**RAKHINE FLOODS RESPONSE**

**LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS – Inter-agency consultation, 12-19 October 2015**

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| **Coordination** | | | |
| **Topic** | **Positive outcomes and key issues to address** | **Recommendations** | **Focal point** |
| **Inter-agency coordination** | * De facto sharing of coordination tasks between central Rakhine (OCHA) and northern Rakhine (UNHCR). UNHCR head of office in Maungdaw was blocked in Buthidaung due to landslides, thus allowing two coordination structures to be set up in the two towns in the first week of the crisis. * INGOs spontaneously initiated coordination in Mrauk-U and Minbya, allowing relatively smooth organization of assessments and sharing of responsibilities between them. OCHA supported coordination in Mrauk-U. * HC a.i. visited Rakhine in the week following the cyclone, HC about two weeks later. * Rakhine coordination tasked to follow situation in Paletwa township (Chin State) around 5-6 weeks after cyclone. | * HCT and ICCG at country level should agree on response coordination structure at national and state level at the onset of crisis, and communicate recommendations to field offices (as per ERRP APAs). Recommendations should include coverage of northern Rakhine and Paletwa township. * GCM and extended AHCT/ICCG should convene at the onset of a crisis. Initial 2-3 meetings should involve all agencies (with participation of national staffs). * OCHA should internally designate one focal point, to centralize information collection and dissemination. Absence of the focal point should be properly handled with contacts of alternate shared with all agencies. * All agencies should ensure that appropriate briefings/hand-overs are given to manager’s alternates. * Review and revise ERRP based on lessons learnt at national and state levels. * Announcement of transition between humanitarian and early recovery response needs to be coordinated with AHCT and ICCG at field level. Decision needs to be evidence-based. * Individual agencies to conduct internal lessons-learnt, and improve internal communication between Yangon and Sittwe levels. |  |
| * OCHA perceived as not sufficiently involved in operational coordination during a period of 7-10 days, due to absence of several key staffs. * Information sharing and coordination between coordination structures (ICCG, AHCT, GCM,…) perceived as inadequate by some agencies. * Lack of overall data analysis impacted negatively on overall coordination of response and rapid identification of high-priority areas throughout the State. * Crisis occurred at the juncture of summer holidays (end July/Beg. August), and on the eve of a 3 days weekend in Myanmar. Most agencies had key staffs (managers, assessment specialists, etc) on leave during the first days/weeks of the crisis. * Perceived lack of written communication on key developments from OCHA. * No formal agreement between OCHA and UNHCR on coordination responsibilities in northern Rakhine. Limited communication between the two offices after the crisis. * No clear division of tasks and responsibilities between humanitarian and early recovery coordination structures. * Immediate announcement of transition from humanitarian response to early recovery (EOC meeting, 05/08) not understood/agreed on by actors on the ground. Was not followed by clear instructions on how coordination should be organized. * Perceived lack of leadership in the coordination of early recovery interventions. |
| **Inter-clusters coordination** | * First emergency ICCG called during cyclone (30/07), flood response occupied most of ICCG meetings agendas in the following two months. * Some clusters reacted very early, before and immediately after cyclone. | * Activation of cluster system should be automatic at the onset of emergency, at least until HCT/ICCG at national level agree on coordination structure (see first recommendation in previous section) * Improve communications between ICCG in Yangon and Sittwe. State level ICCG should feed into country-level meetings. * Ensure all sector/cluster leads and their alternates are properly trained on coordination tasks. * UNHCR, IOM and IFRC should agree on mechanisms to ensure continuity of NFI & shelter coordination at the onset of a crisis. * Stronger ICCG coordination needed, sector/cluster leads should follow ERRP guidelines. Higher level of involvement and accountability expected from sector/cluster leads. |  |
