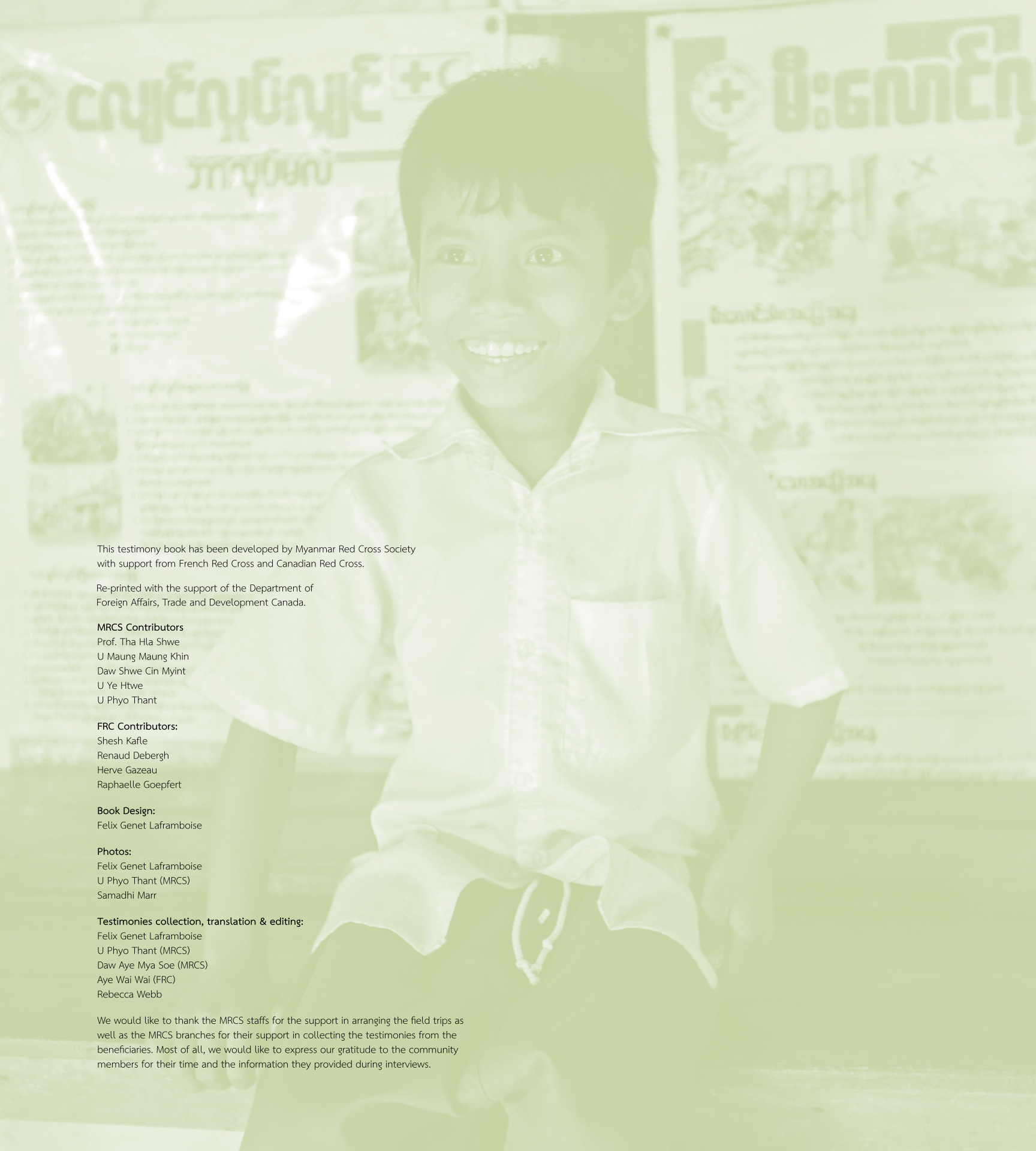


# Testimonies from the field Disaster risk reduction in Myanmar







This testimony book has been developed by Myanmar Red Cross Society with support from French Red Cross and Canadian Red Cross.

Re-printed with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada.

**MRCs Contributors**

Prof. Tha Hla Shwe  
U Maung Maung Khin  
Daw Shwe Cin Myint  
U Ye Htwe  
U Phyo Thant

**FRC Contributors:**

Shesh Kafle  
Renaud Debergh  
Herve Gazeau  
Raphaelle Goepfert

**Book Design:**

Felix Genet Laframboise

**Photos:**

Felix Genet Laframboise  
U Phyo Thant (MRCs)  
Samadhi Marr

**Testimonies collection, translation & editing:**

Felix Genet Laframboise  
U Phyo Thant (MRCs)  
Daw Aye Mya Soe (MRCs)  
Aye Wai Wai (FRC)  
Rebecca Webb

We would like to thank the MRCs staffs for the support in arranging the field trips as well as the MRCs branches for their support in collecting the testimonies from the beneficiaries. Most of all, we would like to express our gratitude to the community members for their time and the information they provided during interviews.

