and act together to solve them.

2.1 Approaches - Formation

Various studies focusing on the Cyclone Nargis relief effort have examined the different mechanisms through which CBGs have been formed (LRCSR, PONREPP, PONSIM, RTE). In summary, the research has found two main approaches to forming CBGs; those formed by communities themselves and those created by external agencies.

The PONSIM found that the formation of emergency committees varied from place to place. In some villages, an NGO (often the first to arrive after Nargis) would establish an emergency committee to help channel their aid with subsequent NGOs using the same committee for their activities. In other places, villages would set up committees themselves because they saw that other villages had them. These committees would then be used by subsequent NGOs providing aid. In the majority of communities, the PONSIM found that NGOs preferred to use emergency committees rather than formal village government institutions as they felt that they were more representative of different groups in the villages as they were set up specifically to aid relief and recovery.[1]

The PONREPP found that most committees were formed by NGOs, although there were a few examples of committees that had formed on their own and some informal committees that existed before Nargis such as Young Men's Associations. For many activities community groups were not formal or permanent, while others (such as for village-based water and sanitation) required more formal and durable community groups to agree not only on design, but also standards (and thus operating costs) and on-going management and maintenance. Most committees were formed and led by locally powerful people, such as monks, government officials, or powerful villagers (including the well-off, people with connections, etc).[2]

Similarly, the RTE found that committees were usually established by international NGOs or UN agencies to help in the implementation of project activities. While these committees did facilitate consultation, it quickly became clear during the RTE focus group discussions, that multiple committees had created confusion and conflict in the villages, which had occasionally required the intervention of the head monk or village chairman to mediate disputes.[3]

The LRCSR categorised committees in the villages they visited into two types: Self initiated village committees and NGO initiated village committees. They found that the earliest village committees were formed by the villagers themselves and some were structured and guided by specific organisations. Four to five months after the cyclone, the informal groups that were organised to assist the distribution of emergency relief food and clothing, realised there was a need for a committee for community resettlement and development. During that time, the LRCSR found many non-formal and formal NGOs with different specific objectives were created as villagers had learnt through experience that is was necessary to form a group to host the incoming donors into their villages.[4]

The LRCSR also found that apart from one village under assessment, all CBOs were formed during July and August 2008. This is of particular importance, as the return of families to their home villages (after the temporary displacement caused by Nargis)

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4 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

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1 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.16

2 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

3 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.8

was a very slow process in many cases. In some instances this has meant that villagers have not been included in beneficiary lists and that township offices have incomplete information on the population of villages.[5]

Outlined on these pages are several different examples of approaches adopted by LNGOs and INGOs to forming of CBGs. These examples illustrate different mechanisms employed by groups working on a short term and longer-term basis and also demonstrate the experience of LNGOs and INGOs working with community formed groups and groups established by external agencies.

5 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

BOX 7: UNDP - Early Recovery Committees (ERC)

ER Committees were set up in villages where UNDP was implementing the ER Programme as the nodal village body for planning of activities and channelling of funds from UNDP to the beneficiaries.

The ERC of the village aimed to be a true representation of the entire village. It should be able to deal with all the people in the village without any discrimination. The ERC, as the village apex body, should have representation from all sections in the village, in its membership.

Villagers came up with names that were acceptable to them. Only in very few villages did they have to resort to any kind of voting to select members to the ERC. It was found that in most villages the leadership that existed pre-Nargis retained their pre-eminent role in the ERCs. To save time the formation of village Self Reliance Groups (SRGs) were initiated during the participatory planning exercise and using PRA tools and methods.

BOX 8: ActionAid - The "Reflect" Approach

Reflect is an approach to facilitating community empowerment. In Reflect, poor and marginalised people are brought together in a participatory forum, which is referred to as a "Reflect circle". In the circle, fellows facilitate inclusive, participatory processes using various tools such as social mapping, timelines and problem trees which enable the participants to critically analyse their situation. As a result the Reflect participants identify their priority issues, the possible solutions and plan the actions they could undertake to bring about the change they desire. There is an ongoing process of reflection on past and current activities that also leads to pro-active responses to changes arising in the broader context.

Through their experience of instigating activities and seeing that they have the possibility to bring about tangible change in some aspect of their situation, the Reflect approach can empower and inspire people to envisage a better future. It enables participants to seek access to equity and justice and to take collective action according to their ideas and hopes. Through the Reflect approach and the fellowship program, communities have been able to bring about substantial change in their situation. They have engaged with government and non-government actors to mobilise the resources they need. At the same time, this exchange can generate a better understanding of the people's situation and has led various actors to be more responsive.

KEY FINDINGS - FORMATION

- Village CBGs can be categorised into those established by communities themselves and those set up by external agencies. The majority were formed by NGOs post Nargis.
- NGOs generally preferred to use emergency committees rather than formal village government institutions as they felt that they were more representative of different groups in the villages.
- For many activities, community groups were not formal or permanent.
- Multiple committees have in some cases created confusion and conflict in villages.
- In some areas, villagers have learnt through experience that it is necessary to form a group to host incoming donors into their villages.
- The delayed return of families to villages has in some cases meant that the assistance package only benefited those who were present in the village on the day of the beneficiary identification.

SECTION TWO

2.2 Approaches - Structure

In many cases, the structure adopted by CBGs established after Cyclone Nargis has been dependent on the model proposed by a donor LNGO or INGO. Furthermore, groups that were already established have in many cases adapted to meet the structural requirements of donors such as having an equal number of men and women members. Summarised below are the findings of research that has examined the membership, leadership and responsibilities of CBGs.

Membership

The PONSIM found wide diversity in the make-up of CBGs. In some villages, community members elected members from different stakeholder groups representing elders, youth, and religious groups, but rarely women. In others, membership was restricted to formal leaders. The LRCSR found that people involved in arranging big social events (funerals, celebrations, etc) tended to join the newly formed committees, as did people who had free time, and had the trust of villagers, or appropriate qualifications. Village-level government officials and security forces were also cited as often being members in committees.[1]

The LRCSR also found that even though the earlier informal village emergency groups were transformed into committees in most of the villages the composition and structure remained somewhat the same. Most of the self-initiated village committees included in the LRCSR consisted of only male leaders and male members at the beginning of the formation. Under the influence of NGOs, women members were placed into the committees but they reported that they had little understanding of why they had been asked to join. In NGO initiated committees, the compositions of group members tended to be pre-identified with an equal ratio of male and female members. In some cases, INGOs instructed communities that there must be compulsory member composition of two mothers and adolescent in the committees.[2]

Leadership

In most villages, significant collective community leadership emerged through village emergency committees. Since Nargis, village heads, elders, monks, men, youth and some women have taken on relief and recovery responsibilities. Village emergency committees usually started off including members from different groups across the wider community, such as young people and religious leaders. In some villages their composition has since changed so that formal leaders such as the village head and those close to them, play a larger role. The initial findings of the PONSIM demonstrate that these CBGs tended to work most effectively in an environment where village leaders encourage and facilitate them in defining their own priorities.[3]

The LRCSR found the majority of the leaders were influential village people from an above average socioeconomic background, experience in administrative ability and ex-village authorities. In the villages visited by the LRCSR team, either the committee leader, or a powerful member of the committee, such as a member of the village-level government or monk, usually made decisions, reflecting that other committee members as well as villagers had little voice in the decision-making process. Thus, there was partnership within the committee but delegation of power was limited to a few. It was found that this was because people taking a leadership role were usually influential and well-off. The villagers were normally informed about the process of distribution but the information received was not always timely, which created problems in some villages.[4]

Responsibilities

Despite the PONREPPs recommendation that 'decision-making should be influenced by both current village consultative groups, and any new groups that are formed', research has found little evidence that CBGs have taken the lead in prioritisation, implementation and monitoring. Similarly, the PONSIM found that village emergency committees tended to play a larger role in distributing assistance than in identifying beneficiaries and priorities.[5]

The RTE found with few exceptions that committees described their role as facilitating implementation. Probing by the RTE team yielded little evidence that they had been consulted on priorities, had been delegated any programme authority, received training or had a clear understanding of their terms of

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1 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.6

2 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.6

3 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 6

4 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.6

5 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 8

reference. In villages evaluated by the LRC, researchers found half of the committees were doing what international organisations asked them to do, (for example WASH, Shelter, or Agriculture). The LRCSR found that some committees kept records, budgets and meeting minutes, but few committees were aware of how to get assistance or guidelines on how to improve their projects from foreign organisations.[6]

Outlined on these pages are details of two CBGs that have been formed in villages in Bogale Township. Both of these CBGs structures have been based on models suggested by external agencies. These examples illustrate the variation in membership of CBGs and the types of leadership and decision making processes they have in place.