| * Several sectors/clusters were absent in the first week following the cyclone. Alternates were often not fully engaged on coordination. Some other sector/cluster leads remained poorly engaged in coordination duties in the following weeks. * No coordination of NFI and shelter flood response for more than a month, due to mandate issues. * Several sectors/clusters were late defining response strategies, priority areas and indicators that would allow targeting of most affected populations. * Very limited cluster presence outside of Sittwe. No cluster support to Mrauk-U coordination. * Perceived lack of communication/coordination between clusters/sectors. * Lack of overall analysis of impact of floods, reliable population data and mapping of most affected areas delayed or prevented appropriate targeting of needs for some sectors/clusters. * Some sector/cluster had to adapt to new context/needs and transition from coordination targeting only IDPs to flood response that involved a larger number of partners. |
| **Coordination with local authorities** | * Rapid and relatively efficient coordination with local authorities in most townships, started from the onset of the crisis to respond to needs in evacuation centers when agencies were already present. Continued in the months following. * Rapid and relatively efficient coordination with technical departments at state and township levels. * Positive contacts with state authorities, no major obstacle to delivery of assistance, no contentious issues developed during the response phase. * Several INGOs conducted assessments on the ground without having agreements to operate in Rakhine or in some specific townships (was this overlooked by authorities? Or deliberately ignored to allow increased response?). * RSG Minister of Transport engaged with agencies in the first days after the cyclone. Engagement remained however limited to his mandate and covered only shelter response and infrastructure in IDP camps. * Authorities offered international agencies to use military helicopters and Navy ships to transport assistance and staffs to affected areas. | * Coordination mechanisms at state level need to be clarified and agreed on before next crisis. Joint trainings/simulation exercises should increase adhesion to agreed mechanisms by state authorities. * OCHA Rakhine Coordinator (with two back-ups/alternates) should be focal point for communication and coordination of humanitarian response with State authorities. * EOC should convene much earlier. Union level authorities should be encouraged to ensure that state authorities are available to engage with international agencies and to set-up adequate and balanced coordination mechanisms at the onset of a crisis. * Clarify mechanisms that should allow coordination with military, either directly or through civilian authorities. * Clarify mechanisms to allow quick deployment of INGOs in townships where they are supposedly not allowed to operate. * One agency to take responsibility for translating government data and guidelines in English. |  |
| * No direct contacts were possible with State Chief Minister and Security Minister in the first 10 days, despite numerous attempts to engage with them to coordinate flood response out of IDP sites. * Limited engagement by Disaster Management Committee. State authorities’ engagement with humanitarian agencies seemed to be driven from Union level. First ECC occurred on 08/08 after visit of Myanmar President in Rakhine, meeting did not however turn out to be an effective coordination forum. First engagement by State authorities to attempt to promote balanced coordination occurred on 08/10 (after visit of Union Natala Minister) when State Secretary proposed to organize a joint-workshop to map flood response. * State authorities did not appear to be informed by township authorities of agencies’ involvement in township coordination and in operational response. * Frequent discrepancies between government data (damage assessment and affected population) obtained at township or State level from GAD or other departments. * Data and government guidelines in Burmese, not systematically translated and shared with agencies. * No effective communication with military authorities which were responsible for the delivery of a large part of the emergency response. Civilian authorities at state or township levels did not appear to be themselves fully aware of and have real time information on the army’s response. * Government response plans and implementation updates were only partially shared with humanitarian agencies. Lack of communication made humanitarian response more difficult to plan. * Some government-sector coordination mechanisms designed for IDP response were inadequate for flood response (ex.: Sittwe District Administrator leading CCCM/NFI coordination for IDP response, Shelter flood response taken over by Min. of Housing). * Humanitarian agencies generally did not use military assets to access flooded areas (due to lack of information or inability to engage with military command?). |  |
