



MYANMAR

International cooperation

In response to the recent political, economic and social changes in Myanmar, the Swiss Federal Council has decided to relax sanctions and to open an embassy in that country. The current Humanitarian Aid programme is to be strengthened with a development programme to support the transition to democracy, consolidate peace and reduce poverty. Funding will gradually increase to CHF 30 million per year.

1. Justifiable and necessary aid

Myanmar has 60 million inhabitants. With a per capita GDP of USD 1300, it is in a similar position to Nepal and Rwanda. The 2011 Human Development Index ranks it 149th (out of 187 countries) behind all its neighbours (Bangladesh 146th, Cambodia 139th and Thailand 103rd), and a quarter of the population is living below the poverty line. Although the country is potentially rich (in gas, precious stones and timber), only a small élite linked to the old junta is benefiting from these resources. The sanctions against Myanmar have meant that the level of development aid there is by far the lowest of any of the least developed countries (at USD 7 per person). The rapid changes that have taken place in recent months in Myanmar provide unprecedented opportunities for Switzerland. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) can help consolidate the restoration of peace by providing tangible benefits to vulnerable sectors of the population and can also help support the opening up and democratisation of the country. The development, political and peace components complement one another, and Switzerland wishes to make a significant contribution in line with the needs of local people.

2. Real prospects for SDC in Myanmar, both now and in future

The four priority thematic areas for international cooperation with Myanmar are the following: **a) Employment and Vocational Skills Development, b) Health, access to social services and local governance, c) Agriculture and food security, d) Promotion of peace, human rights and protection.** Gender equality, conflict sensitive programme management and governance are going to be at the heart of the activities making up Switzerland's future strategy in Myanmar (2013-2017). The total budget is going to be approximately CHF 30 million per year for the activities of SDC (Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation) and the FDFA's Human Security division.

- a) The unemployment rate among young people is an estimated 70%. Job creation is a priority. With the greater freedom of speech that has now been granted, there is a high risk of young people giving vent to their frustrations and revolting, as happened in the 'Arab spring'. On the subject of **Employment and Vocational Skills Development**, the intention is to cooperate closely with local authorities and to bring greater dynamism to local job markets, working together with Burmese NGOs and the private sector. Creating jobs and income is absolutely vital for social stability. The knowledge and experience of Humanitarian Aid in Myanmar with regard to building schools could be put to use to improve or construct professional training centres, particularly in the southeast of the country. Supporting training in this region would strengthen outcomes of the ongoing peace negotiations and give refugees (those displaced internally or exiled in Thailand) prospects of returning home and settling down.

- b) Access to **health and social services** for local populations, particularly ethnic minorities, is to be reinforced and improved (infrastructure and care quality). SDC's Humanitarian Aid will continue to deploy all its expertise to improve access to community infrastructure: water supply, small-scale irrigation, schools, health centres and so on. In so doing, SDC will support **citizen participation** at local level with a view to better responding to people's needs (in terms of access to and management of public services) and to making the State more accountable towards its citizens (checks and balances). Myanmar is also very interested in Switzerland's experiences as regards linguistic diversity, minorities and federalism.
- c) In the field of **agriculture and food security**, strengthening farmers' production capacity and marketing their products are priority tasks with a view to reducing the rural poverty that affects the majority of the population. Particular emphasis is to be placed on water and food production (water for food), following on from the work currently being done with the multi-donor LIFT fund (Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund), to which SDC contributes. SDC's expertise in this field in this region of the world (for instance in rice production, agricultural training and extension work in Laos as well as strengthening value added chains in farming) is an asset.
- d) Peace, an essential precondition for reducing poverty and boosting development: some 40% of Myanmar's population have suffered from inter-ethnic conflicts that have lasted for decades. It is indispensable to enable those people who have been displaced or have fled to return and settle down as soon as a cease-fire is observed and peace restored (rapid dividends of peace). The Swiss programme (i.e. the FDFA's Human Security division and the SDC's Humanitarian Aid) is therefore going to contribute to this directly through activities to **promote peace, human rights and the protection of the local populations**.