6 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.8

BOX 9: Boe Di Kwe i Ywar Ma Village Development Committee (Loka Ahlinn)

In Boe Di Kwe i Ywar Ma, several different aid agencies have provided assistance including Loka Ahlinn (food), JEN (temporary shelter) and MRCS (cash grants for livelihood). Several committees have also been established since the cyclone including a livestock committee, food management committee and village development committee (VDC).

The VDC has 7 members who were proposed and elected at a village mass meeting and they are responsible for assessing the development of the village. They meet twice a month to discuss projects and any financial issues such as who should receive support with any additional funds.

BOX 10: Chaung Bye Gyi (East) Village – Self Reliance Groups (UNDP)

The UNDP introduced the idea of establishing Self Reliance Groups (SRGs) in Chaung Bye Gyi (East) Village in September 2008. Three groups were established with average 20 members in each. From September till April, members saved 100 kyat per week and once this milestone had been achieved the SRG received additional funding from UNDP.

The SRGs were then able to lend to members to support activities such as trading, health checks, and livelihood schemes such as pig raising and fisheries. The rate of interest on the loan amount is 3% per month and the loan term is for 2, 6 or 9 months (lenders pay back interest in 3 instalments). Each SRG has an elected a Chair, Treasurer, Book Keeper, 2 representatives and a key holder. The record keeper received 3 days of training from UNDP. Each of the 3 groups meet every Tuesday for one to two hours.

KEY FINDINGS - STRUCTURE

- Most of the self-initiated village committees consisted of only male leaders and male members when they were first formed.
- There was a noticeable influence of NGO ideas in membership selection and international NGOs often specifically asked that women be included in the committees.
- Even though the earlier informal village emergency groups were transformed into committees, in many villages the composition and structure often remains somewhat the same.
- Leadership plays a crucial role in not only the formation but also in active functioning of village committees
- Committee leaders, or a powerful members of the committee, such as a member of the village-level government or monk usually made decisions, with other committee members as well as villagers having little voice in the decision-making process. Decision-making was not always an easy task for the leader or the committee with limited experience.
- Research has found little evidence that CBGs had taken the lead in prioritisation, implementation and monitoring with village emergency committees tending to play a larger role in distributing assistance than in identifying beneficiaries and priorities.

2.3 Approaches - Relationships

The relationships that CBGs develop with the communities they represent, other villages, and external stakeholders such as the government and NGOs, are crucial in terms of cooperation, transparency and sustainability. The following section draws on several studies to illustrate how CBGs have approached these relationships and in what areas there have been problems and issues.

Relations within the community

The LRCSR found that the relationship between the committees and communities was positive in most of the villages under review. Villages relied on the committee to help them rebuild their communities. Even though there were some misunderstandings, communities perceived committees as doing their best for the village. Committees often served to explain and clarify projects to the villagers, or launch the projects in ceremonies. In addition to their project-related tasks, committees often explained the finances after the project was concluded, found solutions to conflicts arising over distributionm and acted as agents between funders and the village.[1]

Inter-village relations

Cyclone Nargis does not appear to have had large-scale impacts on inter-village relations although there are some signs of increasing interdependence. The PONSIM found that in about one-third of the villages, relations between villagers and formal and informal leaders (religious leaders, elders) improved, and in about half of the villages, relations have not obviously changed. It found no cases of inter-village conflicts over natural resources. In some cases, suspicion over aid distribution had increased levels of discontent with village leaders. Generally, though, relations between formal and informal leaders were good.[2] Similarly, the LRCSR found the relationships between village committees of near by villages was friendly with village committees sharing experiences of dealing with NGO. A number of villages were also found to have helped their worse-off neighbours.[3]

Relations with the government

An acceptance that organisations can develop a working relationship with the Myanmar government, and benefit from it, was a key learning expressed by many of

1 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.8

2 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, x

3 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.8

the organisations interviewed by the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS).[4] This idea is closely aligned with the recognition of the importance of networking and building relationships.[5] This finding is supported by the LRCSR that found that committees functioned better in villages where village authorities had good relations with higher authorities.[6] The CPCS review commented that organisations that worked with the government after Cyclone Nargis reported that constructive and effective relationships were built.[7]

Working with LNGOs and INGOs

The LRCSR found that funding agencies or executing NGOs usually had a top down approach to working with committees. Typically, NGOs identified the relief activities and provided instructions on regulations, record keeping and monitoring mechanisms. Some of the NGOs also gave instructions for member compositions (male, female, youth and children). Little effort was observed of agencies trying to listen to the voices of the

4 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.27

5 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.49

6 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.9

7 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.49

committee or the community. Difficulties and misunderstanding were observed in some villages as a consequence of this top down approach with communities sometimes feeling that NGOs ignored their difficulties and obligated them towards achieving their own objectives.[8]

Local organisations interviewed by the CPCS expressed in strong terms their desire for external actors to understand the local context. They argue that this involves gaining an understanding of the social and conflict dynamics, the religious and ethno-cultural diversity of the country and its political history. These factors greatly influence how local organisations make decisions and respond to issues. Without a contextual understanding, they may be burdened by unrealistic expectations, and can face increased security risks. Engaging with the complexity of the context will build more effective relationships between external and internal actors, and reduce the potential for conflict.[9]

The PONSIM found that villagers in cyclone-hit communities knew what they needed and appreciated the aid they had received but had little real say in the aid effort. This has led to the provision of some kinds of aid that were not adapted to local needs in the Delta. This underscores the need for future aid to be delivered in ways that build on local strengths, give communities real decision-making power in how aid should be delivered and used, include effective information and complaints-resolution mechanisms, and enable communities to advocate for their needs with aid providers.[10]

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8 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.9

9 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.46

10 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, x

BOX 11: Paung Ku – Project Objectives for Third Phase

During its third phase of operations (October 2008 - December 2009), Paung Ku is focusing on supporting CSOs seeking assistance to implement recovery, reconstruction and development interventions. Thus the majority of project activities will be covered be covered by the following list:

Livelihood support, including: crop inputs (seeds, tools, draught animals, pumps, fertilizer etc for paddy rice, other food crops, and cash crops such as betel nut); small livestock (mainly ducks, geese, chickens, pigs); fishery inputs (small boats, engines, nets, lines, hooks, pots and traps etc); support for fish farming; petty trade; micro-enterprise management training; artisans (including blacksmiths and boat makers). Approaches will include targeted one-off distributions; revolving cash funds; rice banks and seed banks; small livestock

Restarting/provision of Basic services, including: support for educational materials; schools equipment; replacement of local energy supplies (especially renewable) used for public services: health centre equipment; support for training of new cadres of local service providers (teachers, health assistants, animal health assistants, water supply managers, artisans); repair of water supply systems; hand-pumps, treadle pumps.

Reconstruction support, including: public infrastructure (especially for storm proof buildings), roads, bridges, support for introduction of improved building technologies (e.g. compressed mud bricks) and targeted support for assistance of home reconstruction.

Social capital, including: support for psycho-social healing; awareness raising for gender related isses (including gender-based violence), HIV/AIDS prevention; ethnic/religious conflict resolution;

Natural resource management, including: social forestry; agro-forestry; grazing management; fisheries management; soil and water conservation; usufruct and tenure issues; land-use management.

KEY FINDINGS - RELATIONSHIPS

- Relationships between CBGs and communities were found to be positive in most villages reviewed. Even though there were some misunderstandings, the communities perceived that the CBGs were doing their best for the development of the village.
- Cyclone Nargis does not appear to have had large-scale impacts on inter-village relations although here are some signs of increasing interdependence.
- Humanitarian organisations who worked in coordination with the government after Cyclone Nargis reported that constructive and effective relationships were built.
- Local organisations expressed in strong terms their desire for external actors to understand the local context.
- Assistance should build on the strengths of affected communities. Villagers in cyclone-hit communities know what they need and appreciate the aid they have received but so far have had little real say in the aid effort.
- NGOs have been perceived as giving ideas, instructions, regulations, record keeping and monitoring mechanisms and little effort has been seen trying to listen to the voices of the committees or the communities.

3
Activities

3.1 Activities - Initial Assessments

The aim of assessing recovery needs during the humanitarian phase following a disaster is to produce an integrated multi-sectoral response plan to support the phasing-out of emergency life-saving interventions, and restore livelihoods, infrastructure, social services, and basic governance capacities.[1] In most of the villages visited by the PONSIM it was found that aid providers rather than recipients determined the types of aid provided with NGOs and other aid agencies normally pre-identifying the type(s) of assistance they would give and what type(s) of groups should receive it.[2]

The PONSIM found that aid providers only rarely considered needs and priorities as identified by the village committees or individual villagers. The team heard of very few cases where participatory needs assessments had been carried out before aid was distributed, and even fewer where communities could decide to spend assistance on what they wanted. In several cases, villagers said that aid providers did not consult them during the planning process and as a result assistance had not focused adequately on the most marginalised and poorest households.[3] Similarly, the LRCSR found that even though communities were able to identify what they needed, their involvement in decision-making was sometimes weak and almost all providers predetermined with what they were going to provide and how much they were going to provide before giving assistance.[4]

1 CWGER (2009) Summary of existing guidance and tools on local level needs assessment methodologies

2 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

3 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, x

4 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

In contrast, the ActionAid emergency response programme found that facilitation of the communities to choose their relief items and determine their own priorities provided unexpected results. Affected people gave highest priority to livelihood recovery, then shelter and thirdly food support. This prioritization reflected people's concern to regain their independence, maintain their dignity and not be dependent on aid.[5] The PONSIM found that individual, private providers of aid were more likely to consult with villagers and village committees on needs and priorities and to provide aid directly to villagers. This tended to be because they targeted fewer villages and so had more time for consultations and because, as informal aid providers, they were not constrained by sector or organisational guidelines.[6]

The RTE team was surprised to learn that none of the villages they visited appeared to have previous experience of separate male and female focus groups during assessments.