| **Coordination with civil society & communication with communities** | * Some agencies engaged with CBOs and other members of the civil society at the onset of the crisis. Provided emergency assistance and/or logistical support out of traditional programming. * CBOs started spontaneous meetings to exchange on flood response, invited international agencies to attend. * No major complaint on international agencies’ response recorded from civil society. Civil society in Sittwe and at Township level appears relatively satisfied with agencies’ overall response. * Response appears to have globally led to wider acceptance by Rakhine community. * Emergency radio messaging organized by health and WASH partners in the first 10 days of the crisis. | * AHCT to discuss ways to reinforce engagement with CBOs, through OCHA and other agencies/regular coordination mechanisms. OCHA needs to act as focal point for communication with CBOs during emergencies. Individual agencies need to appoint staffs internally to act as CBO focal points/liaison officers. Engagement should cover coordination issues, information on response, feedbacks on coordination meetings, technical standards, etc… * OCHA to share CBO information with other international agencies. * Put together adequate messages on international response to floods, define and implement dissemination strategy. * OCHA to compile contact data obtained for village tract administrators, support groups, etc… * OCHA to formalize SOPs to broadcast emergency messages on local radios and other mass medias. SOPs to be shared with ICCGs and all agencies. |  |
| * OCHA’s data on CBOs has not been shared with other agencies. * Limited to no contacts with Muslim support groups operating from Yangon, which could have provided information on humanitarian situation in villages that were not quickly accessed by agencies. * No ready-to-use SOPs for accessing radio network for emergency messaging. |
| **Funding** | * CERF rapidly mobilized, funds transferred to UN agencies in a timeframe that would in theory allow quick response. * OFDA allowed partner agencies to use part of existing funds (allocated to IDP response) to be immediately used for flood response. Re-allocation mechanisms were relatively flexible. * Some agencies provided funds (a few hundred dollars max.) to CBOs out of formal funding mechanisms, to allow quick deployment of assistance. | * Review/revise ERF allocation procedures to allow the fund to be used to respond to emergency humanitarian needs. * UN agencies (as donors) should clarify flexibility of existing agreements (including of ERF) once ERP is activated. * All donors to keep clause in agreements for emergency funding flexibility (i.e. 20% threshold increased to … % when ERP is activated). * Funds allocated for IDP response and directed to flood response should be replaced ASAP if impact on services provided in IDP camps is expected. |  |
|  | * ERF projects not approved rapidly enough. Funds not yet received by agencies. Activities proposed in first ERF projects (mostly WASH, ponds cleaning) became de facto irrelevant about five weeks after cyclone, forcing agencies to change focus and rewrite proposals. ERF emergency funding will come online when community recovery is already taking place. |
| **Early warning & preparedness** | * First reports on isolated flooding incidents received a few days before cyclone (27/07). OCHA started monitoring and recording incidents at that date. * Regular weather update shared with international agencies from Yangon. * OCHA in Sittwe acted on information obtained indirectly from the Bengladesh meteorological department, and from various reports obtained from ground sources. | * Review alert protocols from Yangon to State level, to allow effective alert of agencies on the ground (general weather updates may be difficult to interpret, and should be complemented with informed comments in case a depression as a high chance of turning into a cyclone). * OCHA Sittwe to ensure that all alerts are shared with agencies on the ground. |  |
|  | * No clear alert about impending cyclone received from UN national level. * Information on classification of tropical depression to cyclonic storm emanated from Bengladesh meteorological department (obtained through Myanmar medias). No confirmation received from Myanmar meteorological department. * Agencies started getting mobilized for response after cyclone (29-30/07). Key resources (staff, logistics, supplies) were not deployed in the field before the cyclone and remained blocked in Sittwe for around four days due to logistical constraints. * Population was apparently not well informed about impending floods. In some cases did not use existing cyclone shelters. |

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| **Assessments** | | | |
| **Topic** | **Positive outcomes and key issues to address** | **Recommendations** | **Focal point** |
