



Alekyun – Middle Island – West Ayeyarwaddy Delta

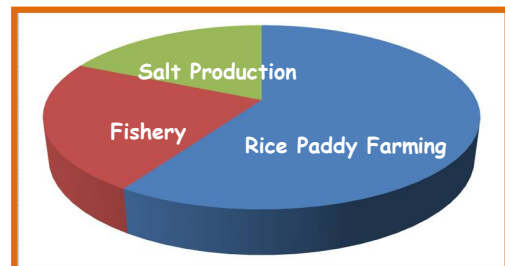
Soon after our first survey team's return from the West Ayeyarwaddy Delta after their initial expedition from 11th to 14th May, the CNRR Relief and Recovery work focused on Alekyun (Middle Island), close to where Cyclone Nargis made landfall across Cape Negrais with such devastating consequences on the night of May 2nd and during the day of 3rd May, 2008.

Alekyun is situated in the southwest of Myanmar below Yangon in the Western Ayeyarwaddy Delta in Ngapudaw Township, adjacent to Hainggyi Island. The tributaries of the Ayeyarwaddy, the Pathein River (aka Ngawun River) form the western and the Thet-Ket-Thaung River, the eastern boundary. Both rivers flow into the Gulf of Martaban in the Bay of Bengal.

Traditionally, Alekyun's population is mainly employed in rice production, fishing and salt farming, and the highest income earners on the island are the salt industry owners.

Employment in the Delta:

- Rice Paddy Farming: 60 to 65%
- Fishery: 20 to 25%
- Salt Production: 15 to 20%



Access / Transport:

Travel to Alekyun is only possible by boat, either on the regular day-river ferry or by chartered boat, and navigation is through the shallow deltaic waterways south of Pathein, where there are strong tides, especially in the southerly parts of the Delta.

Access to the Delta from Yangon, Myanmar's entry city:

- 105 miles by road from Yangon to Pathein, which takes 4~5 hours.
- 50+ miles by waterways from Pathein to Magyipin 6~8 hours.
- From Magyipin to the rest of the Island, travel is by small boat.
- Using the regular ferry which leaves Pathein early morning and arrives at Magyipin circa





3:00 pm. The ferries overnight in Magyipin leaving at 11:00 am to return to Pathein where these arrive at 5:00 pm. Two types of ferry operates a 100 seater and a larger

One of our Team's flat-bottomed outboard river-boats takes team members to a local river-ferry boat - Waterways are the sole means of mobility around Alekyun



A brief description of the Alekyun community after Cyclone Nargis:

Ethnicity : Majority is Bamar

Religion : Buddhism with a minority of other religions

Alekyun lies adjacent to where Cyclone Nargis made landfall at 2pm on May 2nd over Cape Negrais and Haingyi Island. As a result, the loss of life on Alekyun was severe and the devastation catastrophic. Mortality was at its highest in the south and in the coastal villages of Alekyun, especially on the eastern coastline, because the impact of the Cyclone was significantly compounded by accompanying “tsunami”. However, no official figures for loss of life or damage are as yet available.

However, an additional and significant secondary factor causing loss of life is believed to be in the timing of the storm: it arrived over Alekyun just before nightfall. The cyclone took five hours to cross over the island, with the last three hours being in darkness, when most victims who had survived the initial force of the cyclone, are subsequently believed to have died.



Cyclone destruction still evident all over the Delta

Accurate statistics in general are hampered firstly because of the inaccessibility of the Delta area and secondly, the lack of availability of accurate demographic





data for certain economic sectors prior to the Cyclone. For example, the salt production workforce typically includes many temporary migrants from outside the Delta. As Cyclone Nargis occurred at the critical end of season for “salt farming”, accurate data on mortality rates among the temporary workers are difficult, if not virtually impossible, to obtain.

