

**CYCLONE GIRI RELIEF OPERATION:
LESSON LEARNT WORKSHOP**

Report



30 & 31, March 2011

Yangon

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INTRODUCTION

A lesson learnt workshop of the Cyclone Giri relief operation carried out by the International Federation of Red Cross/ Red Crescents Societies and the Myanmar Red Cross Society was conducted from 30 – 31 March 2011 on Yangon. The workshop brought together all those that were involved in the operation. All key members from the four affected townships were also brought together for the workshop. The seminar was undertaken as a means to highlight achievements and challenges during the Cyclone Giri emergency response, and provide recommendations for future relief operations in Myanmar.

However it is quite important to state that from the onset of Cyclone Giri, both the IFRC and MRCS carried out a tremendously successful operation amidst all the difficulties.

It should be highlighted that throughout the duration of the operation from beginning to end, those all involved were faced with tremendous challenges far out of their scope of control due to the many constraints in their operating environment. The western area of Myanmar's Rakhine State is among one of the harshest terrains to operate in.

Despite all these obstacles the relief efforts by the IFRC and MRCS was a very highly successful operation.

The purpose of this report is to have contained within these pages a documentation of what was felt were the key challenges during the operation. As this was not a full review as such, therefore the report is only intended to highlight the lessons learnt and challenges faced.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the best practices of cyclone Giri assessment process and relief operation including missing opportunities.
- To review the impact of distributed relief items including timeliness and targeted approach to reach the most vulnerable
- To review the relevance, timeliness and effectiveness of emergency health and WATSAN activities
- To review coordination with local authorities and other actors operating in the disaster area

EXPECTED OUTPUT

- List of best practices and areas of improvements
- List of recommendations to improve SOPs for assessments and relief operation in future

AGENDA

Time	Agenda
DAY 1	
8:30 am - 9:15 am	Opening Remarks
	Dr. Htun Myint Mr. Christophe Reltien, ECHO Mr. Brend Schell, Head of Delegation, IFRC
9:15 am - 10:00 am	Tea Break
10:00 am - 10:30 am	Objectives and review of agenda
10:30am -12:30pm	Brief presentation by each township and HQ about relief operation (20 min/Township and HQ)
	EWS, Trigger mechanism for Assessment and relief distribution
12:30pm -1:30pm	Lunch
1:30pm -3:00pm	Group works and presentation-7/groups -45 min group works,30 min presentation and 10 min discussion Theme for groups' works
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early Warning System 2. Assessment, Relief distribution, and Restoring Family Links (RFL) 3. Coordination, Communications and Media visits 4. Financial Management and administration 5. Warehousing, transportation and procurement 6. Volunteer mobilization 7. Reporting and effectiveness of NFRI kits <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early Warning System 2. Assessment, Relief distribution, and Restoring Family Links (RFL) 3. Coordination, Communications and Media visits 4. Financial Management and administration 5. Warehousing, transportation and procurement 6. Volunteer mobilization 7. Reporting and effectiveness of NFRI kits (Groups will focus on to identify what went well and why , what needs to be improved and how)
5:00PM	End of First Day
DAY 2	
	Continuation of presentations by thematic groups
12:30pm-1:30pm	Lunch
	Way forward-30 min to each group for quick discussion and preparation. 20 min for presentation and 10 min for feedback 1:30 pm-5:00pm
	Groups will identify recommendations (three major action points of each theme)with priority to improve relief operation in future Informal DREF operation survey Closing Remarks
5:30pm	End of workshop

DETAILS PROCESS/METHODOLOGY

At the start of the workshop, a brief presentation was provided by each township paired with personnel from HQ level. The presentation was to detail the trigger mechanisms and effectiveness of the Early Warning System as well as the challenges that were faced. This was a precursor to what was to come later on in the workshop. As throughout the workshop discussions would be made on processes that went well and problems that were faced.

