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Photo: MRCS

## Integrating cash transfers to COVID-19 response

Myanmar Red Cross Society's *most local actions* building community resilience in Rakhine

### Overview

Since March 2020, a total of MMK 193,514,600 (CHF 133,458) has been transferred to communities in central Rakhine through cash transfers via its multi-year resilience program to address the increasing humanitarian needs in Rakhine compounded by COVID-19.

**Community Resilience Program (CRP)** is a multi-year resilience program implemented by Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) with the support of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), continually funded by British Red Cross. The program integrated COVID-19 from March 2020 to support community-led actions for prevention and mitigation of socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 in central Rakhine. British Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross contributed funding for these activities.

The program began in January 2017 responding to a protracted and evolving crisis which resulted in various needs from communities. Through the program, institutional capacity has been strengthened through village resilience committees, women's revolving funds and volunteer groups, which promote accountability and social cohesion. Within a program framework of addressing basic needs and building community resilience, the program reached 30 villages with a population of 29,097 people (6,334 households) across the townships of Sittwe and Minbya. This encompasses multi-sectoral activities in Livelihoods, Health & Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The program covers ethnic population of Rakhine (50%), Muslim (46%) and Chin (4%).

The program's target communities have been affected by violence in Rakhine, as well as recurring natural disaster, in particular floods and cyclone, both directly and indirectly. Rakhine has additional vulnerabilities in relation to COVID-19, linked to high levels of displacement. Testing and health treatment facilities are limited. From 16 August, confirmed cases of local transmission have been recorded in Rakhine, requiring additional investments in community resilience to COVID.

The annual action plan of the program was modified in March 2020 to reflect the developing situation with COVID-19. Cash interventions were accordingly designed to meet urgent needs of the communities and to address long-term resilience building requirements related to COVID-19. The program was also expanded the outreach to other villages as part of these efforts.

## Our Interventions

**Goal:** To build healthier and safer communities, reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience through community-led actions supported by cash transfers during the unprecedented pandemic.

### Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)



#### COVID-19 response funds to village resilience committees

29 village resilience committees received total 6,380 USD (220 USD per committee) for community-led actions to respond to the villages' own needs including upgrading community-level quarantine facilities, installing hand washing points, purchasing electric batteries for mass communication, and promoting community-level awareness.

#### Village emergency funds

12 villages received total 8,760 USD (730 USD per village) of emergency funds to support community-led activities to respond to emergencies in line with the program's resilience model. The village resilience committees are the custodians of these funds. The committees have started using the emergency funds to address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable households, including providing interest-free loans for health-related needs.

#### Village community volunteer group funds

15 villages received total 7,275 USD (485 USD per village) for volunteer group funds. Village-level community volunteer groups are formed as part of the program. The volunteers play a pivotal role in community mobilization and during project activities and MRCS has provided capital funds to these groups to provide localized support.

#### Cash for cloth masks making

9 villages in Sittwe township received cash for cloth masks making as part of MRCS's on-going Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) interventions. The village resilience committees and volunteer groups supported cloth mask production by local tailors, under technical guidance of MRCS. Once ready, the masks have been distributed within the village as part of community-led actions preparing for and responding to COVID-19.

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)



#### Cash for installation of hand washing facilities at schools & temporary water tank at IDP sites

47 schools in Minbya township received total 2,585 USD (55 USD per school) to install hand washing facilities. The areas covered were not part of the program before March 2020. However, they were added to the COVID-19 specific intervention to address the urgent needs. Total 21,712 children (male 9,988 and female 11,724) attend these schools. In addition, 5 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) sites in Kyauk Taw township received cash transfer for the installation of temporary water tanks with a roof to provide better access to water and help the displaced population stay safe and healthy.

