

Cash for Seeds: Revitalising Winter Vegetable Cropping in Rakhine State

Myanmar Red Cross Society's Humanitarian Interventions in Rakhine



Photo: MRCS Maungdaw Branch/Bonn Myat Htoo

Addressing Basic Needs of Communities through Livelihood Support

The outbreak of violence in Rakhine State of Myanmar on 25 August 2017 resulted in one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent history. An estimated 720,000¹ people fled to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and thousands more were displaced internally within Rakhine State. Rakhine State is one of the most deprived and underdeveloped states in Myanmar and the eruption of violence and resulting displacement, restriction of access and movement has further deteriorated all communities' possibilities to meet basic needs, access markets and continue with their livelihoods.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has been supporting the Myanmar Red Cross Societies (MRCS) to provide humanitarian services to affected populations in various parts of Rakhine state since 2012. This case study captures interventions related to addressing basic needs of violence affected communities by provision of direct cash transfers for agriculture.

¹ ISCG Situation Report Rohingya Refugee Crisis, October 2018, p.2

Livelihoods interventions include the provision of Conditional Cash Grants to households to support livelihoods in the sectors of Agriculture, Livestock, Small Business and Fishery. This was supplemented by Cash for Work (CFW) activities during lean agriculture season, whereby wage employment opportunities were provided to beneficiaries and community access roads were strengthened through CFW in all targeted villages.



Variety of seeds available for beneficiaries to purchase.



Beneficiaries purchase seeds after cash distribution.

To support the revival of traditional winter vegetable cropping practices, MRCS provided households with Cash for Seeds, allowing purchase of a variety of seeds. An allocation of MMK 15,000 (approx. CHF 10) was provided to each selected beneficiary. This basic cash investment, combined with agriculture technical trainings in collaboration with the Agriculture Department, has supported beneficiaries to restart their traditional practices of farming winter crops.

MRCS mobilized local traders to organize the sale of a variety of vegetable seeds at village level promoting easy access to suitable seeds among beneficiaries. A total of 13 varieties of seeds were made available. The selection includes chili, eggplant, radish, cucumber, okra, watermelon, pumpkin, cauliflower, roselle, bitter gourd, tomato, corn and beans.

Beneficiary Profiles – Key Findings as of March 2019

- 100% beneficiary households are dependent on food aid distribution.
- 63% reported having access to land for paddy cultivation before crisis. However, only 11% reported cultivation of paddy harvest in the year following the violence and before the Myanmar Red Cross intervention.
- The average household monthly income is MMK 84,339 (\$60), the main sources of income are agriculture, livestock and daily labour.
- The average household monthly expenditure is MMK 73,883 (\$55), 66% of the monthly income is spent on basic needs (consumption, clothing, health and non-food items).

Key Achievements

- 30 community volunteers trained on agriculture practices in collaboration with Agriculture Department. Trained volunteers impart their knowledge to other community members.
- 200 households supported to purchase vegetable seeds.
- An average of 0.25 acres of land, per supported household, cultivated through winter vegetable crops.
- All 5 targeted villages have improved access to fresh vegetables with distribution through village markets.

“Within a few weeks of planting, we started harvesting radish, tomatoes and chilies that provide good nutrition to us”

Ma Oo Sein, a beneficiary of the Cash for Seed project



Ma Oo Sein, from Ngan Chaung village has nine members in her family household. The family's main occupation is farming, supplemented by small scale fishing and casual village based labour to support family income. Fishing is very inconsistent due to restrictions on movements and labour opportunities are very rare. “After recent violence, there have been more challenges to earn a livelihood as a farmer due to lack of capacity to invest and limited access to market to sell vegetables”, said Ma Oo Sein.

Ma Oo Sein received cash support of MMK 15,000, through the MRCS cash for seeds initiative and participated in village agriculture training sessions. Her family has been able to cultivate a vegetable plot of 0.5 acres with eggplant, tomato, radish, corn, chili, cauliflower, okra, bitter gourd, cucumber and beans. “Within a few weeks of planting, we started harvesting radish, tomatoes and chilies that provide good nutrition to us”, explains Ma So Sein.

Ma Oo Sein, along with other beneficiaries, plans to sell vegetables from farms to village as well as Maungdaw town market, supported by local traders for town market distribution. Ma Oo Sein and other community members are now able to gradually restore pre-crisis livelihoods activities, inclusive of winter crops farming, providing households with nutritional food, in addition to supporting income generation. *A story prepared by MRCS Maungdaw Branch.*

This is a MRCS implemented project in partnership with the IFRC and the Danish Red Cross.

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