5 ActionAid Myanmar (2009) Building for the future: 9 month Nargis Response Update, p.3

6 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

BOX 12: ActionAid - Responding to communities' needs

Responding to communities' needs and priorities requires not only adopting a community participation approach, but also using that information to inform the programming of the organisation. ActionAid Myanmar's original emergency response plan allocated four percent of the funding for livelihoods and early recovery and a large percentage of the budget for food and shelter assistance. After consultation with the communities, it became clear that people prioritised the recovery of their livelihoods to ensure they were not reliant on aid handouts.

As a response to the communities' expressed priority, the emphasis of the relief programme shifted quickly to recovery with 40 percent of the budget to set aside for livelihoods. The focus shifted to livelihood assistance for vulnerable people, disaster risk reduction, psychosocial support, women's participation and strengthening community capacity. The programmes have emphasised the importance of inclusion of women's livelihoods and their selection as committee members. The programmes have also been attentive to transparency and accountability and the equitable distribution of materials.

BOX 13: Da None Chaung Cheng Village Recovery and Development Committee (Paung Ku)

Prior to the cyclone, an informal village group existed in Kwan Thee Cheng and provided some development assistance to the village as a whole. After Nargis, the committee became more formal and increased its membership from 7 to 11 people. The committee applied for grants from external agencies for agriculture support and income generation activities. A number of varied donors provided assistance including ACF, IDE, IOM and WV. Relief items included food, fertiliser, cash, diesel, seeds, tools, water buckets and piping for latrines. Aid agencies asked the committee and villagers to collect information and they then distributed materials and assistance themselves. On June 6th 2008, the committee went to Bogale to apply for funding for food from Paung Ku for 129 HH. After purchasing food locally they then distributed it to all households within the village. In March 2009, the committee applied, and were awarded a grant for income generation for the poorest 99 households in the village.

This was a finding subsequently validated by a number of international agencies based in Bogale, although it should be noted that UNDP set up women's committees prior to the cyclone, which they continued to consult. While the RTE found that men and women focus group discussions shared views on most issues, important differences were evident during livelihood discussions. This is perhaps not so surprising given the impact on family and community structures in some areas where there has been a high death toll – principally women, children and the elderly. In general, women tended prioritize small livestock and small-scale marketing as livelihood opportunities.[7]

A number of LNGOs and INGOs included in this review have focused on incorporating communities and CBGs more fully into the process of needs assessments. Boxes 13, 14 and 15 on these pages give details of the community-based assessments adopted by ActionAid, Paung Ku and Loka Ahlinn.

BOX 14: Loka Ahlinn - Working in consultation with local communities

Needs assessments were carried out in consultation with local communities while overall planning included large involvement of donor staff. Further consultation and involvement of local communities in the assessment and implementation stage was increased following the first immediate relief stage. Close cooperation was established with WFP for assessment, planning, distribution and monitoring purposes. Loka Ahlinn's assistance is planned and targeted all the affected population in selected areas equitably and impartially.

The project activities were changed according to the shifting needs on the ground. As the need for NFIs (mosquito nets, clothes, kitchen utensils and the like) were soon met, the content was changed to school kits, children's kits, radios and water containers. Furthermore, the area Loka Ahlinn had targeted for agricultural assistance received support from another INGO while the need for fishing equipment and access to clean drinking water prompted Loka Ahlinn to revise its activities to meet these needs. During this process Loka Ahlinn learned the need for thorough planning at project and programme level and the importance of ensuring proper documentation to determine changes in activities.

7 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.15

KEY FINDINGS - INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- NGOs and other aid agencies commonly pre-identified the types of assistance they would give and what types of groups should receive it.
- Only rarely were aid providers found to consider the needs and priorities as identified by the village committees or individual villagers.
- Some village CBGs were found to be weak in assessing the priorities and needs of villagers and generally provided no or limited complaints or feedback mechanisms
- None of the villages visited by the RTE appeared to have previous experience of separate male and female focus groups during assessments.
- The RTE found that men and women focus group discussions shared views on most issues, important differences were evident during livelihood discussions
- Individual, private providers of aid were more likely to consult with villagers and village committees on needs and priorities and to provide aid directly to villagers.
- Further consultation and involvement of local communities in the assessment and implementation stage was increased following the first immediate relief stage.

SECTION

THREE

3.2 Activities - Response

The focus of the present review is not to examine in detail the different types of relief interventions that have been implemented through community based organisations since Cyclone Nargis, but to look at some areas in which community based groups have been particularly effective in providing support during the recovery period, such as livelihood support, disaster risk reduction and psychosocial support.

Livelihood

The PONJA recommended that the majority of programmes in the livelihood area (with the exception of vocational training and micro-business services) should be community-based. Having acknowledged that the use of community-driven approaches is not as large-scale in Myanmar as it is in other countries, the PONJA highlighted that there are successful experiences in delivering assistance in the Delta through these approaches. The two pre-requisites for the successful use of community-driven approaches were identified as being the ability to support village groups who can genuinely solicit and reflect the priorities of the community and avoid elite capture, and the ability to establish and operate basic financial management processes.

Interventions include:
1. Primary income generation through crops, fisheries, livestock and forestry
2. Income generation through participation in rebuilding critically needed household and community shelters
3. Provision of essential community-based water and sanitation services
4. Income generation through the revitalization of small-scale commerce and processing of primary products.

The PONREPP argued that such livelihood-oriented support should focus on villages or small groups of households that have common interests in respect of (1) - (4) above. In order for this to be successful, transparent mechanisms need to be put in place to enable households and villages to convey their priorities. This, it argued, will ensure that assistance is demand-driven and priority-responsive.[1] Please find below a summary of community based livelihood income generation programmes supported by UNDP.

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1 TCG (December 2008) Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 8

> **BOX 15: UNDP - Self Reliance Groups (SRGs)**
>
> Most of the self reliance groups that existed before Nargis were disintegrated and the members lost their assets and resources thus leading to discontinuity of their income generation activities. Hence the early months after Nargis focused on revival of old groups and formation of new SRGs in the Nargis affected villages.
>
> Considering the need of the post disaster scenario the SRG concept was adapted to benefit the immediate requirements of the households. An emergency loan of 50,000 Kyats each was provided to provide to 1810 member from 121 groups. In addition to the old SRGs 624 new groups were formed in all the five townships. Members from the SRGs who are recruited on cash for work basis are trained as promoters to assist in the formation and strengthening of the groups.
>
> The capacity building of the SRGs focuses on basic self reliance group concepts, book keeping and assessing the maturity of the groups. Till date 624 new SRGs including 1284 book writers, have been trained on the above. On completion of the training the above SRGs were assessed and 529 groups qualified to receive a capital injection of USD 100 per groups and individual soft loans in the range of USD 85 -150. The project aims to cover atleast 1000 SRGs by the end of 2009. In addition to capacity building on group strengthening, technical skills trainings related to the income generation activities will be taken up in the next quarter.

BOX 16: Han Thar Nyunt Village Development Committee Village Development Committee (Loka Ahlinn)

Loka Ahlinn provided a range of support for the Han Thar Nyunt Village. Initially, they were responsible for distribution of the WFP food ration. In the first phase, food was distributed to all villagers, but it was subsequently targeted to those most in need. In addition to food distribution, Loka Ahlinn provided fishing nets, drinking water and support for the local schools.

More recently, Loka Ahlinn has provided training on DRR for 15 members of the village providing them with 7 days of food provision for their attendance. However, the committee identified a number of areas in which they would benefit from additional training such as agricultural techniques, power tiller maintenance and micro-finance. The committee are keen to ensure they avoid dependency on external agencies especially for food but argued that in order to maintain the independence they need to establish infrastructure.

BOX 17: ActionAid - Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA)

The core principle in ActionAid's people centered approach is that poor people can and must be involved in finding the solutions to their problems. Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) is a tool for building awareness and understanding of why disasters occur and how they can be reduced. It is undertaken by vulnerable communities themselves, together with local leaders.