For the second part of the workshop the participants were provided with the following topics:

1. Early Warning System
2. Assessment, Relief distribution, and Restoring Family Links (RFL)
3. Coordination, Communications and Media visits
4. Financial Management and administration
5. Warehousing, transportation and procurement
6. Volunteer mobilization
7. Reporting and effectiveness of NFRI kits

The participants were then assigned as group to work on one of the seven topics. The groups were made up of all the diverse department members that were involved at the various stages of the operation cycle. This was done to ensure that the group as a whole would have many different views and opinions on the thematic topics assigned.

Each thematic group was to then focus and identify the following as listed below:

- What had gone well and why? (Good practices)
- What needs/could to be improved and how?

The thematic groups were in a sense carrying out a series of SWOT analyses (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) that focused on the topics assigned.

By allowing the participants to review what had been carried out in the operation in a rapid but focused manner that produced recommendations without being held back down by the interesting but complicated details of programme implementation.

At the conclusion of each SWOT, time was spent reflecting on the achievements and improvements needed.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (EWS) DISCUSSIONS BY TOWNSHIP

Each of the four townships (Myebon, Minbya, Pauktaw, Kyaukphyu) together with their HQ counterparts gave a briefing of the events. Although the presentations were very detailed, there were reoccurring themes that emerged for both the achievements and constraints form the four townships.

Achievements:

- **Early warning allowed MRCS to mobilize quickly and effectively:** The EWS was found to be highly effective in giving the townships ample time for preparations before the cyclone struck allowing for MRCS to help reduce the impact of Cyclone Giri. As the MRCS' Disaster Management Division was able to dispatch the early cyclone warning received from the DMH (Myanmar Meteorology and Hydrology Department) to the relevant (Grade 1) Officers, whom were able to give the message to their townships.
- **Strong relations with the Local Authorities allowed MRCS mobilize and operate in their townships freely:** Due to MRCS' strong relations with both Government and Local Authorities on the ground, MRCS was given full authority to mobilize and start preparedness measures as soon as the request was made. Had permission not be received from the Authorities to go ahead, MRCS would not have been able to operate and take advantage nor have the ability to prepare the communities in risk reduction. The authorities also worked together with MRCS in disseminating early warnings to the people.
- **The Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) trainings were crucial in the reduction of casualties:** Volunteers and various CBDRM multiplier teams were able to mobilize instantly to alert the communities as they were already trained on what to carry out as part of risk reduction. The CBDRM kits were very crucial in the dissemination of the early warnings as teams were able to use the Hand Speaker and the markers to full effect in alerting people to the cyclone.

Constraints:

- **Travel difficulties:** Not all villages were able to be reached due to their distance and location. Many of the villages in the areas were situated in the most hard to reach places even under normal conditions. To reach these places one has to navigate through many waterways but this can only be accomplished with boats with local knowledge of the waterways. Therefore a few villages could not be reached for early warning.
- **Communications with distant villages:** Difficulties in communication was the biggest constraint faced by the Townships. As many of the hard to reach villages (as mentioned above) did not have in their possession any phones or any other means of communications. This made it difficult for MRCS to get in touch with these villages ahead of time for preparations.
- **Lack of amplification equipment:** Many of the teams were hampered by lack of amplification equipment for the announcing of risk reduction messages. For large areas such as markets and such the Hand Speakers were not loud/clear enough for the crowds of people to receive the messages. Even though the townships tried to rent these equipment, there were not enough to be secured.

Conclusion

Despite the constraints the number of casualties was greatly reduced due to the EWS and CBDRM trainings combined together with the hard work and dedications of those all involved.

FINDING OF DISCUSSION/GROUP WORK

Below are the summaries of key discussion points presented by each thematic group. Some of the more cross-cutting constraints and their suggested improvements are listed in the next section “Recommendations/Way forward “as per the thematic groups.

The general constraints that was common throughout the exercise is as follows;

Language Barrier: The Language barrier that the MRCS teams had to face with dealing with beneficiaries in remote areas. Where different accents or dialects make it a little difficult to communicate.

Transportation: Lack of vehicles for transportation

Communication: Problematic communications (too little network coverage)

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (EWS)

This was key in the reduction of casualties and also allowing for the teams to starting preparing for mobilizations well ahead of time before the impact of Cyclone Giri. The communications chain operated as it should and no unnecessary delays affected the message. MRCS Disaster Management Division’s close relations with the Myanmar Meteorology and Hydrology Department were key and the dissemination of the information to the townships was another highlight of the entire system. Also the group highlighted the fact that the trust between MRCS and the Local Authorities was another factor that allowed for the smooth operating environment.

