

Myanmar: Information Note¹

I. BACKGROUND

1. As of 24 June, the official death toll from tropical cyclone Nargis stood at 84,537 with another 53,836 people still unaccounted for some two months after the storm. The United Nations (UN) estimates that the storm has severely impacted 2.4 million people or more than a third of all people living in the affected area.

II. POST-NARGIS JOINT ASSESSMENT (PONJA)

2. To allow rapid and systematic assessment of recovery needs, the Tripartite Core Group (TCG)² launched a joint needs assessment with fieldwork starting on 3 June 2008. The assessment (PONJA) covers relief and early and longer term recovery needs. The study was a joint effort of the Government of the Union of Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the UN.

3. The UN coordinated the assessment of relief and early recovery needs, employing a village tract assessment methodology that deployed over 250 volunteers to cover the affected areas and collect primary data. The volunteers collected data on post-disaster circumstances and immediate needs for food, shelter, medicine, and early livelihood recovery.

4. The ASEAN Secretariat coordinated the assessment of longer term recovery needs, employing a methodology originally developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the early 1970s. The exercise estimated the value of damaged or destroyed assets and the losses in income arising from the cyclone, using secondary data supplemented by field work. The estimates of the damages provided a basis for calculating recovery needs, while the estimates of losses provided a measure of the fall in economic activity and in household incomes resulting from the cyclone. The World Bank and ADB provided staff to support the ASEAN Secretariat in this exercise. The World Bank deployed about 30 staff; ADB deployed a further 9 staff.

5. The Government was closely involved throughout the PONJA exercise. More than 50 officials from some 18 ministries supported the assessments and report writing. The Government also eased access to the affected areas and provided transport and vital communications equipment.

III. PONJA: PROCESS

6. The PONJA exercise has been remarkable, most notably in successfully bringing together a wide range of people and institutions, working together toward a common purpose, within a short span of time, under difficult circumstances. International experts provided training for government officials in the damage and loss assessment (DALA) methodology. These officials were then able to provide the needed data to the international experts working with them. Starting from this picture, the teams were able to gather and verify information across a wide range of sectors and make credible assessments of the tragedy. With the assessments

¹ This is the third in a series of information notes providing updates on the situation in Myanmar following cyclone Nargis which made landfall in the Irrawaddy delta region on 3 May 2008.

² The Tripartite Core Group is the institutional mechanism formed to coordinate, facilitate, and monitor the flow of international assistance to the country in the wake of the cyclone and consists of representatives from the Government of the Union of Myanmar, the United Nations, and the ASEAN Secretariat.

concluded, the UN is setting up coordination and distribution hubs in selected townships in the affected areas for the recovery efforts.

IV. PONJA: INITIAL FINDINGS AND SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

7. The PONJA Report was publicly released at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore on 21 July 2008.

8. The report showed that the impact of the cyclone on the economy and people has been severe even compared to similar disasters in other countries. This is due in part to the timing of the event: just after the harvest of the summer paddy (large stores of paddy and rice were lost) and right before planting season for the monsoon paddy crop (large scale loss of farmers lives and destruction of inputs will lower yields from the next crop). This magnified economic losses and the impact on households in an area that had not experienced such a disaster in over 100 years. Because this region of the country had not experienced a storm like this one in living memory was one reason that there was little institutional capacity for disaster management and relief.

9. The PONJA report suggests that recovery needs are significant and span all sectors. In the rural areas there was widespread destruction of primary health and education facilities. The health situation has further worsened because the wind and water destroyed sanitation facilities and contaminated water supplies. The cyclone destroyed or damaged an estimated 800,000 homes, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Although many people in the affected areas have quickly rebuilt their homes, materials and construction techniques employed have often been makeshift offering little or no protection to further storms. The devastation among farmers and fishermen has had a significant follow-on effect in other sectors, depressing commerce and industry. Restoring livelihoods and stabilizing of incomes will call for considerable support over the next few years.

10. The PONJA findings support the earlier UN work that the scale of the disaster, both loss of life and destruction of assets, will mean that recovery will call for significant and sustained effort over several years. In the near term, the UN estimates that almost a million persons will continue to need food and other forms of help until the November harvest, with 300,000 needing continued support through next year. Based on findings from the assessment, the UN launched an appeal on 10 July 2008 for \$482 million to support ongoing humanitarian and early recovery work until April 2009.