

## August 2008

### Update from 'Aung' and 'Charity'

We started our 3<sup>rd</sup> trip to Laputta on 20<sup>th</sup> July and arrived back in Yangon on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On this trip, we praise the Lord for providing us with 5 full-time graduates from our wholistic development programme, a volunteer to do office work, and an engineer / technician so that we could station in Myit Pauk village to continue our relief and rehabilitation work.

**Aye lost her beloved husband and the business that she headed** which was worth 2700 lakhs (about £135,000) to cyclone Nargis. She suddenly became a widow with 4 children and no business. She couldn't cry or smile but endured the impoverished life because she was afraid her children would become discouraged. Before this, she didn't need to humble [herself] before anyone for help because she was wealthy. However, after her husband, who was a local authority, died, she asked the authority senior to her husband for help, but was rejected...

Although she couldn't cry in front of her children, she wept heavily in front of me and I couldn't hold my tears either. Sympathizing [with] the other woman, I couldn't do anything for her but hug her. I understand how hard it is for someone who had once been wealthy to humbly ask [for] help from others and how anxious she must be wondering if she might be rejected. By God's grace, we were able to provide household utensils, school kits, and food for her family and her workers' families, who were dependent on her. Unlike when she came to us, her smiling face was radiant when she went home. The next day, her 16-year-old daughter participated as a volunteer in our work.

There are many businessmen who lost their businesses. The loss of the rice industry owners, fish and shrimp business owners, boat owners, salt farm owner is countless. Now, they have to set aside their pride and hope for someone who would confidently invest in them. The workers who relied on these businessmen also became jobless and had to struggle everyday. I especially became aware of this during my first and this third trip. If we could invest in these skilled businessmen, the lives of many families will improve.

### **The Task Force I have had from the first day of Cyclone Nargis**

3<sup>rd</sup> May was the graduation day of the *Stars of Dawn* wholistic development training. However, because the students were helping their neighbours because of the Cyclone, and their families were having trouble because of the blocked roads, the graduation ceremony was arranged rather informally in the evening. These students who first helped in the relief work after the cyclone are going to Laputta with me to help with rehabilitation.

Although we had arranged the 2008/09 wholistic development training to open on 5<sup>th</sup> July, some advised us to postpone the program this year because the staff were engaging enthusiastically in the relief work. However, throughout the trips, I began to understand how much workers are needed to work among the people. Likewise, as I now know how reliable the trainees are, our management team decided to open the training no matter how busy we were. And so, I praise the Lord for being able to open the training with 29 trainees on 19<sup>th</sup> July.

### **What Amazing Timing!**

On the second trip to Laputta, SP gave us written permission to take 20 plastic rolls from the World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse to distribute along our trip. By the end of the trip, we still didn't receive the plastic rolls. On this third trip, we went to the warehouse daily to investigate the matter, but we couldn't get the materials. When I myself went to the warehouse on the morning of our trip to the villages, we finally got the materials. While we were loading the materials, 2 villagers from "Myaing Chaung" saw the name of their village on the packages and asked us about it and found out that we were going to their village. These two people came along in our boat to guide us to their village. Halfway there, the engine suddenly went dead. Because we didn't have the spare parts to fix it, we were floating here and there in the middle of the river. Then it suddenly rained. If the wind also came, our boat could capsize. One of the villagers who had come along with us could sail and used the plastic sheets, so we arrived safely in their village to distribute the relief materials and school kits there. It would be unthinkable if we didn't have the plastic sheets or the person who could sail on this trip.

**It's been 3 months from 2<sup>nd</sup> May**, the day on which Cyclone Nargis devastated the country. A few villages are being rehabilitated because of enthusiastic donors and are able to resume farming. However, villages that are inconveniently located and have poor transportations, and villages that have no death toll but are affected by the cyclone receive almost no help and are facing starvation.

Because the WFP is facing the difficult situation to buy rice, there are a lot of difficulties in rice distribution. One relief worker said, "Of all the countries I have done relief work, Myanmar is the most challenging situation." I myself have gone to villages in Laputta and talked with the church leaders and village chiefs. And I have seen the true situation

because I have slept in those villages. Although UN organisations and NGOs are situated in those with the highest death tolls and destruction, many villagers are still facing many difficulties.

Local private donors are slowly becoming weary. Because it is now the rainy season, roads are damaged by the rain and it is becoming increasingly inconvenient and dangerous to travel. There is news that motorboats are sinking while crossing rivers because of the strong wind and heavy rain. The native villagers are facing difficulties to go to the cities to get the food supply; students are facing difficulties to cross the rivers and streams to get to the villages where their schools are situated; those who are ill are facing difficulties to get medical treatment in the cities. The farmers need tractors, seeding paddy, diesel, fertilizers and insecticides. Because the fishermen don't have boats or fishing nets, they are jobless even though they live near the rivers and streams abundant with fish, shrimps and crabs. Pregnant women, lactating mothers and many children are malnourished.

On 19<sup>th</sup> May, Christian denominations across Myanmar formed *Myanmar Christian Coalition for Cyclone Relief* to engage in relief work. On behalf of the millions of villagers in need, I would like to invite you to help with the following things:

**- Food**

£2.50 a month would keep someone from starvation. £5 would enable them to have some nutritious diet.

**- Transportation**

Providing 1 boat to a village would make transportation for food supplies, ferrying children to school, selling local products in the city, taking patients to the city for medical treatment etc significantly easier. The cost of a motorboat is £1,400.

**- Livelihood**

- A fisherman needs a boat and a set of nets to resume his work. They cost about £175 to £275.

- For a farmer to resume his work, he needs a team of oxen/cows or a hand tractor, plus seeding paddy and diesel which all would cost about £525.

**- Shelter**

£150 could help a family to live in a bamboo hut which would protect them from heavy rain and strong wind.

**- Education**

- To employ teachers in villages, a primary school teacher needs a salary of £12.50 and a middle school teacher needs £20.

- To support a child already enrolled in school, £5 would provide stationery for the whole school year.

- A blackboard costs £5.

- School furniture for a student costs £5.

**- Microfinance**

Small grocery store, trading, sewing etc needs capital of £75 - £150 to rehabilitate.

**- Business Owner**

For the business owners to rehabilitate –

Rice factory owner: £5,000

Fish/Prawn owner: £5,000

Motorboat Transportation: £5,000

These business owners promise that they will be able to give back all the capital loaned within 2 years.

**The following has been provided so far:**

25 tractors to farmers; 40 boats and 100 nets to fishermen; school kits and stationery to several thousand school children; nursery aid to about 400 children and the nursery schools; monk kits for 50 monks; hundreds of baby kits to pregnant women; rice bags to thousands of villagers; vegetable seed, paddy seed, diesel and fertilizers to many farmers.

With great appreciation for your prayers and partnerships!

Aung and 'Charity'