Cyclone Komen Early Recovery Assessment, Rakhine State

Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U and Minbya townships | August 2015

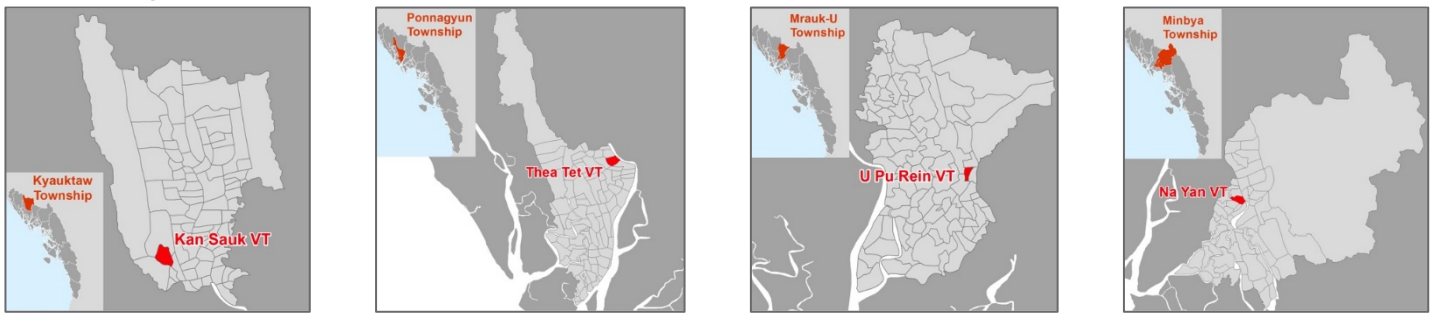
Introduction

In August 2015 REACH conducted a rapid early recovery assessment in northern Rakhine state in collaboration with Swanyee Development Foundation, UNDP and IOM. The assessment was launched to address a lack of information specifically pertinent to early recovery programming, particularly household-level data, in the direct aftermath of Cyclone Komen, which struck the region on 30-31 August 2015. The assessment was conducted to support UNDP and other members of the Rakhine state early recovery network, and aims to inform the prioritisation and development of early recovery programming after the cyclone by identifying communities' capacity to respond to and recover from the cyclone, their vulnerability to future shocks, and main entry points for interventions. This summary document should be read in conjunction with Early Recovery factsheets for each of the village tracts (VTs) assessed.

Methodology

The assessment took a "snapshot" of one village tract per township in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U, and Minbya townships. Village tracts (VTs) were selected to be indicative of other cyclone-hit communities in each township in order to identify key broad trends in the affected area. Each snapshot involved a survey of a random sample of households within each VT, providing household-level data that is statistically representative of the population of each VT at 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error. Surveys were combined with key informant interviews (KIIs) with village administrators to provide information on community-level infrastructure and socio-environmental context. Data collection took place from 11-21 August. A total of 334 household interviews were conducted across 17 villages within the 5 VTs, of which 48% respondents were male and 52% were female. These were accompanied by 17 KIIs. The Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs contained only Rakhine communities, while the Mrauk-U and Minbya VTs contained both Rakhine and Muslim communities (the Mrauk-U VT was also a site of internal displacement prior to the cyclone).

Assessed village tracts



Key Findings

Livelihoods

The assessed VTs displayed two distinct livelihood profiles. **Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs were both largely dependent on farming for a primary income, but with a high level of diversity of secondary income sources** – in Kyauktaw VT 87% of HHs reported a second income source (mainly casual labour, winter crop farming and livestock rearing) and 76% reported a third, while in Ponnagyun these figures were 82% and 51% respectively. By contrast, **Mrauk-U and Minbya VTs were dependent on a mix of farming and casual labour for a primary income, and displayed a lower level of income diversification** – in Mrauk-U VT 76% of HHs reported a second income source (mainly casual labour and winter crop) and 17% reported a third, while in Minbya these figures were 26% and 1% respectively. This lack of income diversification may indicate a higher level of vulnerability to future shocks in Mrauk-U and Minbya VTs.

Paddy Farming

Paddy access was more widespread in the Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs (where 85% and 77% of HHs reported paddy access) compared to Mrauk-U and Minbya (where only 38% and 39% reported access). **In all villages assessed, almost all paddy land had been flooded and crops destroyed. At least 50% of farmers reported having some access to paddy seed for replanting in all VTs**, and almost all farmers with access to seed had started re-planting. However, this was reportedly poorer-quality seed drawn largely from farmers' own stocks of grain, and being broadcast directly onto flooded land rather than planted onto re-ploughed land. **This suggests that even in re-planted areas, expected yields will likely be significantly reduced from pre-flood levels.**

Livestock

Most commonly reported livestock owned were chickens, with 80-90% of HHs owning across all VTs. **On average, HHs with chickens lost between 55% and 74% of their flock** depending on VT assessed. Ownership of cows or buffaloes was higher in Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs (74% and 60% reporting ownership) and lower in Mrauk-U and Minbya (43% and 41%). Herd loss was highest in the Kyauktaw VT, where HHs lost an average of 69% of their herd, and relatively low in other VTs, where HHs lost 15-23% of their herd.