## Foreword



I am pleased to write the foreword for this publication as I think this commendable effort will have a long-lasting impact on the future course of action of the disaster risk reduction programming of the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCs). We believe that ‘beneficiary testimony’ is one of the strongest tools of documenting good practices and success stories at the community level. The experiences gained and realization made by the community members and other stakeholders while implementing the program activities will be of high importance for us for developing organizational policies and programming. I hope that this photo-book will also be helpful in disseminating the impact of our work to wider donor communities.

This is one of the several publications produced by the DRR program over the past five years (2009-2013). The overall objective of this program was to increase the resilience of population at-risk facing natural disasters in the coastal areas of Myanmar. The program has supported Townships, communities and schools to assess their vulnerabilities and capacities and mitigate their risks. The program has contributed to building community resilience through providing the support for training, micro-mitigation projects, emergency kits, awareness raising materials and drill exercises. I believe that this photo-book is able to capture some of the key successes and good practices of the program at the community level.

Ten success stories are included in this book. These stories tell us how a small-scale support at community level can have multiple benefits for building disaster-resilient communities.

I take this opportunity to urge all concerned at MRCs and at the Movement Partners to make the best use of the messages given by the community members while designing the programs at various levels. We need to replicate the success stories and good practices to other vulnerable areas of the country.

**Prof. Tha Hla Shwe**  
President  
Myanmar Red Cross Society  
Nay Pyi Taw

March 11, 2014

With the support of



Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada

Affaires étrangères, Commerce et Développement Canada





Testimonies from the field  
Disaster risk reduction  
in Myanmar





## Building safe and resilient communities

*Coastal areas in Myanmar are exposed to many hazards, among which flooding is one of the most frequent. People need to cope with this situation every year.*

In the coastal village of InyaKone, U KoKo Mg is recalling the day the flood waters came.

“The local authorities had warned us that the water level during rainy season could be even higher than last year so we immediately began to warn our neighbours” he said.

As a community which regularly suffers the effects of severe storms and flooding, the Myanmar Red Cross Society has been working closely with the local residents in InyaKone village to help them identify the risks they face and to create preparedness plans, ready to be implemented should disaster strike.

“We used the loud-speaker provided by the Red Cross to warn our friends and neighbours at least 3-4 days before the floods came” U KoKo Mg continued. “We also reached out to the families who live on the outskirts of the village, to make sure they also had the preparedness information they needed.”

The early warning system proved to be crucial as the water levels continued to rise and families had to be immediately evacuated to safety.



“We went round the whole community, using the loud speaker, to let people know it was time for them to move to the evacuation center. We also had to go to the paddy field to gather some villagers who were not evacuating yet, to warn them that the flood levels were still rising. By the morning, all of the villagers had successfully moved to the evacuation center.”

The efforts of U Ko Ko Mg, and the village disaster preparedness committee, are already making a big difference in his local community.

“In the past, people from the flood plains stayed at home during the floods and never moved to higher land as there weren’t clearly identified evacuation shelters. They only moved to the local Monastery when their houses were completely flooded. But now the evacuation shelters have been identified and we announced where people need to go using the loudspeaker so they were able to immediately evacuate. Emergency items from the Red Cross, such as blankets and mosquito nets, had also been distributed to the shelters and the host villagers provided families with food packets. In previous years, the flooding lasted only 3 to 4 days but last year the area was so water-logged that people couldn’t return to their homes for a whole month.”

*Early warning systems have been developed by MRCS in order to allow remote communities to better prepare and anticipate emergency situations.*





Emergency boat provides a lifeline for isolated communities

*The MRCS boat, a life saving opportunity for remote communities in times of medical emergencies and disasters.*





*During non-emergency times, the MRCS rescue boat is used as a means of transportation in order to raise funds for the boat maintenance.*

Thone Ain Than village sits on a river bank and is home to U Man Yin Nar, a member of the community disaster risk reduction committee.

The Myanmar Red Cross Society has worked closely with the committee to create disaster preparedness plans and to provide the necessary training and equipment. In Thone Ain Than village, where the main transport route is often only the river, this includes a much needed emergency boat.