The process involves a joint analysis of different hazards, the root causes of vulnerability as well as the different levels of vulnerability of various groups of people. It highlights community strengths and discusses potential solutions for reducing risk.

Participatory methodologies for vulnerability analysis ensure that responses are appropriate, community-led and transparent. This shared analysis helps assign roles and responsibilities to different actors so that in the event of a disaster, they can respond more quickly and effectively.

Disaster Risk Reduction

The devastation Cylone Nargis inflicted revealed a lack of information on awareness and of preparation for disasters. Community based disaster risk reduction is an essential component of development work to prepare communities for future disasters, and for the future integration of emergency work in development programming. During an emergency response, disaster preparedness and mitigation activities can be integrated with the provision of aid, such as developing strategies that can reduce the risk of loss or damage to livelihood assets in future disasters. Participatory decision making processes and organising collective activities can lead to the development of social capital. This contributes not only to broader development aims but reinforces community capacity and cohesion for disaster response. Please find on this page examples of community based DRR initiatives initiated by a number of external agencies.

BOX 18: Paung Ku - Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The Paung Ku Nargis Response team has identified a need to help SHGs and CBOs develop recovery proposals based on a more carefully considered village-owned and integrated strategy. Paung Ku is providing simple training, similar to Integrated Recovery Planning (IRP), to equip SHGs and CBOs to facilitate their communities to develop their own village and family level DRR strategies. An initial survey has been completed of existing DRR initiatives of UN, INGOs and LNGOs to ensure that Paung Ku is not duplicating what is being done elsewhere. The training will equip CBO members to be able to return to their villages to facilitate their village populations undertake a participatory analysis and planning process which leads to a jointly-owned DRR plan.

Psychosocial Support

Providing psychosocial care to alleviate some of the trauma associated with major disasters such as Cyclone Nargis is vital in ensuring the long-term recovery of those most affected. Below and opposite details of the approaches adopted by UNDP and ActionAid that provide psychosocial support through mobilising communities themselves.

BOX 19: UNDP - Community based approaches and partnerships

The impact a disaster can have on a community is multifaceted, both in the short as well as the long term. The obvious needs that require immediate relief are the lack of shelter, food, health and sanitation. What are not as apparent are the effects of emotional trauma due to shock and loss of livelihoods on overall social well being. Since many communities were severely affected, psychosocial care coupled with efforts to reduce their vulnerability is critical. In addition, it is important to assess the manner in which we identify factors that make some groups more vulnerable, the way we target our beneficiaries and identify their needs to ensure the principles of participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion are addressed.

In order to address these needs, two pilots have been initiated. First, to train community youth on Theater for Development in such a way that they are then able to consistently work over a long period of time with Nargis affected communities particularly with children and young people. Sixty youth from 5 townships selected on criteria such as good social mobilization skills, background and interest and talent in dance and drama and willingness to work with communities were identified and trained using Theater techniques for psychosocial care. These 60 promoters have traveled to 180 villages in the 5 townships. In addition to using theatre as a medium of healing, this approach also encourages debate and discussion on other cross cutting issues such as Disaster Risk Reduction, HIV/AIDS and other issues identified by the community.

The second pilot scheme has been implemented in partnership with Action Aid, where traditional coping mechanisms are being strengthened in 30 villages in Labutta by training monks, nuns, teachers and other community representatives to address issues of trauma. Information hubs are also being piloted in these 30 villages where information education and communication material on messages related to various sectors has been made available to communities.

BOX 20: ActionAid - Psychosocial Support

Providing psychosocial care to alleviate some of the trauma associated with major disasters such as Cyclone Nargis is vital in ensuring the long-term recovery of those most affected. Understanding the impact of disasters on people's well being and the importance of providing psychosocial support in early stages to help prevent longer term complications from the trauma experienced is crucial. Trained volunteers have mobilised members of the community in activities that will help them deal with the trauma they are experiencing following the disaster, with special attention being given to women and children.

The ActionAid psychosocial care approach combines three elements simultaneously that aims to restore some sense of normalcy:

• Immediately after the cyclone, various activities such as cash-for-work enabled the community to be active in rebuilding and to start thinking about recovery and the future.
• The training of psychosocial volunteers from the local affected area, especially to start supporting children and those highly traumatized by creating space where children could play and people could come together and talk.
• Creating awareness at the community level so that community members could help each other to process the trauma by listening, showing empathy.

Key Lessons learnt from providing psychosocial support

• Trained community volunteers can provide more effective support than outsiders as they have a good understanding of the local culture and people as well as being acquainted with the situation in the Delta area.
• Provision of immediate psychosocial support for children is crucial in enabling them to recover from the trauma they have experienced.
• Local people are critical in the identification of the most vulnerable members of their community who are in need of support.

KEY FINDINGS - RESPONSE

• The PONJA recommended that the majority of programmes in the livelihood area should be community-based.
• Community-based disaster risk reduction is an essential component of development work to prepare communities for future disasters, and for the future integration of emergency work in development programming.
• Participatory decision-making processes and organising collective activities can lead to the development of social capital. This contributes not only to broader development aims but reinforces community capacity and cohesion for disaster response.
• Providing psychosocial care to alleviate some of the trauma associated with major disasters such as Cyclone Nargis is vital in ensuring the long-term recovery of those most affected.
• Trained community volunteers can provide more effective support than outsiders as they have a good understanding of the local culture and people as well as being acquainted with the situation in the Delta area.
• Since many communities were severely affected, psychosocial care coupled with efforts to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking, HIV/AIDS is critical.

3.3 Activities - Targeting

A wide range of targeting mechanisms have been employed for distributing aid both between and within villages. One implication of this is that it is more difficult to assess accurately what aid has already been provided to whom. As a result, in deciding on aid distribution, aid providers are less able to take account of what has already been provided from other sources.[1]

Although there is a wide variation, the PONSIM identified a number of different generic types of targeting mechanisms (See below). Often all of the mechanisms outlined below were used in the same village with different aid providers each having their own targeting mechanisms, and different programmes using different targeting approaches. Furthermore, different aid providers often distributed the same types of aid (for example, food) in different ways within villages, sometimes during the same time period.[2]

The RTE reported that in focus group discussions and interviews with INGO staff, there was a sense that more effective consultations with communities around vulnerability criteria and cultural context could have resulted in more efficient distributions. For example, some INGO staff felt that a considerable amount of time and effort had been expended on developing food assistance targeting criteria that was inconsistent with community traditions. Targeting criteria must move beyond general food distribution and there is little other option for high unit value assistance such as permanent shelter. Nevertheless, reflections by cooperating partner staff were that, since "targeted" recipients mostly redistributed to other community members and relatives, attempts to enforce targeting criteria during the early phases of the response was not the best use of their time. The general point emerging from this and other examples is that, if assistance policies are developed in a participatory manner, the additional time invested in consultations can pay off in increased efficiency.[3]

The LRCSR found that a key factor in minimising potential tension and conflict within communities was participatory and transparent selection process to ensure the communities are engaged and aware of the program selection criteria. To reduce misunderstandings and complaints, committees should share selection criteria with the villagers and give them a chance to discuss them.[4]

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1 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

2 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

3 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.16

4 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4

BOX 21: Types of targeting mechanisms

In some cases, aid providers went directly to each household to create targeting mechanisms. In others, they defined selection criteria and then worked through village leaders or committees including emergency committees that were established in many villages. Whether aid was delivered directly or through the village leadership structure depended largely on the policy of the aid provider. Where aid went through the village leadership structures, there were more reported cases of the vulnerable not receiving their full share, although communities were found to have some mechanisms for making complaints.

Some relief and recovery assistance (from food to livelihoods inputs) was delivered in insufficient quantities to help all those in need in a village. Some noted that allocations tended to be biased towards people with links to those in positions of power in the village. Where village leaders were asked to manage distribution, they often chose to have 'lucky draws' to decide on who should get help. Most villagers the research teams spoke to were content with such arrangements.

Livelihoods assistance tended to be given to farmers and fishermen rather than day labourers or those in supporting occupations. For this type of aid, committees for the aid project were usually established. While the members of these tended to be members in other committees as well, often these were distinct bodies not formally linked to preexisting ones. Government assistance tended to be transferred through formal structures; the Peace and Development Councils and village leaders. The extent to which it then reached the vulnerable in affected villages depended on the local leadership.

BOX 22: Kant Ba Lar Chaung Village Recovery Committee (Paung Ku)

The Village Recovery Committee (VRC) in Kant Ba Lar Chaung Village has received 3 stages of funding from Paung Ku. In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, Paung Ku approved an application from the VRC for a food grant for all 93 HH in their village. Paung Ku provided 435,000 Kyat for food to be purchased from the market. In July 2008, the VRC discussed the livelihood support with the whole community and applied for an income generation grant to buy duck and chickens. The poorest families in the villages were identified in a village meeting and 44 families received an equal grant to buy livestock locally. The third grant approved by Paung Ku was for a bridge building project linking Kant Ba Lar Chaung with a neighbouring village. Following consultation with the community, Paung Ku distributed funds of 3,114,000 kyat in December 2008 for materials and skilled labour with volunteers being provided by both villages. The bridge was completed in mid January 2009. The VRC has plans to apply for further funding to create village roads and to purchase power tillers for farmers who are facing problems with cultivation.