Food Security

Food stocks were substantially lower in the Mrauk-U and Minbya VTs, where only 11% and 14% of HHs respectively reported having any stocks. By contrast, in the Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs 62% and 56% of HHs reported some level of food stocks. **HHs were dependent on purchasing food in the market for an average of around two-thirds of their food needs in Mrauk-U, Minbya and Ponnagyun.** In Kyauktaw this figure was lower, at just under half.

Coping Strategies

The three most common coping strategies reported as currently in use by HHs were **taking loans** (reported by 25% of HHs in the Kyauktaw VT, up to 57% of HHs in the Minbya VT), **buying food on credit** (reported by 25% of HHs in the Ponnagyun VT up to 46% in Minbya and Mrauk-U), and **reducing spending on basic goods** (reported by 25% of HHs in the Mrauk-U VT to 40% in Kyauktaw). **Across all VTs, the primary coping strategy anticipated in 3 months' time if no help was received was taking on more debt** (anticipated by 38% of HHs in Ponnagyun up to 73% in Minbya). More severely negative coping strategies such as selling off land or engaging in demeaning or dangerous work were reported by between 2-5% of HHs across all VTs.

Across all VTs, most HHs had debts while very few had savings. The proportion of HHs reporting having debts ranged from 78% (Kyauktaw) to 93% (Mrauk-U), while the proportion reporting having savings ranged from 7% (Minbya) to only 12% (Ponnagyun). **Average reported debt levels were around 300,000 Myanmar Kyat** (235 USD) in all VTs except Ponnagyun, where they were much higher at 750,000 Myanmar Kyat (587 USD). Government banks were the most common lender in Ponnagyun in Kyauktaw, whereas they were not reported as a lender in Mrauk-U and Minbya.

Shelter & NFIs

HHs reporting destroyed shelters ranged between 9% (Minbya) and 22% (Mrauk-U). The proportion of HHs reporting at least some level of shelter damage (either light, heavy, or total) ranged from 46% in Minbya and 75% in Mrauk-U. The proportion of HHs reporting at least half of their household items damaged ranged from 20% in Kyauktaw to 50% in Mrauk-U. Key informants indicated that villagers had since worked together to repair the majority of destroyed shelters in each village

Sanitation

In all VTs, the proportion of HHs reporting no access to sanitation facilities increased by at least 13 percentage points. HHs reporting no access to sanitation facilities prior to the cyclone ranged from 23% (Mrauk-U) to 49% (Kyauktaw). After the cyclone, these figures ranged from 46% (Mrauk-U) to 62% (Kyauktaw).

Education

Education was the least obviously affected of all sectors covered by this assessment. HHs reporting children attending primary school saw a drop in attendance of between 0 (Mrauk-U) and 14 (Ponnagyun) percentage points compared to pre-cyclone levels. Reported drops in middle and secondary attendance were negligible.

Reported Needs

The most commonly reported immediate need across all VTs was food, reported by 73% of HHs in Minbya up to 90% of HHs in Mrauk-U. Second and third needs varied according to VT, but in all cases included access to clean water, access to healthcare, and repairing farmland. Notably, these priority needs did not change substantially when HHs were asked to anticipate their needs after 3 months.

Conclusion

A number of key trends emerge from this assessment. First, it is clear that food security and livelihoods are already and are likely to remain the most urgent gaps following flooding. Farming communities have had their paddy destroyed and, even if replanting, can expect well below-average yields. Damage to secondary productive assets such as livestock is also common. Substantial numbers of households already have no food stocks, and in many cases are dependent on potentially fluctuating market prices to meet the majority of their food needs. The majority of households are also already in debt, and many anticipate taking on more to cope with the immediate and prolonged impacts of the flooding. **All of the above points to an overall drop in household livelihood security, and a weakened ability to withstand future shocks.**

Second, it appears that sanitation is an important and so far potentially overlooked need. While water supplies are already a major focus of emergency response efforts to date, less attention has been paid to access to sanitation, which has seen a major drop in the wake of the flooding across all assessed VTs.

Finally, the apparent difference in vulnerability profile between the relatively less-vulnerable Kyauktaw and Ponnagyun VTs on the one hand, and the more vulnerable Mrauk-U and Minbya VTs on the other suggests a need for more comprehensive data at township level to better target and prioritise early recovery activities. In addition, it points to a need for a better qualitative understanding of how cyclone impacts may have interacted with displacement status and other pre-existing vulnerabilities.