U Man Yin Nar said “This boat has saved lives in our community. In 2012, a woman here suffered complications with her pregnancy and we were able to send her to the clinic in time thanks to this boat. It was dark and late at night and there weren’t any other boats nearby, although even if there had been she wouldn’t have been able to afford the rental cost. So they came to the committee and requested our help. We immediately sent her to the clinic on the boat, together with our trained Red Cross volunteer. The doctor said that if we had been just half an hour later, both mother and child could have died.”



*Another example of Income Generating Activities; The MRCS boat is used for goods and material transportation.*

The community boat is maintained and managed by the village disaster management committee and was provided to the local residents in 2010. Since then, it has been used 11 times to help transport members of the community to nearby health facilities for emergency medical treatment. During severe floods in Sin Ku, the boat also rescued isolated families and transported them to safety in nearby villages.

U Man Yin Nar continued “We generate income from using the boat to transport goods and we also receive donations from the parents of school children who use the boat to take their children to school. We use that fund for the maintenance of the boat and emergency medical transportation for poor families. This boat has been invaluable to our community.”





*An access road, renovated by Myanmar Red Cross Society and used as an evacuation path by over thousands of people during times of flooding.*

## Connecting communities

Thone Gwa Township is home to a thriving marketplace with people from nearby towns and villages travelling daily to sell goods, to send their children to school and to access medical facilities. But for those living near Ywa Thit village, the journey has been rife with danger.

“Many people from the village sell salt in the market so they travel to Thone Gwa town every day. The bridge was unsafe though and often people slipped and lost their salt. It was difficult for them to see the damaged properly as they had to travel before dawn and it was very dark. Often, school children would also slip and fall on the bridge so a teacher would have to wait and watch the children pass” said U Myint Khaing, secretary of the village disaster management committee.

Ensuring communities have safe access to nearby towns, and adequate evacuation routes in times of disaster, is a key part of Myanmar Red Cross Society disaster risk reduction activities. Working with the residents of Ywa Thit village, Red Cross volunteers quickly identified the need to secure the damaged bridge which had been badly eroded due to strong floods. With over 1000 people from the surrounding villages using the bridge each day, its safety was critical.

“Now the bridge has been properly constructed we don’t face the daily dangers we used to. The Red Cross also elevated the village road which sits beside the stream and used to flood all the time. Now we have secure access to the nearby towns, no matter what the weather” he continued.

*The new bridge not only provides safe access to the evacuation center but also allows the community to maintain its daily routine (school access, livelihood,...)*







Reaching out to the new generation

*Early morning drill exercises are conducted regularly in schools in order to practice how to properly respond to disasters and to boost self confidence.*





*Teachers are trained and provided with numerous educational materials to keep their student alert and ready in case of emergencies.*

In Ywar Thit Primary School in Thone Gwa Township, the children are engaged in a game which sees them acting out what to do in case of a disaster. As Daw Naw San Nyein oversees the class, she explains how the school is using role-play, poems and songs to help the children understand what to do in the event of an earthquake, cyclone or floods.

“The role-play helps the children to understand how they should respond in case of a disaster. We carry out the training every two weeks and the children are keen to learn and to practice what they should do in an emergency” she said.

The Myanmar Red Cross Society has been training teachers across the country in disaster preparedness and first aid. The aim is to enable teachers to create a safe learning environment for the children, while also sharing disaster preparedness knowledge which can be passed on to the students and their families.



“The first aid training has also been very useful for the teachers here” said Daw Naw San Nyein. “In the past, the children would get lots of injuries from playing around and we didn’t always know what to do. Now we are able to treat simple injuries such as a nose bleed and the children also carry this information back to their families” she continued.

“Many families in the past used traditional methods to cure a nose bleed such as inhaling cow manure or using chalk powder. Now the parents ask us about our first aid when they come to pick up their children from school and we are able to share with them. More and more parents come to discuss first aid or disaster preparedness with us every year and they are starting to abandon their traditional practices and take on this new learning”.

*MRCSS has been providing school teachers and students essential skills in delivering first aid services in order to react promptly whenever there is a need.*





## Securing Safe drinking water

U Kyaw recognizes the signs of impending floods. The water level in his village rises every year with the onset of heavy rains and the local community have seen first-hand the damage that flood waters can bring.

“There are 9 wells in our village and all the wells were flooded every year” said U Kyaw.

“During these times, it was very difficult for us to access safe drinking water. We would have to travel to a different village, which is situated on the other side of the Dar Ka River. For washing and bathing we would just use the flood waters which reach under and around our houses, although it is quite polluted.”

Crossing the river to gather safe drinking water was an arduous and perilous task.