Outlined above and overleaf is a summary of training provided to CBGs by Paung Ku and ActionAid to assist villagers them in effectively identifying and targeting vulnerable people to receive assistance within their communities.

How equitable do villagers believe aid is within their villages?

As discussed above, many of the villages studied took issue with how aid was being distributed. Determining whom to assist can be very difficult because different forms of aid have different aims and different villagers have different conceptions of what a just distribution looks like. At times, it made sense to target particular groups who need more (the vulnerable) or where assistance provided might have spill over effects (for example, for landowning farmers who employ others as labourers).[5]

In some places, people felt aid was inequitably distributed because certain groups had received less than others. In others, people accepted aid being distributed unevenly if it went to those whom villagers thought needed it most. In general, aid that targeted all in the village led to few problems. However, for many types of assistance this was not possible. Across the villages, a clear pattern emerged: where villagers felt they had a say in aid distribution they were more likely to accept some groups receiving more than others, even when they 'lost out' themselves. The lucky draw system for distributing aid was generally deemed to be fair. In many villages, communities redistributed assistance amongst themselves to limit aid inequities and the problems they felt it might cause.[6]

The PONSIM found that social capital was damaged when villagers perceived aid distribution to be inequitable or to have excluded certain groups while others benefited. In a few cases, religious groups provided assistance only to members of their own faiths. This kind of exclusive faith-based targeting, which was the exception much more than the practice, caused social tensions. In other villages, tensions arose over the targeting of aid to vulnerable people for house reconstruction. In these instances, a lack of transparency and information about the way that aid was targeted caused villagers to become suspicious about each other and of the village emergency committee. Finally, social capital was damaged when promises about aid were unfulfilled and villagers perceived certain groups in their community to have benefited over others.[7]

How equitable do villagers think assistance is across villages?

The PONSIM found that the vast majority of villages that received aid felt they had received less assistance than neighbouring villages. In some cases, this reflected reality, and resulted in a decrease in inter-village cooperation. Some villages were less affected than others, were not officially recognised (for example, registered as villages), were remote and difficult to reach, or did not have a dominant religious organisation providing aid. All these factors limited the amount of aid provided. Yet often those who felt they had received less help than others actually appeared to have received more than neighbouring villages. In these cases, though, they lacked clear information about cross-village aid distribution and so their perceptions did not reflect reality.[8]

In some communities, villagers and their leaders redistributed aid within their villages away from those originally targeted by aid providers in an effort to ensure social solidarity. In one village, the aid provider targeted aid at vulnerable or marginalised people, but the village emergency committee retargeted it to cover the wider population. Villagers said that this was to preserve village unity.

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5 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

6 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

7 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.14

8 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.18

BOX 23: ActionAid - A community-based response

ActionAid and partners implemented a community-based emergency response that sought to respect, promote and protect the people's dignity by involving them in the decision-making process regarding what assistance they would receive and how. In many cases communities were involved in deciding everything from budget allocation to the details of early recovery. The community's involvement in identifying the most vulnerable beneficiaries, design of food and non-food item lists, identifying locations to set up first aid camps and coordinating the distribution of relief items was crucial.

ActionAid found it critical that the community recognise that the most vulnerable people (such as women headed households, people living with disabilities, older people, and children who had lost their families in the disaster) lack the reserves and support networks that they can draw on to assist them to recover, and hence have a greater need.

Basic training was provided to community members and volunteers on methods of rapid assessments and relief operation implementation so they were equipped to take on these responsibilities. This process also brought about transparency and accountability as well as equity in the distribution of materials. As a result of their participation in the emergency response process, villagers not only became empowered but also did not loose their dignity - a common negative outcome when people are treated only as passive recipients.

KEY FINDINGS - TARGETING

- The wide range of mechanisms that have been employed for targeting aid, making it more difficult in some cases to assess accurately what aid has already been provided to whom.
- Whether aid was delivered directly or through the village leadership structure tended to be largely dependent on the policy of the aid provider. The aid provided commonly made most decisions about which members of the community would receive assistance.
- Where aid went through village leadership, there were more reported cases of the vulnerable not receiving their full share. Some allocations tended to be biased towards people with links to those in positions of power in the village. Social capital was damaged when villagers perceived aid distribution to be inequitable or to have excluded certain groups while others benefited. It was also harmed when promises about aid were unfulfilled.
- A participatory and transparent selection process empowers villagers, ensures communities are engaged and aware of the programme selection criteria and minimises potential tension and conflict. Where villagers felt they had a say in aid distribution they were more likely to accept some groups receiving more than others, even when they 'lost out' themselves.
- In many villages, communities redistributed assistance amongst themselves to limit aid inequities and the problems they felt it might cause. In some communities, villagers and their leaders redistributed aid within their villages away from those originally targeted by aid providers in an effort to ensure social solidarity.

4

Accountability

4.1 Accountability - Participation

In a global synthesis of fifteen post-disaster evaluations by the World Bank the third most common lesson identified (out of a total of 51) was that even in the difficult circumstances of a disaster response, beneficiary participation during the design and implementation stages is essential to success.[1] The participation of disaster-affected people in decision-making throughout the project cycle (assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) helps to ensure that programmes are not only equitable and but also effective. Participation should ensure that programmes are based on the willing cooperation of disaster-affected people and that they respect local culture, where this does not undermine the rights of individuals. Assistance programmes should reflect the interdependency of individuals, households and communities and ensure that protection elements are not overlooked.[2]

Following the cyclone, emotional distress, the breakdown of coping mechanisms and the chaotic nature of the changing situation made community participation particularly challenging. However, as ActionAid comments, local staff and village volunteers who are living and working in the communities are vital for understanding the local context

and to reducing the risk of externally imposed, inappropriate interventions.[3] The LRCSR found that communities were willing to participate in the implementation of village wise development activities such as, road renovation, rebuilding schools and clinics, and that they also attended mass community meetings called by the committees. However, the LRCSR found that although the villagers attended the meetings, participation in decision-making was said to be minimal, that only committee members made decisions and villagers were usually just informed of the decisions made.[4]

However, in spite of this, the relief effort has expanded the number of people, particularly young people, working both formally and voluntarily within the humanitarian sector. Participatory engagement with affected communities has created the potential to create decision-making structures that incorporate more people from the community who are affected by such decisions. Through using participatory and transparent methods, communities can identify the most vulnerable members who are in greatest need of assistance. This can also reduce the likelihood of resentment and conflict. Community participation is particularly important in the

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1 *IEG Working Paper (2008) Disaster Risk Management: Taking Lessons from Evaluation*

2 *The Sphere Project - Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, p.28*

3 *ActionAid Myanmar (2009) Believing in Community Capacity: A reflection on the response to Cyclone Nargis, p.6*

4 *LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.4*

BOX 24: The role of women in community based groups

The cyclone caused a higher number of women fatalities than men leading to the creation of more single men headed households. The PONJA report of July 2008 highlighted that 61% of those who died were female, with the number much higher in some villages. The disproportionate number of female victims was especially evident in the key productive and reproductive age group of 18-60. The report also highlighted that the demographic change had significant impacts on roles and relationships between different genders.

Initially, women did not tend to play a major role in managing and distributing aid. The members of village emergency committees were usually men. Where women did participate, it was usually in a supporting rather than decision-making role. The LRCSR found that in the villages under study, women tended to have traditional roles and identities, although this did not ultimately bar them from participating in the committees. Villages, including women themselves, generally thought of the role of women in community affairs to be in the background. Women viewed themselves as not able to do much for their villages, and unable to spare as time as men.

Under the influence of NGOs, women joined committees, although often with little understanding of why they were asked to join. In NGO-initiated committees, the composition of committees was ofern set out beforehand, with an equal number of male and female in some committees. NGOs often required that committee roles be distributed evenly across gender, so that for example where the leader was a man, the second leader had to be a women.

identification of these most vulnerable beneficiaries and formulating and coordinating the distribution of relief items.

In some instances, aid providers reported that trained volunteers from local communities were the most essential resource in overcoming the challenge of effective community participation in the midst of the urgency and scale of the disaster. Experience has demonstrated that offering financial support and building appropriate capacity, while giving communities clear rules and information, allows them to decide their own priorities and address their own needs.