The only key issues that this thematic group reported on was that of the constraints mentioned previously above. There was however a small obstacle mentioned as to instances of a few isolated cases where villagers did not feel the urge to follow the warnings given to them by MRCS due to their lack of understanding. This, the group believed could be solved through more awareness raising sessions with villagers.

The lone recommendation is for each township to send any news regarding signs of cyclones in the area so that HQ can start verifying and if need be disseminate the message. This is due to the fact that there are instances when local knowledge can give early indications of a cyclone brewing.

ASSESSMENT, RELIEF DISTRIBUTION, AND RESTORING FAMILY LINKS (RFL)

The group presented the following discussions. Assessments were the key in indentifying the persons affected for the distribution of relief items, delivery of health and WASH activities. MRCS was highly effective in its assessments because they did not have issues of access to villages due to their good working relations with the Local Authorities.

While carrying out assessments, MRCS Teams made maximum use of information available from Local Authorities as well as village leaders. But at the same time acknowledging the fact that this data while available may not always be one hundred percent reliable. Therefore many of the teams carried out and cross referenced the figures in order to avoid instances of where a village head may

only report the needs of people he favours/family members and such. The teams also used their own contextual understanding of the working environment in assessing the affected areas.

The main constraints the group saw was the request for uncoordinated needs assessment processes being carried out repeatedly in one area. What was meant of this comment is that of Assessment teams being requested to assess for the different sectors such as Health, WATSAN etc. at different times. They feel that a lot of duplication of work could be avoided by simply streamlining the assessments and better coordinating with the assessment teams before they go out to the field. There is also much need for the assessment formats to be standardized in order to avoid duplication of work and effort.

Language was a big barrier for the teams carrying out assessments and at times slowed the process due to the villagers not clearly understand the questions being asked.

The distribution of relief items was mainly hampered by the difficulty in travelling to the affected areas. The areas are situated very far away and have to travel through a labyrinth of water ways. Many of the teams had to build makeshift jetties in order to unload the relief items onto. Many of the affected communities helped the Red Cross Volunteers with the unloading after many understood through information sessions by the teams that they were volunteers coming to assist those in need.

As for the RFL team, it was shared with the participants that the department itself is fairly new in its inception. During the course of the operation they were very limited in terms of manpower and resources. The team was only had two phones in their possession to be used for their tracing and restoring family links assistance. Due to their limitations they were only able to address Myebon township. Many cases also went unheard due as they did not have enough human resources to spread out to many of the villages affected by the cyclone. They would however like in future to work more closely with assessments in order to contribute in areas of RFL and provide trainings for raise more awareness among the members of the Red Cross for future operations

COORDINATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA VISITS

The coordination within the organization was found to be satisfactory. The only main issue that most participants felt was that the flow of information from the Operation Room was at times slow. This has however much to do with the clearing process of information needed as per the protocols of MRCS before situational updates can be released to every department. As a result of this many departments when in need of information would contact the concerned department directly forgoing the Operations Room. In their quest to receive information quicker, some details are lost among the different departments that are part of the relief operation.

MRCS was able to coordinate very well with the major I/NGOs and all humanitarian actors in the areas as MRCS is seen as the leading agency.

Many were pleased with the arrangement of Media visits that gave a more exposure of the disaster area and as well as MRCS. Many also at the same time wished that IFRC/MRCS would put more efforts towards more visibility i.e. more Logos to be placed on distributed items, Logo plaques set-up next to WATSAN activities etc.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The participants of the meeting were overall satisfied with all the support that was provided by administration throughout the disaster.

Many participants felt that the finance department was a bit delayed in the issuing of cash that was very much needed at field level. However, this was more so an issue of the field not following good proper voucher practices when clearing their first advances. The finance unit during the emergency tried its best to accept field vouchers that met the most minimum of requirements for vouchers in order to avoid delays in the transfer.

WAREHOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND PROCUREMENT

Many agreed that the subjects in this heading were of most crucial for relief distributions. They felt that many problems could have been avoided in these areas if there had been persons with the training, experience and knowledge to handle these aspects. During the operation many of the different roles that the Relief Officer was that of a Warehouse Manager and at times this role was given to RCVs, as both are busy with many other matters and both do not have the proper knowledge of the procedures in warehouse management, many issues occurred that affected stacking/storing of relief items to that of reporting of stock. All these were major issues that could be avoided through capacity building and training of the right individuals.

VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION

Red Cross Volunteers were the key to success of the operation. RCVs need to be recognized more than ever so that their moral is kept high and the retention rate remains high in townships. They are in need of capacity building trainings in many areas as these are the people that are heavily relied on when the operations are carried out. As they are only able to assist effectively if they have the knowledge on what is needed of them.

REPORTING AND EFFECTIVENESS OF NFRI KITS

Under the following heading of reporting, HQ level conveyed to the participants that there are times when reports are not received in a timely manner. The request for all reports to arrive on time is for the benefit of all as these are crucial in informing HQ what needs need to be addressed urgently while also giving a sense of what is actually occurring on the ground. The first photos/reports received are also needed as means of communication with the outside world and donors in conveying the needs of the affected people. But at the same time it is understood that communications is a huge constraint as even in the most normal of times the communications infrastructure is lacking.

Another reason for delays in reporting is due to the fact that many of the Red Cross Volunteers come from many varying backgrounds and education levels it is very necessary for their capacity in reporting to be built up. They are very much in need of trainings on the preparation of reports and at the same time involving them in the understanding the guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of MRCS in disasters.

The NFRI Kits were found to be extremely effective and of great assistance for the communities affected by the cyclone. However many of the relief distribution teams would like to see more discussions and communications with the beneficiary groups in future so that small adjustment to relief packages. They believe that it is important to allow the relief receiving communities to be able to have a say in what they receive. During the operation some communities of the affected regions refused to use the plastic plates contained within the kitchen set kits. By their cultural norm they perceive that only prisoners eat with plastic plates and believe that eating with these may lead to imprisonment. This would be of interest for packaging of future kits.

RECOMMENDATIONS/WAY FORWARD AS PER PARTICIPATIONS

The following is a list of recommendations and way forward suggestions that the participants of the workshop felt that were of utmost importance to follow in order to improve for future operations. It is interesting to note that most of the recommendations came out of many interesting discussions that happened among all the participants of the workshop as opposed to the ones that came out of their thematic groups. The list of recommendations as follows:

Constraint: Not all involved at township levels fully understand the SOP and the different procedures of MRCS.

Recommendation: All active members at township level are to review and learn the different operation manuals available in order to better understand the procedures and workings to increase efficiency in times of disaster.

Constraint: There was general consensus among the group that each individual had too many Terms of References (TOR)/Job Descriptions to follow. For example: Relief Officers are responsible for Volunteer Management, Financial Management, Logistics, Relief Coordination etc.. Often leaving the person with too many goals to achieve causing gaps in the persons work during times of high stress as emergencies. This causes the person to lose sight of all the things they have to complete.

Recommendation: MRCS needs to assign TORs that are achievable and manageable. Job descriptions that are more in line with their actual post

Constraint: There are no clearly established offices at townships. As most offices are attached to the TMO/Health offices.

Recommendation: There is a need to secure and establish offices at township level. The benefits of establishing as office are many. Many felt that by having a visible office at the townships would give the communities a place to come for and better understand the work of MRCS. These offices can become a place where volunteers can be recruited and meet. A place where members of communities can come for assistance. A place for coordination.

Constraint: Although there are many CBDRM trainings being carried out, there still aren't enough trainings available to very vulnerable areas. These trainings have proven to be very invaluable during the Giri Operation.

Recommendation: More CBDRM trainings to be conducted for all vulnerable areas

Constraint: RCVs were tasked with activities beyond their capacity. For example: During the emergency RCVs were tasked with handling Warehouse management. Although trainings were given they were not fully aware of all aspects of the work leading to difficulties in reporting, stacking and maximizing warehouse space.