“We would travel to fetch water in a group as we didn’t have our own boat and so couldn’t make individual trips. Some villagers made bamboo rafts to fetch water but sometimes these would be torn apart during the return journey. We had to risk our lives to collect drinking water. Some children tried to cross the river, facing the risk of drowning, but luckily another boat saw them and was able to bring them back. It is too dangerous for children to make this journey; they are still too young to protect themselves.”

The situation changed for the community in 2010 when the Myanmar Red Cross Society visited, to help the community better prepare for potential disasters and to establish a disaster management committee. Despite the high vulnerabilities the community faced, many were skeptical.

“We already knew that we should move to higher land during floods and that we should place our personal possessions high above the watermark so they cannot get damaged. So we wondered why is the Red Cross coming to tell us what we already know?”

“But I came to understand many different things when I attended the sessions. They reinforced some of the things we already knew and also taught us new things. For instance we now know that we need to draw a roadmap and evacuation routes. We also know the best way to secure your home and what we need to do, should a disaster happen. Now we are able to respond to any disaster, supported by our disaster management committee.”

Importantly, the village also now has access to safe drinking water, even during floods.

“Elevating our well, so it is safe from rising flood water, is one of the first activities the Red Cross showed us. Now we have a reliable drinking water source and don’t have to risk our lives by crossing the river during floods. The whole village gets its water from this well and it is also helping to keep us healthy. This year, there have been almost no cases of diarrhea in this village. It is now the duty of the disaster management committee to maintain the good work we have started and we greatly appreciate the Red Cross for all they have done.”

*Elevated hand-pumps allowing communities to access safe drinking water even during flooding.*





## Saving lives with first aid

As a maternity nurse in her home village of Kywe Te Kone, Kyi Kyi San already had a strong healthcare background when she volunteered to become a Red Cross volunteer in 2011.

“I used to think that the Red Cross was just focused on first aid but I soon realized they also help to prepare for disasters. For instance they have shown how to elevate the hand-pump to resist floods. I was delighted when I could share this information to help my village” she said.

Despite her Red Cross training, and her healthcare background, Kyi Kyi San had to work hard to build trust amongst her community.

“Villagers just perceived Red Cross works as applying balm to the injured players during football matches. They were not even aware that the knowledge provided by the Red Cross was so helpful for them.

“I always support the villagers when they need me but some people didn’t trust what I was saying and where worried I might make a mistake. When people were injured they would usually apply balms, even if the injury was a burn.

From my first aid training I know that the best way to treat a burn is to keep applying water and now I have shown them they understand. Now, as soon as something happens, they come and find me” she continued.

While Kyi Kyi San regularly attends to the villages basic first aid needs such as cuts and burns, her position as a trained first aider has also meant she has been called on during serious medical emergencies.

“The case I remember most is of a pregnant lady who needed my help. She was losing blood when I arrived and nobody knew what to do. So I asked everyone to move away as the patient was passed out and nobody could wake her up. I used my first aid knowledge to stop the bleeding and then when it had slowed down, I tried to wake her up. I used the breathing support methods pushing her chest for 7 to 8 times. She slowly began to wake up and began to groan. It was only when we heard her make a noise that all the people could breathe a sigh of relief. After this incident the local villagers rely on me even more and I make them sure they are aware that first aid skills can save a life.”

*MRCs volunteers are trained in First Aid so they can support their communities.*





# Strengthening local Red Cross branches

The Myanmar Red Cross Society is continually working to build the capacity of its 330 branches by ensuring that local teams have the training and resources to meet the needs in their communities. For many, this has included finding land to build new offices as Red Cross volunteers have previously been forced to hold meetings in public places such as parks or tea shops.

U Mya Han leads one of the local Red Cross branches and he and the team of the volunteers have already seen huge improvements.

“It was really difficult to organize our activities as we didn’t have our own office building and it was hard to find places for our meetings. Gradually the number of Red Cross volunteers was decreasing and it was becoming harder to mobilize new volunteers. Now we have our own office and we just need to share a notice on when to meet and all our members show up at the office. We can organize our activities much more efficiently and we also have somewhere to file and keep all our documents” he said.

Technical trainings have also enabled Red Cross volunteers to expand their activities by building their skills, with the knowledge they have gained then being passed onto local communities.

Soe Soe Mon, a Red Cross volunteer from YelKyi Township said, “We could only disseminate first aid knowledge in the past as this was all we knew. But now we can also share disaster preparedness information and advice and we have already carried out these new trainings in four villages.”

By training even more volunteers, the Myanmar Red Cross Society is also able to increase the number of communities it works with. Daw Win Kyi lives in NyaungNgu Village in YelKyi Township where Red Cross volunteers have recently carried out training.