#### Cash for latrines construction in households and IDP sites

225 households received total 11,250 USD (50 USD per household) for latrines construction between March-July 2020, as part of the 2,267 latrine constructions from the beginning of CRP program. In addition, MRCS supported a permanent unit of latrines at one new IDP site using cash transfer modality to promote better and safe access to sanitation facilities for displaced population. Total 730 USD was transferred in instalments to the committee for latrine construction.

#### Cash for hand washing soap making

Volunteers from 9 villages in Sittwe township who received soap making training as part of the program last year gathered to produce hand washing soap to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in their own communities by giving easy access to hand washing soap among community members. The hand washing soaps produced were sold to community members at a minimum charge, while the income gained was channelled through volunteer group fund. The volunteers also engaged in awareness raising of communities on proper hand washing and disseminated other safety messages.

### Livelihoods and basic needs



#### Women group revolving funds

6 newly formed women groups were received total 2,540 USD (440 USD each), while 39 previously formed women groups received total 5,655 USD (145 USD each) as top-up cash on their group revolving funds. The women groups provide micro loans to their members at a minimal rate of interest to meet their livelihoods and other basic needs. The funds focus on economic empowerment of women.

#### Livelihoods cash grants

250 households received total 50,000 USD (200 USD per household in two instalments) to implement their business plans in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, small business, and fishery.

## Community Reflections



**Ma Myo Thu Zar Aung**, 26, is a volunteer group leader in Nar Ri Kan village since 2019. She leads 17 volunteers, 2 men and 15 women, in her community and work closely with the Village Administrator and Village Resilience Committee to support activities in the village to help its development and resilience building. She organizes volunteer group members to support women group revolving funds, COVID-19 activities, and other Red Cross activities.

She has distributed COVID-19 information, education, and communication (IEC) posters and conducted awareness raising sessions, hand washing campaigns, and distributed masks, soaps, and hand gels, buckets, and cups for individual households in the village. These items have been provided by MRCS and international non-governmental organizations. MRCS also provided cash supports for cloth mask making and hand washing soap making.

The volunteer group organized sewing groups and have made 830 masks under the technical guidance of MRCS. The mask will be distributed to most vulnerable groups in the village such as elderly people, pregnant women, casual labourers, as well as high school and middle school students. For soap making, each group made of 8 volunteers produced 60 litres of soap per day. So far, 600 litres of soap were made for the community.

**“ Communities are very thankful to Myanmar Red Cross society for supporting cash for cloth mask making and hand washing soap making. We will distribute the masks for free and have made hundreds of litres of soap.”**

**Kyaw Hla**, 32, is a volunteer group leader in Nga Pun Gyi village. He leads 22 volunteers, 16 men and 6 women, who are actively involved in the COVID-19 prevention activities. In the village, MRCS's mobile clinic has been actively conducting COVID-19 information sharing through a loud speaker and organized group awareness raising sessions.

The volunteer group, in collaboration with village resilience committee, supported village leaders to facilitate COVID-19 safety message sharing. With the cash transfer from MRCS, the village resilience committee purchased 880 soap and distributed to each household. Some soaps were kept aside to be used for mosques, mobile clinic, and for necessary meetings in the village.

With the request of the volunteer group, MRCS provided additional cash support for cloth mask making and hand washing soap making. The volunteer group organized sewing groups for cloth mask making under the technical guidance of MRCS. They are planning to distribute the masks for free and sell the soap at a minimum charge. For soap making, 20 volunteers together made 700 litres of soap until now.



### Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS)

As the leading and principled humanitarian organization in Myanmar, MRCS is committed to improving the health and well-being of vulnerable people. In line with its auxiliary role to the Government in the humanitarian field through a strong legal base, MRCS continues to provide life-saving support everywhere for everyone, every day.

### International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

As the largest humanitarian network in the world consisting of 192 National Societies worldwide, IFRC is providing vital technical, financial and logistical support to National Societies globally, while strengthening their participation in regional and global cooperation during natural disasters, health emergencies, and population movement among others.

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## The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality:** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality:** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence:** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary Service:** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity:** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality:** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.