Food:

Following Cyclone Nargis up to the present, Alekyun’s displaced villagers, like many others in the Delta, are partially dependant on rice and other foodstuffs donated by various Governmental entities, INGO’s (International NGO’s) and local NGO’s. In addition, local private companies and individuals continue to provide significant support. The rice in storage is estimated to be sufficient for a month or so. No reliable information on other food items is currently available. The probability of food shortages in the coming months is high, if this rice-growing season is missed in full or in part – Alekyun produces only one rice crop annually.

Water

Drinking Water:

During the “rainy season” from May to October, the Alekyun community is mainly dependent on rainwater, stored in ground level ponds and concrete storage tanks, and in large earthenware pots and additional by tube wells. Many ponds were heavily contaminated by seawater during the Cyclone Nargis tsunami, and the bulk of the water pots were destroyed. There is a need to complete cleaning of ponds and tanks and/or rebuilding new ponds in new locations. Fortunately, heavy rainfall helps. CNRR has been donating diesel to enable salt producers’ pumps to be used to clean ponds.



Many children have been orphaned by Cyclone Nargis

In addition, water wells are used all year round in some places. These are particularly crucial during the hot, dry months. Again, salt-water contamination and well destruction highlight the urgency for repair and/or digging of new wells before the dry summer season starts next October.





substantial repairs, much of it to so extensive that re-building would be more effective.

Community:

Cyclone Nargis' survivors on Alekyun are keen to resume their normal lives. CNRR believes the Alekyun community possesses sufficient human, natural and social capital for a successful and meaningful recovery. Comprehensive assistance should lead to an effective recovery of the Alekyun community after the tragic events of Cyclone Nargis.

Urgent Needs Assessment and Where CNRR Hopes to Assist:

CNRR continues to work with its partners and the Alekyun community to provide community healthcare, carry out repairs of schools and hospitals as well as in overall relief. Nevertheless, long term projects are needed: CNRR proposes to commence comprehensive recovery projects in focused areas:

1. Housing and recovery of personal property in order to re-establish a safe family environment i.e. a house for each household.
2. Livelihood: Capital and equipment to restart earnings capacity:
 - a. For rice paddy farming: rice seeds, buffalos (preferred) and tractors
 - b. For fishermen: boats and nets
 - c. Salt production: the exact acreage affected by continued flooding as well as the impact on the harvesting ability is unknown. However, the local Alekyun people are optimistic about the industry's long-term prospects.Provision of capital for recovery projects could take the form of a “micro-financing” type scheme to kick-start economic growth.
3. Health care system: The work of the PHIH medical teams is on-going, now with assistance from Malteser. Short term on-going repairs (especially to roofs) and use of temporary structures such as CNRR's pre-fabricated buildings, should be supplemented by longer term re-building.
4. Education: Children need to return to school as a top priority CNRR is now assisting with fast track, short-term repairs and erecting school tents provided by Save the Children; these should be supplemented by longer term re-building.
5. Community infrastructure: Jetties, bridges and roads have to be re-built. Electricity and improved water supplies and sanitation should be provided.





6. Storm Shelters: in future, Delta village communities should have ready access to storm resistant shelters to protect the population.

“We may not be able to protect houses against future storms, but our aim is to save lives”



These photographs show two types of structures our Teams are building on Alekyun to provide immediate shelter: A traditional timber-framed structure on the left, and a prefabricated building on the right, which are being used as Medical Centres and as temporary school buildings.

In working with the local community to re-build Delta villages devastated by Cyclone Nargis, it is CNRR's intention to retain the best attributes of the traditional Delta lifestyle. In addition, where feasible, CNRR proposes to seize the opportunity presented by starting afresh after the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, to provide a boost to rural living standards and to adopt environmentally sustainable concepts as core principles.

These improvement will include provision of solar panels for an individual light in every house, and for pumping water to overhead tanks to pipe of pre-determined literage of water to a tap within each house via gravity-feed; corrugated aluzinc roofs; individual toilet facilities and septic pit for every house; and raised, pathways for all-weathers access to homes.

The Cape Negrals Relief and Recovery team stands ready and willing to consider proposals and partnerships and co-operation in any of the areas of need or funding to enable a return to normal life in Alekyun.