| **Assessments coordination** | * Assessments or field visits conducted in more than 500 villages in Rakhine State, despite limited agencies presence in rural areas in central Rakhine prior to floods. * Assessment mapping initiated by OCHA in the first days of the crisis. Mapping used to identify areas that remained to be covered and prevent agencies overlapping and wasting resources. * Government conducted quick impact assessment by contacting village tract administrators. Government network theoretically allows fast and exhaustive collection of data. * Some sectors organized joint assessments with government counter-parts. | * One assessment coordinator, possibly from OCHA, should be appointed at the beginning of the crisis (responsibility limited to emergency humanitarian assessments, connection with early recovery actors will be needed to ensure smooth transition and sharing of information). * All organizations should keep OCHA and sector/cluster leads informed in real time about assessment plans. * Initial rapid impact assessment methodology should aim at quickly identifying affected areas. Exhaustive rapid damage assessments could be conducted remotely (by phone, contacting VT administrators) and should be designed with government counterparts. Mapping of potential high-needs areas could be conducted very early based on data obtained with government (see MIRA comments in following section). * Better and timely use of satellite imagery to define geographical priorities for assessments. * UN agencies to conduct assessments in areas that are more difficult to access for INGOs (either due to lack of presence, absence of government authorization or conflict sensitivities). * Support to government to standardize definitions of affected populations and damage inventories. |  |
| * Almost no connection between humanitarian and government-led assessments. * Government definitions of affected populations and damages often unclear. Terminology often obstacle to designing sector/cluster response plans. * MIRA form not adapted to quickly identify most affected areas and direct further assessments and initial response. Initial data collection for damage assessments conducted in many different formats (almost one per agency). No reconciliation of information collected from Sittwe and Maungdaw. * Assessment maps could not be shared widely/electronically because showing information on agencies operating out of areas covered by agreements with Myanmar authorities. * Several areas have remained un-assessed due to lack of capacity (parts of Minbya, Rathedaung townships in particular). * Overall damage assessments were not available in a timely manner, and often subject to questioning. No impact and vulnerability mapping available for clusters/sectors to optimize targeting at state level. * Too many assessments conducted with different methodologies. |
| **MIRA** | * MIRA methodology and questionnaire designed before crisis. * Amended MIRA questionnaire used by UN agencies and INGOs in the first weeks of the crisis. | * Objectives of MIRA assessments and MIRA analysis to be confirmed. MIRA methodology and tools to be revised and amended in conformity to objectives. * MIRA questionnaire to be revised with inputs from sectors/clusters, IM specialists and staff involved in field assessments. Final version could be completed with sector-specific questions on a case-by case basis, depending on assessments needs. * Government to be associated to revision of MIRA questionnaire. Government staffs (including technical counter-parts) and CBOs to be involved in future training on MIRA methodology. * MIRA form to be cut, time spent on the ground going through form should not exceed 45mn. * Until MIRA questionnaire is revised, OCHA and sector/cluster leads should advise agencies to use MIRA form in case new emergency arises. * Agencies conducting MIRAs are responsible for data entry. * Only one agency should compile and analyze data. |  |
| * Results of MIRA assessments compiled by MIMU and OCHA generally not used by agencies on the ground. MIRAs do not appear efficient when their usage is compared to allocated resources and time spent on data collection and compilation. * Overall objectives of MIRA assessments remain unclear. Did not provide overall damage assessment (because not exhaustive, government figures were used instead). General analysis of situation and needs could have been provided by assessments targeting fewer villages with real sampling methodology, allowing a more optimal allocation of resources. Assessments aimed at defining ad’hoc response at village levels were conducted by individual agencies using their own methodology or amended MIRA forms. * MIRA questionnaire was slightly amended in the week following the cyclone to allow use for flood context. Information was however not shared effectively and agencies used various versions of MIRA form. * MIRA questionnaire too long, currently takes up to 2hrs to be filled on the ground. * OCHA did not enforce use of MIRA forms at the onset of the crisis. |

