

# Youth volunteers leading disaster response in Myanmar

## Impact Story



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*Myanmar is affected by a variety of natural disasters. By training youth leaders, ADPC builds community capacity and spreads awareness of disaster risk reduction at the local level.*

**Yangon, Myanmar** – Natural disasters have wreaked havoc in Myanmar causing extreme damage and losses while destroying the livelihoods of people across the country. One of the most notable disasters in recent history was Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which greatly affected local communities. It was evident that even though Myanmar has practiced disaster management efforts, more needed to be done to engage and build the capacity of local communities.

Officials from the Relief and Resettlement Department of Myanmar under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, devised a plan to better engage the community level by training youth volunteers. These volunteers would help disseminate information at the local level and assist the Relief and Resettlement Department officials by participating in community discussions that raise awareness on disasters.

The youth began to play a key role in Myanmar by improving local level engagement and ensuring there would always be knowledge on disaster risk reduction within the community.

### Improved capacity pays off

When a disaster occurs, destroyed infrastructure can sometimes delay the arrival of outside help for days. The trained youth volunteers will be able to help fellow community members in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, and they also have the task of building the community's capacity to take measures to mitigate the impact of future hazards.

The volunteers are trained using the materials and methods from the Relief and Resettlement Department's Disaster Management Course.



## Disaster Management training since 1977

The Disaster Management Course has been a part of Myanmar's disaster risk reduction strategy since 1977. Its primary goal is to ensure civil servants within the country are prepared for disasters and know how to act if one occurs.

The course went through major reforms between 2011–2012 to provide a more up-to-date and uniform platform for disaster risk reduction efforts and to better engage the community level. The remodeling process built off the successes of previous efforts by selecting the most important lessons and creating a consistent agenda for the trainers under all government departments to follow.

The initiative to remodel the training course was coordinated by CARE Myanmar with technical support from Asian Disaster Preparedness Center. The technical working group comprised of representatives from a number of agencies and departments in Myanmar, including ActionAid Myanmar, UN-Habitat, UNDP Myanmar, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Myanmar Engineering Society, Myanmar Red Cross Society, Oxfam, and World Vision.



### Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

SM Tower, 24th Floor 979/69 Paholyothin Road, Samsen Nai, Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand  
Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 Fax: +66 2 298 0012 E-mail: [adpc@adpc.net](mailto:adpc@adpc.net) Website: [www.adpc.net](http://www.adpc.net)



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*The training methods have proven effective and volunteers are already making a difference. When a flash flood occurred, one of the volunteers knew who to contact for direction and assistance.*

“The disaster management course gave us more knowledge on the nature of disasters, disaster prevention, and response, and a greater understanding of disaster risk management. I’d like to suggest this training be conducted in every township and district level, even if there can only be community discussions, because it’s really necessary and effective for the people of Myanmar,” states U Kyi Thar, Director and Head of Yangon Region at the Relief and Resettlement Department.

### **Youth training community members**

Out of the 50 participants engaged in each community’s youth training, five to ten are selected to become trainers. The Relief and Resettlement Department officials together with the selected youth trainers then conduct training for all community members to disseminate disaster risk reduction information. The youth volunteers’ presence in the community will help ensure that the community members’ awareness of disaster preparedness will remain consistent even after a community training has ended.

The youth participants are selected for the disaster management course via invitation by the General Administration Department, which acts as the administrative party at the district, township and state level. For many volunteers, their interest in disaster risk reduction doesn’t spark until after the program begins.

“Initially, some of the youth volunteers weren’t very interested in the course, but after they attended the training and increased their knowledge on disasters and response methods, they became very interested, especially during the one-day field trip to a disaster-affected area,” says Chaw Su Soe, participant of the training of trainers program organized as part of the Disaster Management Course.

The training course customized for the youth focuses mainly on practical examples and hands-on exercises.

“We were instructed by disaster risk reduction officials to conduct the training using common language and group work instead of lectures. The youth volunteers really enjoyed this approach and stayed involved throughout the training,” said Daw Kay Thwe Win, one of the organizers of the training.



## A national disaster management training center opened in Hinthada

Myanmar’s first national disaster management training center was opened in the city of Hinthada in the Ayerwaddy Region in December 2015.

The training center will provide a standard location for countrywide capacity building on disaster risk management. Community participants and government officials will be provided with the necessary resources to fully commit to the training.

The massive project resulted in a complex with multiple classrooms and separate housing facilities to accommodate students and trainers during long-term training courses.

The topics of the training courses provided at the center will vary from awareness raising to skill development, and the course duration will be from one week to three months depending on the topic.



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Community volunteers who have been trained in disaster risk management can assist the Relief and Resettlement Department of Myanmar to more effectively and efficiently prepare the communities for disasters and assist with relief efforts.

## Youth volunteers helped mitigate the impact of a flash flood

The training methods have proven effective and volunteers are already making a difference. When a flash flood occurred, one of the volunteers knew who to contact for direction and assistance.

“Training participants were told to inform the Relief and Resettlement Department if there is a disaster. During one of the training courses there was a flash flood in the township and they knew to contact the department for support. They wouldn’t have known who to contact without the training,” added Ms. Daw Kay Thwe Win, training volunteer.

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By: Don Tartaglione



## Trained to help those in need

The Relief and Resettlement Department is responsible for a variety of tasks and the youth volunteers can help with those related to disasters.

The department’s activities include:

1. Supporting the distribution of food, water, shelter, and medicine for the people affected by a disaster.
2. Locating fishermen lost at sea during a storm and assisting them in getting back home.
3. Supporting the resettlement of internally displaced people during social or armed conflicts.
4. Providing food security for people who have been affected by drought or pests, or any disasters that may affect their crops and other food sources.
5. Raising national disaster awareness, disseminating information, and conducting training for government officials and community members on disaster risk reduction.

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SM Tower, 24th Floor 979/69 Paholyothin Road, Samsen Nai, Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand  
Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 Fax: +66 2 298 0012 E-mail: [adpc@adpc.net](mailto:adpc@adpc.net) Website: [www.adpc.net](http://www.adpc.net)



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