Recommendation: RCVs need to be trained and have their capacities built regularly and not on an ad-hoc basis. A team consisting of RCVS training in Financial management, Logistics and Warehousing Management should be trained in advance in order for them to be deployed should a disaster strike.

Constraint: Currently there are instances of individuals receiving many different trainings within a year. Usually all this knowledge is not used in times of emergency as this person may specifically work on issues that are not directly related to the trainings they have had.

Recommendation: Criteria for the selection of candidates for trainings need to be reviewed so that the right people are selected for the right training. This is to ensure that the right knowledge is limited to a single person.

Constraint: Currently there are no emergency ready teams set up to be deployed should assistance be needed at anytime in the country of Myanmar.

Recommendation: Selection and recruitment of individual who will be trained for emergency deployments. Setting up of an Emergency Roster is a must.

Constraint: Township teams need ready Emergency Response kits (Flashlights, Hand Speakers, Cameras, etc) on hand for them to be able to deploy instantly with no delay. As part of these kits, it was recommended that there be a chain saw added as during the time of emergency the teams had no means of clearing large fallen trees as they in their possessions only had normal saws. This at times delayed their ability to reach the affected communities more quickly.

Recommendation: Townships to have ready a set of Field Ready kits on standby. Chain saws to be added as part of these field ready kits.

Constraint: Lack of effective communications equipment. During the emergency, teams were sometime stranded in water when their boats failed and with no means to communication had to wait until passer bys were seen. There were also times when different teams could not coordinate their relief efforts when their phones had failed to get a connection in the field.

Recommendation: Hand-held radios(Locally known as ICONs) should be assigned to teams and Township level in order to make sure that there is a means of communication available when all other types fail during emergencies.

Constraint: There are too many versions of assessment formats being used in the field. These need to be streamlined in order to avoid confusion and increase effectiveness of assessments. Better coordination among the different departments need to occur so that assessments are able to deliver the data that is crucial to each programme.

Recommendation: The different departments involved in assessments should meet and work on developing a more streamlined and consolidated assessment format standard that is easily understood and can be used across all sectors.

Constraint: More RCVs and Community volunteers need to be recruited. There is also a need to maintain these individuals ever more so. During the operation it is a known fact that without the assistance of the volunteers the response would have less of an impact.

Recommendation: RCVs and Community recruitment/trainings should be organized more and more by the township level. Township levels should income generate themselves and reach out to the communities more in order to build more interest for the Red Cross movement. Currently recruited individuals should be kept in constant contact with Township level to ensure that they are motivated and empowered to always be available when the time is needed. Meetings should be arranged on a monthly basis to ensure that the volunteers and community leaders are always kept informed. Thus they are recognized as valuable members of MRCS. HQ level can also assist in the recognition of outstanding individuals to keep moral high and constant. Community members should also be provided with small incentives such as MRCS logo T-Shirts, Pens etc... as a mean of keeping the bonds with MRCS strong

Constraint: There is currently only a handful of WATSAN ready members available at a time as this is very knowledge and skilled based work.

Recommendation: Training of more WATSAN technicians is needed. Building of this capacity should be achieved through using a rotation system so that it allows all trained members to gain experience through deployments.

Constraint: Not all township teams are familiar with good financial management practices especially of that of good voucher practices. Due to these factors, often times there is much delay between reimbursements.

Recommendation: More financial trainings are needed to be reviewed with all those involved in handling cash/payments.

Constraint: Not all standard kits were packaged according to specifications. E.g. Not all Shelter Kits had all the standard items in one package. Standard kits were at times did not meet local needs

Recommendation: Standard kits need to be pre-packaged and stored. A review of the Standard kits to be made in a local context.