3. Switzerland's commitment in Myanmar up to the present

Switzerland has been involved in Myanmar (including refugee camps located in Thailand) since 1994, primarily through SDC's Humanitarian Aid. In 2001, SDC's Humanitarian Aid declared it a priority region and seconded a regional humanitarian coordinator to take charge of the humanitarian activities in Thailand and Myanmar. In connection with the support provided to the victims of the disaster caused by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, a programme office was set up in Yangon the following year.

In the framework of the **current programme**, SDC is actively involved in two fields with the **following objectives**:

- Improving access to local **community infrastructures and quality services** for the vulnerable communities living in the Irrawaddy Delta (hit by Cyclone Nargis) in the east of Myanmar as well as the camps for refugees from Myanmar in Thailand (and their surroundings).

In the regions of the Irrawaddy Delta affected by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Switzerland has entered into a commitment to rebuild schools which are also suitable for use as shelters in the event of disasters. Today, these schools provide 145 classrooms for a total of more than 7250 pupils and shelter for approximately 40 000 people. The local communities are being trained to manage the schools/shelters in a sustainable way and improve their preparedness for potential/future catastrophes.

In the south-east of Myanmar, which has been marked for decades by internal armed conflicts, human-rights violations and large numbers of displaced persons and refugees, Switzerland is active to improve living conditions and better access for the people living there to community infrastructures: building schools, health centres and drinking-water supply systems in particular as well as training the local population in managing these in-

frastructures in a sustainable way. Through these direct actions, Switzerland is aiming to promote improved humanitarian access to the vulnerable populations in the ceasefire zones and to contribute to adequate living conditions for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Switzerland has also managed to become involved in Kayah, one of the poorest and most vulnerable provinces in the whole of the country, with two water and sanitation projects: drinking-water supply in combination with the construction and remediation of sewers, the construction of sanitary facilities in the schools and health centres and sensitisation of the population to hygienic habits. These two projects are being implemented by Action contre la Faim and Care, whose partners are local non-governmental organisations. Switzerland's involvement is thus contributing to the ongoing peace processes while also bringing immediate benefits to the people at large.

- Reinforcing **food security** and assuring a livelihood for displaced persons inside the country, the host communities, the former poppy growers in the east of Myanmar and the refugees in Thailand.

Children are suffering from malnutrition, and 32% or around 16 million of them are critically underweight. The average family spends approximately 70% of its income on food, which is a huge proportion. SDC is contributing to the *Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT)*, a fund set up in Myanmar in 2009 in response to the urgent need for aid and reconstruction following Cyclone Nargis and which has now realigned its priorities to focus on agricultural development.

Switzerland is also providing crucial support to vulnerable populations affected by seasonal uncertainties in food supplies and trapped in spiraling debt, by contributing to the World Food Programme (WFP).

For several years, Switzerland has also been actively involved in several areas that are critical for food security and livelihoods of vulnerable populations: drinking-water supplies (access to and management of water sources); alternative livelihoods for the former poppy growers in Kokang, Shan State, in taking up the production and marketing of tea; supplies of the basic necessities of life (food, shelter and fuel) for the Myanmar's refugees living in the camps in Thailand as well as improving the possibilities for them to earn a living.

By the same token, Switzerland is offering support in the form of emergency aid in the event of natural disasters (cyclones, floods and earthquakes), which are unfortunately frequent in Myanmar. Lastly, it is supporting the mission of a certain number of international organisations involved in Myanmar, notably the International Committee of the Red Cross (management of orthopaedic clinics, supply of water and sanitary facilities in prisons and assistance to prisoners' families), the UNHCR (improving the protection of refugees from Myanmar in the camps in Thailand) and UNICEF (demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers). Support for these activities is provided in the form of finance and by making experts available through the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

A new cooperation programme for the 2013-2017 period is currently being drawn up in close co-operation with Swiss and local NGOs, the government authorities and representatives of the ethnic minorities, in coordination with other donors active in Burma.

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