

Daw San Thida Tun, 27, Maw Like Kalay South village, Kalay, Sagaing



Daw San Thida Tun had never seen anything like that fateful day in August, when the waters destroyed her whole village. “The water began to rise, and we became afraid that if we stayed any longer we wouldn’t get out alive, so we fled in a boat. All we could take with us were the clothes on our backs.” San Thida, 27, and her husband and five year old boy were lucky to survive, but they lost their home, their belongings, everything. “I’m sad every day, “ she says, “ because that was my native village, the place where I was born, and we can never go back.”

San Thida and the rest of her village, of Maw Like Kalay South that lay in a valley have relocated to an area about two and a half miles away, an empty piece of land where they have been able, through support from the Myanmar Red Cross, to restart their lives. “We were scared that it would happen again, so we decided it would be better to move here,” she explains.

Daw San Thida Tun received a 500,000 MMK (approximately 385 USD) cash grant from MRCS at the beginning of December. With that money, she was able to buy the plot of land that her new temporary house stands on, as well as install a well that will provide ample water for not only her family, but for many others in the village. Finally, she bought some concrete foundation blocks that she will be able to use as soon as her family has saved up enough money to buy the rest of the materials.

San Thida and her husband are able to make ends meet by working as construction workers rebuilding roads nearby. It is back breaking work, but as casual labours there are not many options. The cash grant came out of the blue. “I was so surprised when I heard about the money from the Red Cross! I didn’t expect it at all. I had no idea how we were going to survive before this grant, so

we were overjoyed when we heard we would be receiving this assistance from MRCS. If we hadn't received this, we would have had an extremely difficult time."

Life is still anything but easy for San Thida and her growing family. She is expecting a baby in a few months, and nervous about her baby's future. "It's hard to think about the future, when every day is a struggle" she says. " But what I really hope for the future is that my children can get an education." Although the grant has far from solved the family's problems, they are in a much better position than two months ago – with a piece of land to call their own, a plentiful supply of water and a start towards building a new house.

Daw Tin Oo, 9, Maw Like Kalay South village, Kalay, Sagaing



Never in her 90 years has Daw Tin oo seen anything like it. "The water came so fast. Normally it flows one way and only 2 or 3 feet deep, but this time it came from both directions. I've never heard such a noise. It kept rising so fast, and we were afraid. So we fled as fast as we could and were not able to save anything but the clothes on our backs. We lost everything."

Daw Tin Oo and her family owned a two-story house in the village of Maw Like Kalay South, the land that the house was built on and cultivation land. Life was comfortable. As she tells her story, Daw Tin Oo's animated face becomes serious, "Now it is all totally ruined. Our house is under mud and we couldn't salvage anything. And the agricultural land is destroyed."

Daw Tin Oo, her daughter, son in law and their three children now live in a shack that used to be where they stored hay on a new plot of land over two miles from the site of the old village. "The entire village decided to move here, because our whole village was destroyed. This place is new to

us, it's still very strange for us. 90 years I lived in my native village. When we arrived here, I just wanted to cry. So we all cried together.”

The Myanmar Red Cross Society has been giving cash grants of between 230 and 465 USD to families like Daw Tin Oo who have been severely affected by the floods and who have no other means of recovering their homes and livelihoods. “When I first heard from a neighbour that I should come to a meeting to discuss receiving this money, I didn’t believe it. But after going along, I saw it was true. I am so grateful for this.”

Daw Tin Oo and her family decided to spend some of the money on buying the new land they live on. “We are happy to know that we own this land now, this is a big thing. The rest of the money we are keeping as a safety net for medical expenses and other emergencies.”

This is the first step in a long process of recovery for Daw Tin Oo, her family, and many of the other 1.7 million people displaced by the worst floods to hit Myanmar in as long as Daw Tin Oo, in her 90 years, can remember.

U Pyar Gyi, 44, Nat Nan village, Kalay Township, Sagaing Region



U Pyar Gyi, 44, and his wife and three children were forced to flee their home near the river bank when the worst floods in their living memory hit Myanmar at the end of July last year. “We had to flee, quickly. At first we saw the water rising foot by foot and thought it would stop, but then it became clear that it was not going to and that we were in danger. We shut the door to our house, and we fled.”

When the worst of the flooding was over, they returned to their two story brick house and could not believe the damage that had been done to what they thought was a stable building. U Pyar Gyi explains, "There were so many logs and other debris carried by the water that they rammed into and destroyed the house. Everything we had downstairs, including our shop, was destroyed. Luckily we had a few things for the shop stored upstairs and we were able to save that, but that was all. Everything else, gone."

"We didn't know what to do after this. How could we restart the business and rebuild our lives? When we heard MRCS would be giving us some money to do this, at first we couldn't believe it!" U Pyar Gyi is one of over 18,800 people who have received unconditional cash assistance from MRCS after the floods, to use to recover from the floods in the way that they think best for their own needs.

"We decided to spend 300,000 MMK on restarting the shop and 200,000 MMK on building a fence on the perimeter of the new piece of land we moved to, over one mile from our old home." U Pyar Gyi was able to salvage some wooden boards from their old house and has used these to build the shop and home they now live in. They spent a long time scraping the mud off of the wood, but it is still visible even now.

"We have never received anything from anyone. Not even 1,000 kyat. And now we get 500,000! Sometimes I'm so surprised and happy by this that my heart can't stop pounding. On the day that we received this news we were so excited that we couldn't even eat or sleep." When asked what he hopes for the future, U Pyar Gyi says, "I hope that we can grow the business and continue to support our family. In 90 years we've never seen a flood like this, so we hope that this is the last time we have to suffer this way."