DREF SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

A session was conducted using DREF survey questionnaires at the end of the workshop as a means of assessing how many felt the operation had went. The main conclusions from the findings are that everyone felt that the operation was able to meet the needs of beneficiaries in a timely manner despite all the obstacles faced. The beneficiary criteria used for the operation allowed for the targeting of the most vulnerable populations. They also selected religious establishment and leaders as part of the selection criteria for beneficiaries as these are the hear of the communities affected and through these establishments communities seek for further assistance. The coordination was found to be satisfactory in view of all the difficulties and circumstances. The main concerns were that of transport and warehousing issues as outlined in the previous sections. Many of the respondents of the survey were pleased to say that as a result of the DREF operation many have had their skills developed and are more than ever disaster prepared.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MRCs Headquarter

Sr.	Name	Division	Position
1	Dr. Tun Myint	MRCs	Executive Committee
2	U Maung Maung Khin	DM Division	HoD
3	Daw Shwe Sin Myint	Communication	HoD
4	Dr. Mya Than	Health Division	Senior PSP Officer
5	Dr. Win Kyi	Health Division	Assistant Coordinator
6	U Khin Maung Ye	WASH Division	Senior Watsan Engineer
7	U Aung Thaung Shwe	DM Division	Program Coordinator
8	U Htay Aung	DM Division	Program Coordinator
9	Daw Moe Thida Win	DM Division	GIS Officer
10	Daw Myat Pan Ei San	DM Division	Relief Coordinator
11	Daw Nan Zin Nyein Aye	Logistic Unit	Logistics Officer
12	Daw Ei Ei Khine	Finance Division	Finance Officer
13	O Own Thwin	First Aid & Safety	Assistant Training Officer
14	Daw Su Su Htay	DRR Unit	Program Coordinator
15	U Sai Pann Kyin	RFL Unit	RFL Officer
16	Daw Witt Yee Win	Health Division	Watsan Engineer

MRCs Township Participants

Sr.	Name	Township	Position
1	Daw Ni Ni Moe	Bago (West)	G1
2	U Sithu	Bago (West)	volunteers
3	U Hpone Kyaw	Mandalay	G1
4	U Kyaw Kyaw	Mandalay	volunteers
5	U Myo Min Naung	Yangon	G1
6	U Ye' Lwin	Yangon	2IC
7	U Nyunt Shwe	Sittwe	G1
8	U Than Shwe	Pauktaw	2IC
9	Daw Cho Cho	Pauktaw	Relief Officer
10	Daw Sandar Win	Pauktaw	Volunteer
11	U Myo Min Tun	Pauktaw	Volunteer
12	U Khine Soe Lin	Pauktaw	Volunteer
13	U Myint Than	Minbya	Relief Officer
14	U Aung Zan Wai	Minbya	Volunteer
15	U Myo Zaw Tun Oo	Minbya	Volunteer
16	U San Yu	Minbya	Volunteer
17	U Zaw Win Maung	Minbya	Volunteer
18	U Kyaw Than Tin	Myebon	2IC/Relief Officer
19	Daw Yin Yin Aung	Myebon	Volunteer
20	Daw Moe Moe San	Myebon	Volunteer
21	U Tun Min Min	Myebon	Volunteer
22	U Soe Naing	Kyauk Phyu	2IC

Sr.	Name	Township	Position
23	U Yan Myo Aung	Kyauk Phyu	Volunteer
24	U Nay Myo Tun	Kyauk Phyu	Volunteer
25	U Tin Myo Naing	Kyauk Phyu	Volunteer
26	U Thant Zaw Aung	Kyaik Lat	Logistic Officer
27	Naw Htwe Htwe Nyein	Health Division	Health Officer
28	Daw Thiri Mon	Health Division	Health Officer
29	U Yan Naing Tun	Health Division	Watsan Engineer
30	U Sithu	Health Division	Watsan Engineer

Other Participants

Sr.	Name	Position
1	Phyo Zin Mar Wai	IFRC
2	Bernd Schell	IFRC
3	Christophe RELTIEN	ECHO
4	Heikki VAATAMOINEN	IFRC/AP DMU
5	Sanjeev Kumar kafley	IFRC
6	Phyo Wai Kyaw	Facilitator
7	Jo Shetliffe	ARC

ACRONYMS

DREF: Disaster Relief Emergency Fund

IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INGO: International Non-Government Organizations

MRCS: Myanmar Red Cross Society

RCV: Red Cross Volunteers

RFL: Restoring Family Links

SOP: Standard Operating Procedures

TOR: Terms of References

TMO: Township Medical Officer