“Our village received first aid training from the local Red Cross branch for the first time ever” she said.

“They gave us the information we need so we know what to do in a disaster and we also had first aid training so now we know how to take care of an injured person right here in our village. This kind of knowledge is very useful for our community and I hope it can also be shared with other villages.”

*The capacities of Township Branches have been strengthened in order to function more independently at the local level and sustain DRR activities.*

*Ye Min Han, a Red Cross Volunteer from Kyon Pyaw Township, sharing stories from his more-than-ten-years experience as a volunteer.*







*MRCS staff collect information during emergencies in order to better respond to the needs of the community.*

## Bringing Hope to flooded Communities

The families living in No (5) quarter, in Monyo Township, used to have good reason to dread the rainy season. Each year the flood waters would come rushing into their community, isolating the local residents for weeks at a time.

“Water would come flooding in and quickly overflow because there was no drainage. Every year we were water-logged for up to a month. But now the Red Cross has renovated the drainage system, the water flows away after just a couple of days” said U Shwe Maung, the quarter administrator.

The drainage system, which stands 6 feet tall and is over 1500 foot long, supports over 2000 people in the local community.

“We faced so many difficulties when the community was flooded. We were worried about our health and struggled to travel anywhere. Sometimes our children missed their school classes because we could not take them, especially when we were sick. But all that hardship and difficulty has disappeared.”

*Two volunteers performing their regular maintenance duty. Drainage has helped thousands of people during the rainy season by maintaining water at an acceptable level.*







## Raising funds in local communities

The 330 local branches of the Myanmar Red Cross Society provide a network of humanitarian support which reaches out across the entire country. From emergency relief and first aid through to early warning systems and disaster preparedness trainings; Red Cross volunteers are on hand countrywide, to help build the resilience of local communities.

To strengthen the capacity of the local branches, Red Cross volunteers from the targeted branches have received financial training to help them to develop a series of fundraising initiatives.

The initiatives, which include the running of small businesses such as a Desktop Publishing Shop and a motorbike rental scheme, aim to ensure that each local branch is able to secure the funds needed to carry out their work.

“We have been using the funds we raised to provide trainings and to disseminate information in our villages. By raising the funds locally we can put the money back into the local community” said U Aung Kyaw Oo, leader of the Red Cross volunteers in Kyauktan.

*With funds from Income Generating Activities, the MRCS volunteers can sustain activities such as first aid in their community.*

*The Red Cross Volunteers take turns staffing the Income Generation Activities office in order to ensure the financial health of their branch.*







## Volunteers in Action!

*Red Cross volunteers transport flood victims to evacuation centers or hospital when medical attention is required.*

### Volunteers in flood response

Floods are a regular phenomenon in most of the parts of the country in Myanmar. Thandwe is not an exception. Recurrent flood triggered by heavy rainfall and storm surge has made many communities vulnerable to disasters. In August last year, the heavy floods that occurred in most of the lower part of Thandwe caused significant damage to lives and properties.

The evacuation centers were identified and renovated in most of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) targeted communities. When the flood level exceeded the danger level, the Red Cross Volunteers (RCVs) issued the disaster alerts through loud speakers. RCVs, who were trained by MRCS headquarters, provided first aid, emergency medical and basic health care supports to the affected families. They also coordinated with the local people and organizations for providing food and other daily needs.

“We gave First Aid and basic health care in the camps. We also provided emergency medical evacuation including for a pregnant woman and a child who suffered from fever.” said U Tun Wai. He also said that they received trainings for disaster preparedness and response given by

MRCS headquarters. They can help the victims effectively based on their experiences and knowledge from the trainings. “We didn’t know much about the systematic response operations before, but we do now. It can save lives of the affected ones. When Red Cross Volunteers from An Taw contacted me, I could guide and support emergency relief kits on time.” said U Than Tun, leader of Thandwe Red Cross Brigade.

### Volunteers in IDP management

Red Cross Volunteers are mobilized not only in the flood response but also in other humanitarian works. During the communal violence that was erupted in some of the villages in Thandwe in September last year, RCVs helped the people in IDP camps by providing first aid, medical evacuation and emergency kits. “We helped the victims who were displaced in the conflicts by supporting First Aid and emergency medical evacuation and emergency kits. It’s so important to respond systematically to any disasters (natural or manmade). If we didn’t respond on time and in a systematic manner, damage of life and properties would have increased.” said U Than Tun.

*In case of emergency, MRCS will ensure the most vulnerable members of the community are prioritised.*





*School children learn the behavior to adopt during natural disaster - Khe Paung Village, Kyonpyaw Township*