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| **Information Management** | | | |
| **Topic** | **Positive outcomes and key issues to address** | **Recommendations** | **Focal point** |
| **Data collection and management** | * OCHA started collecting information on response directly from agencies at the onset of the crisis, in agencies’ own formats. Information shared with sectors/clusters. Data integrated in an adapted MIMU 3Ws format. * Sector/cluster currently involved in systematic collection of data from agencies. | * Sectors/clusters to review and define optimal 3W formats to be used during next crisis. * Sectors/clusters start using reporting and 3W formats at the beginning of the response. * Sector/cluster 3W formats should be designed in a way that they can be easily integrated into a inter-sector 3W at national level. * All agencies, sectors/clusters should use MIMU p\_codes and villages names for reporting. * Agencies contact lists to be updated regularly during crisis, with focus on staff involved in emergency response. |  |
| * Parallel 3Ws set-up by MIMU in Yangon and OCHA in Sittwe. Not yet unified. * MIMU 3Ws not usable for operational coordination in the field. * Most sector/clusters started systematic assistance tracking only 4-5 weeks after cyclone. Some had no ready-to-use reporting formats and proposed tools that were not existent or not systematically used before. * OCHA assessment tracking and 3Ws not widely shared (only with sector/cluster leads and agencies operating in Mrauk-U). May not be used by individual agencies. * Multiple requests for data from different sectors, OCHA and MIMU. |
| **Mapping** | * Assessment maps produced early, used on a daily basis at the onset of the crisis to guide organizations towards non-covered areas and avoid overlapping. | * Produce general township maps responding to agencies’ needs, showing accurate locations of all villages and geographical features (rivers, creeks, hills, paddy areas, etc…). Maps can show flooded areas (UNOSAT). * Prepare format for assessment and response maps, to be used at the onset of future crisis. |  |
| * Maps of flooded areas (UNOSAT) only marginally useful for planning response. * Limited diffusion of OCHA assessment maps. * No response map available yet. |

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| **Logistics, Operational Response and Humanitarian Access** | | | |
| **Topic** | **Positive outcomes and key issues to address** | **Recommendations** | **Focal point** |
| **Logistical constraints and business continuity** | * Agencies’ offices and warehouses in Sittwe and Maungdaw were generally not affected by cyclone, allowing them to continue operating in the first days of the crisis. * Fuel provision was not interrupted in the days/weeks following cyclone. * Roads and railroads were quickly repaired and put back in working order. All goods remained easily available in local markets. * Local boats and trucks remained available for rent. * Sittwe Hotel remained functional, with permanent power supplies and internet access. Mrauk-U Hotel became de-facto operational center after relocation of INGOs. * Banking system remained functional (but ATMs suffered from power/internet outage). | * HCT (national level) to define a benchmark that would trigger advise the HC that would trigger an activation of the logistics cluster. * In the absence of logistics cluster, one agency should be immediately appointed to conduct initial assessment of road/sea/train networks at the onset of crisis. Assessment to be updated on a daily basis. * Information on physical constraints affecting road and river/sea access to be shared more widely and systematically. * Geographical database on road and river accessibility to be developed and integrated in emergency preparedness plan. * Agencies to pool resources (vehicles, offices, warehouses) in the first days of a crisis. UN to put boats at disposal of other organizations (including CBOs) if they are not used to conduct own activities. * Agencies’ staff and vehicles to be deployed prior to cyclone to areas which are most likely to be affected. Deployment to be coordinated to allow optimum needs assessment coverage and initial response to emergency needs. * Agencies to integrate business continuity plan in their emergency scenarios, to allow quick repair of offices in case of more serious cyclone (roof damage, power and telecoms interruption). * UN to lobby for official authorization of satphone coms in emergencies. * UN to get authorization to set-up VHF system in Sittwe. * UN agencies to be ready to act as operational center in Sittwe if INGOs office are badly damaged or lose coms. * Pre-identification of safe storage areas in Sittwe and other township capitals (“people with space”, monasteries, government buildings,…). |  |