It is also evident that investing in youth to build their capacity to facilitate development in communities is not only an effective development approach in ordinary times but can also be transferred and utilised in the emergency response, particularly in a context where access for international staff or external actors is difficult. It has been found that if young people are given the opportunity to learn and to do something good for their community they will grasp it with two hands as outlined below.[5]

Similarly, other organisations have highlighted the benefits of hiring field level staff from the areas where the projects are implemented. This makes it easier for them to pay attention to local customs and culture of the beneficiary communities. Projects can make use of local capacities and local knowledge and facilitate high beneficiary participation. On this page two examples of the approaches of aid agencies to ensuring that village CBGs participating fully in relief activities.

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5 ActionAid Myanmar (2009) Believing in Community Capacity: A reflection on the response to Cyclone Nargis, p.6

KEY FINDINGS - PARTICIPATION

- Following the cyclone, emotional distress, the breakdown of coping mechanisms and the chaotic nature of the changing situation made community participation particularly challenging.
- Communities were willing to participate in the implementation of village development activities such as, road renovation, rebuilding schools and clinics.
- The relief effort has expanded the number of people, particularly young people, working both formally and voluntarily within the humanitarian sector.
- Trained volunteers from the local communities have been identified as an essential resource in overcoming the challenge of effective community participation in the midst of the urgency and scale of the disaster.
- Field level staffs were recruited from the area where the projects are implemented were found to be more aware of local customs and culture of the beneficiary communities

BOX 25: UNDP - Particpatory Decision-Making & Gender Equality

Early recovery committees (ERCs) follow the principle of participatory decision-making and consider the views of all concerned parties and allow everyone to present their opinions before arriving at a decision. It is not always possible to take decisions that satisfy everyone. But a committee that believes in participation will ensure that everyone is consulted and those whose opinions did not match the final decision are given an opportunity to air their concerns.

The UNDP Eight Point Agenda for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery guides activities within this area. UNDP particularly focuses on supporting the inclusion of gender equality in early recovery frameworks and programmes by collecting gender disaggregated data for priority countries and developing gender-sensitive assessment tools.

BOX 26: Kyee Pin Su Village Development Committee (Loka Ahlinn)

Before Cyclone Nargis, the government had established a committee in the village for looking after the community as a whole. However, after the cyclone, with the support of Loka Ahlinn, the village called mass meeting and established a new Village Development Committee (VDC) to help with relief distribution. All the members of the VDC were elected during a mass meeting.

The VDC then formed various sub committees that were responsible for differ rent sectors such as livestock, education and health. The VDC meets on an impromptu basis when there are issues and discuss activities relevant to each of the sectors. Loka Ahlinn visits the village regularly (twice a month) and discusses activities with the committee. These meetings also as a method through which members of the village can raise concerns with them publically.

4.2 Accountability - Consultation & Complaints

Consultation

Numerous studies, such as the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) report, have identified one of the most common mistakes in post-disaster planning as the lack of consultation with the affected communities.[1] In the urgency of the emergency response humanitarian agencies may feel they do not have time to consult communities, and that people everywhere have the same basic needs. If aid is seen as charity and not justice then an attitude of 'experts knowing better' can prevail and over-ride local knowledge and priorities. If the community is regarded as passive recipients and not active participants in the response then the establishment of a mechanism by which communities can hold agencies accountable for the aid they are receiving is often not prioritised.[2]

In spite of this research, the 'Reflections Workshop' on relationships between UN/INGO and LNGOs raised the issue that local NGOs were frequently not involved in decisions that affected them and that they were often told what to do or not to do and not consulted. It was felt that 'programmes designed without consultation (INGO/UN to local NGO and local NGO/INGO/UN and communities) could be inappropriate and inflexible and may not meet people's needs and a changing situation on the ground.[3]

To avoid repeating this mistake in Myanmar, the Real Time Evaluation (RTE) argued that improvements in the quality and frequency of consultation were required during the transition stage. Based on interviews with international agencies and in communities along with reviews of agency assessments, it argued that outreach to national organisations and affected communities needed to be further strengthened.[4]

Reviews of agency reports as well as interviews with agency staff and communities highlight some significant efforts to consult communities regarding their needs and priorities (e.g. the PONJA and FAO household surveys). However, while there have been consultations at the village level, communication flows tend to be one-way (upwards), with little or

no feedback to communities. The RTE found there was little evidence during focus group discussions with communities that they were aware of what agencies were planning to do with the information they had collected from assessments or indeed which organisations were planning longer-term engagements.[5]

In villages reviewed in the LRCSR it appeared that committees were more concerned with pleasing or fulfilling the directives of donor agencies rather than with being accountable towards the beneficiaries or their communities. Many committees placed a priority on fulfilling the goals of their donors in the belief that this would ensure continued funding. Information appeared to be shared mainly within committees and not outside of them. Generally, a few leading members decided what information was to be told to the wider community. Every household in the community would be invited to a meeting and the villagers would be informed of the

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5 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.15

BOX 27: Ma Gyi Chaung Village Recovery and Development Committee (Paung Ku)

The committee called regular village meetings at the monastery where one representative from each household attended. These meetings provided an opportunity for the community members to understand the role of the committee and the process through which it operated. For example, when prices went up, the committee implemented a lottery system to allocate the reduced amount of assistance. Paung Ku staff met with communities at least once a month and also provided Integrated Recovery Planning (IRP) training to eight members of the village committee.

Prior to the training, Paung Ku staff discussed what types of training would be useful with people from the village. The main areas identified were fisheries, income generation schemes and vegetable cultivation. The training was helpful not only in providing support but also in identifying some of the weaknesses of the committees such as decision making, managing human resources, leadership and management.

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1 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.6

2 ActionAid Myanmar (2009) Believing in Community Capacity: A reflection on the response to Cyclone Nargis, p.7

3 U Ngwe Thein (2009): Myanmar NGOs' partnership experience with UN agencies and INGOs after Nargis, p.21

4 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.6

committee's activities and decisions. At least one member of a family was supposed to attend these meetings. Since villagers were often not told ahead of time what was going to be discussed, many households sent non-decision making members. The research team observed that most committees did not share detailed information with their host communities, suggesting that committees did not fully understand the importance of this process.[6]

The amount of information shared about aid varied between villages. In the majority of villages visited by the PONSIM, meetings were held to share information about aid projects, but often the information provided was vague and meeting minutes were infrequently taken. While some villages had kept some records on aid distributed, no village had follow-up meetings to discuss progress and lessons learned.[7] At the suggestion of a number of agencies, transparency boards were used by a number of CBGs illustrating the types of assistance that had been provided and to whom.

Complaints

The PONSIM found that communities did not know of any project-related complaints mechanisms in any village that they visited. This suggests that communities options for complaining if assistance was deemed to be inequitable or ineffective were limited. Villagers experienced some cases of unfair aid distribution. Some people received more aid than others did, and some aid was ineffective because of its lack of suitability to the local context.[8] However, across almost all villages reviewed, villagers either did not complain to the authorities or did not know how to voice their complaints. The LRCSR found that the committee and the community were not aware of their rights to complain. They thought that they should not complain because they might seem ungrateful toward the funding agency or invite retaliation from the funding agency or donor.[9]

6 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.7

7 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.18

8 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.18

9 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.7

There were some exceptions to this where community members complained about aid targeting and distribution with mixed results. These cases show that systems of checks and balances do exist within some communities to ensure that aid is delivered transparently. Although in some cases complaints were not effective, in others they led to changes being made, such as altering who controlled aid distribution.[10]

Despite the apparent lack of complaints procedures in villages evaluated, a number of agencies claimed to provide beneficiaries with appropriate tools to communicate their ideas, suggestions and complaints about programmes implemented in their respective villages. However, overall research showed that the lack of effective complaints systems reduced the effectiveness of aid and that villages often found it particularly difficult to complain to aid providers outside of the village.

10 TCG (November 2008) Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring, p.18

BOX 28: ActionAid - Village Youth Volunteers

A key element of ActionAid 's approach is creating and building the capacity of local NGOs, village youth volunteers, village women volunteers and group leaders in facilitation and mobilisation, as well as key aspects of livelihood planning, feasibility assessment and management, management of groups and savings. In collaboration with ActionAid, partners developed the criteria to identify dynamic village youth volunteers (VYV) - one from each of the selected villages. Equal numbers of women and men were preferred. ActionAid provided two rounds of training to the village youth volunteers on: (i) First round training (2 weeks): role of volunteer, understanding poverty, vulnerability, facilitation skills, community mobilisation, PRA/PVA, identification of vulnerable families, group formation. (ii) Second round training (1 week): Livelihood: family recovery plans, analysis/feasibility of livelihoods, savings, disbursement process for grants; DRR action plans.

KEY FINDINGS - CONSULTATION & COMPLAINTS

- As a result of the large number of actors involved in the relief effort, the degree of consultation has varied, ranging from minimal levels of consultation at one extreme to an explicit transfer of decision-making at the other. The array of mechanisms used has led to some confusion amongst aid recipients.
- In some cases, there has been little or no communication or coordination between NGOs before they came to the villages and set up their projects leading to confusion among the villagers. Committees seemed to be more concerned with upward-accountability towards the donor agencies rather than downward-accountability towards the beneficiaries or community.
- In general villagers have not been informed about eligibility criteria, they lack information about aid flows, which can raise perceptions of inequity, and there are no complaint mechanisms in place although there are some local checks and balances. More effective consultations with communities around vulnerability criteria and cultural context could have resulted in more efficient distributions.
- Villagers experienced some cases of unfair aid distribution. Some people received more aid than others did, and some aid was ineffective because of its lack of suitability to the local context. An absence of project-related complaints mechanisms was found across communities that had received external assistance in some cases to reduce the effectiveness of aid.
- Information provided about aid projects by CBGs was often vague and minutes were often not taken and meetings.

4.3 Accountability - Compentencies & Capacities

Competencies

Prior to Nargis, many INGOs and LNGOs were actively working to build capacities of communities through a multitude of means including workshops, trainings and exposure visits. Although focusing on leadership skills, the range of subjects was often broad including trauma healing; communication skills; disaster risk reduction and planning; civic education; gender awareness; peace building; development; community planning and participation and federalism. Cyclone Nargis presented an opportunity to capitalise on this training and infrastructure and put it into practice. People were not only motivated to assist but had the training to contribute to the relief effort and were keen to use it.

While the emergency response following Cyclone Nargis focused on the rapid distribution of supplies with little or no community participation, high levels of participation have been evident subsequently. The RTE highlighted that the response to Nargis has been predominantly a local one and that civil society could be strengthened through the hands-on experience gained by literally thousands of national volunteers and staff.[1] The response has also clearly demonstrated the ability of communities and local organisations in Myanmar to respond rapidly and flexibly to needs on the ground. With their experience of providing assistance following Nargis, there is now an unprecedented opportunity to support local organisations in a sustained manner and help to build a range of capacities to support the country's further development.[2]

The LRCRS found that good leadership and having members with experience working with larger organisations or NGOs had a positive impact on the overall abilities and competence of the committees. Out of all the committees studied, only a few had members that had the necessary qualifications and experiences to carry out projects without further training or guidance. For example, in a village where some of the women had had experience participating in an NGO-led community credit group, the committees knew how to find funding agencies.

These women also understood how to keep records. Even though all the committees in the study kept some kind of documentation of their projects, the research team found NGO-initiated committees to be better at systematic reporting and record-keeping.

Only a few committee members in the study had received any kind of formal training, which ranged from hygiene awareness, brick-making, and Disaster Risk Reduction, to project cycle management. Members themselves identified several areas in which they would like to increase their competencies, including how to form a committee systematically, basic book-keeping, and communication strategies with the world outside the village.[3]

Capacity

As described above, the degree to which villagers have been involved in shaping the relief effort to date is the major reason for its success and achievements. With such high levels of involvement, it is crucial that the capacity building needs of community-based groups are assessed and that appropriate training and support are provided.

Building the capacities of local groups is an issue of empowerment and sustainability. This is particularly important in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis as many local groups are emerging and have a strong commitment to their own communities but have limited capacity. While capacity building on how to work effectively in the community is needed, organisational capacity is also essential to keep the groups connected and able to respond to the requirements set by international standards.[4]

3 LRC (August 2009) Study Report on Committees, p.7

4 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p50

1 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.23

2 UNDP (2008) Output 3 of the Integrated Early Recovery Programme: Capacity Development, p.1

Building capacity at the village or household level includes drawing on the capacity of INGOs, LNGOs and UN agencies to deliver programmes, and as such is partially dependent on their capacity to increase their activities as increased funding is secured.[5] Capacity building, targeting social recovery at the community level, is key to the achievement of recovery in this area. Social recovery has been promoted through working to revitalise and empower local communities by encouraging and supporting civil society organisations – including national NGOs, community-based organisations, women's groups and other self-help groups – and strengthening the links between these groups and local authorities.[6]

Recognising that in many cases, existing community-based groups have led the recovery effort so far, a concerted effort is needed to support these existing structures, and/or create a conducive environment for new community-based groups to emerge as needed. A number of organisations interviewed by the CPCS expressed the view that external organisations should place greater trust in local people to do the work. They identified that more could be done to support and strengthen local capacities in programme cycle management and especially in reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

For these mechanisms to work, it was made clear that participation in developing frameworks, and co-operation between external and local organisations, and community people was essential.[7] The RTE team also observed many potential opportunities that would benefit local agencies (including private sector), national staff and communities, notably in operational planning, aid delivery and DRR.[8] Please find on this page an example of a training programmes conducted by UNDP.

5 TCG (December 2008), Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, p. 8

6 TCG (December 2008), Post-Nargis Recovery & Preparedness Plan, Annex 18 – Early Recovery, p.167

7 CPCS (2009) CPCS (2009) Listening to Voices from Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis, p46

8 IASC (December 2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis, p.23

BOX 29: UNDP - The Capacity Building Programme

The purpose of the Capacity Building Programme is to enable the members of the village level Early Recovery Committees to carry out the functions of the Committee in an effective, equitable, inclusive, transparent and accountable manner. The proposed Capacity Building programme for the ERCs is based on a Capacity Building Triad of Skills and Knowledge, Attitudes and Motivation and Creating an Enabling Environment.

- Skills and Knowledge – to carry out administrative and management tasks. In most cases, the requisite skills and knowledge can be created through training programmes
- Attitude and Motivation – to practice values of equity, fairness, transparency and accountability. These are not amenable to training situations, but can be brought about through continued support by project staff and by instituting meaningful monitoring mechanisms
- Enabling Environment – for the committees to function effectively and use the capacities that they have gained. A large number of the environment factors are beyond the control of the project/UNDP or even the villagers themselves, but the way in which project-village interactions are set up will help in creating a positive environment.

Creating an enabling environment for the ERC to function in is an ongoing process. So are actions to improve the motivation of the individuals in the Committees and develop in them a positive attitude towards their roles and responsibilities. For the CB programme to be effective and successful, all the three elements will need to be put in place.

KEY FINDINGS - COMPETENCIES & CAPACITY

- The response to Cyclone Nargis has clearly demonstrated the ability of communities and local organisations in Myanmar to respond rapidly and flexibly to needs on the ground.
- Committee's leadership and experience of working with organisations and presence of an assigned NGO volunteer appeared to have a positive impact on the competency of the members.
- Capacity limitations are a major constraint to the development of CBGs. Building the capacities of local groups is an issue of empowerment and sustainability. Although CBGs have the capacity to work in groups, only a few members have the capacity for initiation and decision-making.
- More international support is required for capacity building and of local partners. More could be done to support and strengthen local capacities in program cycle management and especially in reporting, monitoring and evaluation.
- Many organisations in Myanmar had conducted training with different groups in the community. Nargis has allowed these groups to undertake learning at the field level, and use this knowledge to further their capacity and operations into the future.
- There is little or no long-term planning for the continuity and future of CBGs. It has been recommended that NGOs that facilitate the founding of committees should provide them with training and information on how to function long-term, for example, by teaching them how to do fund-raising or by providing capacity-development training.

5

Best Practice

SECTION FIVE

5.1 Best practice guidelines

The post-Nargis environment has provided an opportunity for LNGOs and INGOs to work collaboratively with CBGs in a participatory and inclusive manner. More than a year after the cyclone, there are still opportunities for humanitarian organisations to develop their understanding of communities and work more effectively with them. It is hoped that summarising some of the approaches of different agencies and existing research in the area will help practitioners understand the particular complexities of working with CBGs and provide some examples of successful relationships that have developed in communities in the Delta.

As has already been highlighted, there are a number of diverse approaches to working with CBGs and it is not possible or desirable to recommend a uniform approach for best practice. However, based on the experience of aid agencies working in the Delta, there are some key findings that help to inform some basic guiding principles and minimum standards for working with CBGs. Outlined below are some guiding principles for LNGOs/INGOs to consider when working with CBGs, focusing specifically on the themes of approach, activities and accountability. These guiding principles to best practice should be considered throughout the needs assessment, planning, programming, and evaluation stages of the recovery implementation process.

Approaches

Formation

The emergency response has given external humanitarian agencies the opportunity to develop partnerships with communities in ways previously not possible. LNGOs/INGOs should seek to support existing community groups that have already demonstrated their commitment and have credibility in the community.   Creating multiple community groups have in some cases created confusion and conflict in villages and external agencies should avoid forming new groups to undertake projects unless absolutely necessary. Where existing organisations do not exist, or are inappropriate for external support, LNGOs/INGOs should focus on mobilising communities to develop their own community based groups.   Agencies promoting the establishment of village-level groups need to ensure that these are mutually supportive with representative membership and are provided with appropriate capacity building.