| * Several township capitals were hardly accessible due to road/river closure (up to 4 days after cyclone). Rural areas were sometimes non-accessible up to 7 days after cyclone. Some evacuation centers remained non-accessible, even to local organizations, during most of the emergency phase. * Road to Yangon was cut for a few days. * Power network was shut down the day before the cyclone (28/07) to allow upgrade of system in Ann. Cyclone damaged lines in and out of Sittwe, leading to an interruption of power supply in Sittwe for around 20 days. * Most agencies’ offices in Mrauk-U were flooded, forcing relocation to Mrauk-U Hotel. Operational center was de-facto created in that location. * Most of agencies’ staff, cars and boats remained blocked in Sittwe in the first 5-7 days of the crisis. Most UN boats remained docked and unused in the period. * CDMA phone network was cut for several days. GSM continued working but was less reliable. OCHA VSAT damaged by cyclone. Satphone coms usually not available for most agencies (not authorized in country). * Poor internet network (even before floods) hampered fast and efficient sharing of information between agencies operating in Rakhine State. * No warehouses available in several township capitals (Mrauk-U, Minbya). * National staffs were often busy looking after their family in the first days of the crisis. |
| **Supplies** | * Local markets covered agencies’ needs for NFIs in Sittwe and Mrauk-U. NFI prices remained unchanged. * Government, CBOs and civil society provided most of the emergency assistance in the evacuation centers. International agencies were able to support the effort in some areas if they had staff and supplies already present. * Agencies were able to distribute supplies originally allocated to IDP response. | * Agencies to increase contingency stocks, in accordance with sector/cluster recommendations. Donors to increase funding for preparedness and contingency stocking. * Agencies to focus on logistical support to government & civil society in first 7-10 days of crisis when people are in evacuation centers. Main programming should however cover post-emergency period, to respond to needs in affected villages. |  |
| * In general the international community was not able to mobilize significant assistance to respond to emergency needs in evacuation center (7-10 days after cyclone). * Reported shortages of food items and seeds for mass purchase. Food prices increased in Sittwe due to fear that Sittwe-Yangon road could remain closed for a long time. |
| **Security** | * No critical security incident affecting humanitarian organizations reported since beginning of crisis (whether connected to natural hazard or human action). | * UNDSS/ASC to share security recommendations to all agencies prior to cyclone. Ensure security plans are enforced. Closely follow-up developments on the ground in first days of crisis. |  |
|  | * Regular ASMT convened on 29/07 (a few hours before cyclone) but did not touch on practical security arrangements linked to cyclone. Discussions on reported flooded roads and suspension of power delivery were added as AoBs, for information. * No use of warden system or security tree after cyclone. |
| **Conflict sensitivity and obstructions to delivery of humanitarian assistance** | * No obstructions to access to Muslim villages in central Rakhine. * No additional tensions between communities derived from perceived imbalance in targeting. Perception of humanitarian agencies by Rakhines generally improved. * Situation closely monitored by Protection sector and OCHA. Feed-back provided to individual agencies were possible imbalance was observed (assessment and response phase). OCHA response tracking database partly designed to monitor assistance provided to different communities. * OCHA context analysis mapping shared with agencies operating in sensitive areas. | * Agencies should maintain prudent approach in rural areas and monitor how their interventions impact on relationships between communities. * OCHA to continue monitoring response in all villages, alert protection partners if imbalance is observed. * All agencies to continue close monitoring of local community’s comments on international assistance. * Strategic deployment of national staff in the first days of the crisis, in their own areas of origin. Staff’s origins should be known by agencies’ management and integrated in internal preparedness plans. |  |
|  | * Some TA(s?) systematically omitted to report on needs in Muslim villages. * Increased government control over agencies’ operations in northern Rakhine (TBC). * Local CSOs usually targeted assistance to Rakhine villages and omitted Muslim communities. Financial assistance provided by Muslim CSOs/support groups from Yangon remains unknown. * Some boats drivers reportedly refused to move to Muslim villages. * Response in many villages started several weeks after Rakhine villages, to address conflict sensitivity. |