Structure

LNGOs/INGOs should ensure that CBGs include a wide range of representatives and are not dominated by a few power holders. They should promote equality and develop local capacities to prevent discrimination of any kind such us race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status.   Leadership plays a crucial role in not only the formation but also in active functioning of village committees and LNGOs/INGOs should help facilitate this within CBGs.

There should be a focus on strengthening women's' networks to encourage and facilitate their involvement in decision-making processes, including project management guidance, sector-specific technical training, and advice and support on developing accountable structures.   Roles and responsibilities should be well defined and CBGs should be assisted in developing the power and capacity to effectively manage community projects.

Relationships

External agencies should promote the view that CBGs, LNGOs, INGO and the UN are equals and each have an invaluable contribution to make to the relief, recovery and development efforts.   Synergies among different actors should be maximised through efficient coordination of stakeholders in the recovery process. Information should be shared and integration promoted to avoid duplication and gaps, and optimize the resources available for sustainable recovery.

CBGs should be encouraged and assisted in developing good relationships with the existing authorities and other people who have power in the community such as religious leaders. Guidance should be provided to develop capacities for building constructive and

inclusive working relationships between CBGs and government institutions. Different CBGs in the same village should be encouraged to have regular coordination meetings and information sharing sessions. Partners should reflect on their relationships on a regular basis and ensure there is enough space for open dialogue and feedback.

Activities

Initial assessments

CBGs should work with LNGOs/INGOs to conduct effective assessments of need and capacity to determine objectives and priorities for recovery. These needs assessments should be shared with the local communities. In addition, beneficiaries in the affected communities should also participate in conceiving, planning and implementing recovery programmes and should support them in undertaking these activities. Where possible, external agencies should undertake focus group discussions in order to assess needs of different groups independently.

Response

The response of humanitarian agencies should protect the humanitarian interests of the affected population while respecting local culture and customs. It should provide an opportunity for communities to build capacity rather than creating aid dependency. External agencies should recognise that CBGs can be particularly effective in providing support during the recovery period, especially in the areas of livelihood support, disaster risk reduction and psychosocial support.

The majority of programmes in the livelihood area should be community-based. CBGs should be involved in involved in risk

reduction and conflict prevention measures by ensuring that key decisions are based on risk assessment. Where possible, community members should be supported by external agencies in providing psychosocial support. Villagers have a good understanding of the local culture and people as well as being acquainted with the situation in the Delta area and in many cases in a better position to provide emotional support than outsiders.

Targeting

External agencies should ensure that they involve CBGs in beneficiary identification and aid distribution. A participatory and transparent selection process empowers villagers, ensures communities are engaged and aware of the programme selection criteria and minimises potential tension and conflict. Where villagers have a say in aid distribution they are more likely to accept some groups receiving more than others, even when they 'lose out' themselves. LNGOs/INGOs should try to minimise the number of targeting mechanisms used as this can make it more difficult to assess accurately what aid has already been provided to whom. CBGs should ensure that aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need and not biased towards people with links to those in positions of power in communities. LNGOs/INGOs and CBGs should be clear about the level of aid committed as credibility and trust can be harmed when promises of assistance are unfulfilled.

Accountability

Participation

LNGOs/INGOs should maximise use of local initiatives, resources and capacities. They should base planning and execution on local knowledge, skills, materials and methods, taking into account the need for affordable solutions. CBGs should be involved in decision-making throughout the project cycle, including assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and feedback. Both LNGOs/INGOs and CBGs should use and promote participatory practices to identify needs, build capacities for empowering communities and create the foundations of a sustained, free, active and meaningful participation throughout all phases of the recovery process. CBGs should be representative of many stakeholder groups especially the vulnerable in the community including youth, elderly, women, different religious groups, and different livelihood

groups. Methods should be developed and implemented to clarify the roles of women, to improve their ability to take on responsibility, and to ensure male CBG members and communities in general recognise the value of women's participation. CBGs should also implement plans to have all members understand exactly what their individual roles and responsibilities are. Where possible, LNGOs/INGOs should consider recruiting field level staff from the area where the projects are being implemented owing to their awareness of local customs and culture.

Consultation and Complaints

External agencies should consult communities on a regular and continuous basis throughout the project lifecycle and ensure their approach is trusted, transparent and equitable. Prior to working in a community, they should communicate with any pre-existing groups or LNGOs/INGOs that are already working in that village. External agencies should work transparently with all stakeholders involved and ensure that any village-based groups are supported. They should listen to the views of CBGs and give affected communities a real opportunity to develop and oversee their own recovery plans.

A coordinated and coherent approach to working in communities should be adopted including transparent information sharing to avoid overlap and fill gaps. CBGs and communities should be informed about eligibility criteria and made aware of the long-term plans of external agencies. CBGs should be provided with training to monitor, evaluate and learn through appropriate participatory techniques and mechanisms that allow timely identification of corrective measures, and capture the experiences and voices of the target population. CBGs should ensure they consider downward accountability to beneficiaries and their community as well as upward accountability to donors.

External agencies should consult CBGs, intended beneficiaries and the host community about appropriate ways to handle complaints. Community feedback mechanisms should be implemented in conjunction with CBGs that allow communities to voice their concerns, and link them with those organisations responsible for responding to complaints. LNGOs/INGOs and CBGS should ensure that intended beneficiaries, affected communities, and their own members understand the complaints-handling procedures.

Competencies and Capacities

The response to Cyclone Nargis has clearly demonstrated the ability of communities and CBGs in Myanmar to respond rapidly and flexibly to needs on the ground. However, although communities have the capacity to work in groups, NGOs should be aware that in some cases members have a limited capacity for initiation and decision-making.

LNGOs/INGOs should assess the capacity and representativeness of existing community-based organisations and provide support for them as required. This should involve building the capacity of CBGs at every stage of the relief and recovery effort (especially in reporting, monitoring and evaluation) with a focus on reducing vulnerability to future disasters. Building the capacities of local groups should be seen an issue of empowerment and sustainability.

LNGOs/INGOs should build the capacity of CBGs to strengthen accountability systems so that the population can hold governments and local authorities to account in the implementation of recovery plans and programmes as well as find redress if they have a grievance or a legitimate claim unfulfilled. NGOs should work with CBGs to help them plan for the continuity and future and provide training and information on how to function in the long-term, for example, by teaching them how to do fund-raising or by providing capacity-development training. As capacity of local communities increases they should be supported in scaling up their activities.

5.2 Conclusions

This review has highlighted the diversity of CBGs that have been involved in providing relief in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta since the impact of Cyclone Nargis. It has illustrated some of the similarities and differences in the ways that humanitarian actors have responded to working with communities and CBGs following the cyclone and it has also outlined some key points for LNGOs and INGOs to consider when working with communities and CBGs in the future.

As discussed in the introduction, each setting is unique, and it is not possible or appropriate to recommend a uniform approach to working with CBGs. The intention of this review has therefore not been to identify a specific model, but rather to share approaches adopted by a number of different agencies with the view of creating better practice. In many ways, the review has highlighted that there is not a prescriptive way of working with CBGs, but rather there are many tensions which communities, CBGs, LNGOs and INGOs have to reconcile together in order to provide assistance in a participatory and effective manner. For example, whether to us existing structures versus representative structures; targeting the poor versus weakening community solidarity; working with groups with good relations with authorities versus groups not dominated by power holders.

The growth in support for local communities and CBGs in Myanmar since Cyclone Nargis has been unprecedented. Much ground has been covered and communities and humanitarian actors have learnt many lessons through their experiences of providing support. There is now is a great opportunity to build on this solid foundation both in terms of emergency support and recovery, but also longer term development work in Myanmar. It is hoped that this review will encourage humanitarian actors, both inside and outside of Myanmar, to critically reflect on their ways to working with communities and CBGs, and to consider the recommendations of best practice in terms of approaches, activities and accountability.

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BOXES

* Villages names have been replaced by ficticious names to protect the identities of the villagers involved.

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The post Nargis period has seen a significant emergence of **Community Based Groups (CBGs)** both which have sprung spontaneously and those facilitated by various organisations. After the initial relief phase many of these CBGs are being promoted to take up a larger role in designing and implementing recovery activities.

In order to learn from the various approaches of agencies, a stakeholder meeting on good practice in Community-Driven Recovery met in Feburary 2009 with the objective of implementing a strategy to ensure that agency approaches when engaging with communities for 'community-driven recovery' were based on good practice. From this meeting the following outputs were agreed:

- Increased awareness of best practice from communities and agencies' perspective on how to work with and support communities for community-driven recovery.
- Increased knowledge of various approaches for community organising and capacity building being utilised in Myanmar
- Improved coordination of agencies/committees at village level

In line with the above objective and outputs, this review was undertaken with the following aims:

- Help practitioners understand the particular complexities of working with CBGs, and appreciate the diverse range of approaches in planning and implementing activities through them.
- Raise awareness of some of the problems associated with working with communities and CBGs.
- Establish some basic guiding principles and minimum standards for working with CBGs.

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