

# OXFAM IN MYANMAR



OXFAM

Oxfam in Myanmar is working with local organisations to reduce poverty, inequality and meet the humanitarian needs of over 450,000 people across Myanmar, in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Ayeyarwaddy, Mon, Kayin, Kayah, and Yangon.

## WHO IS OXFAM?

Oxfam is a confederation of 20 affiliates working in over 90 countries around the world towards the vision of “A Just World without Poverty”, and is one of the world’s leading humanitarian and development agencies. Oxfam believes that achieving change can only happen through working in partnership with others. In Myanmar, Oxfam has been working with communities, local NGOs, Government and Ethnic Administrations since the 1990s to overcome poverty and suffering.



## COUNTRY SITUATION

Myanmar is the second biggest country in South East Asia, bordering five countries and with a population of over 50 million. Although it is rich in resources, over twenty per cent of the population still live below the poverty line. Myanmar is currently undergoing a major political transition and reform process which is changing the economic and political face of the country. Most people work in agriculture but industrialization is rapid and there is a growing manufacturing industry – which both offers opportunities and poses threats. Despite speedy economic change, Myanmar is still characterized by a high prevalence of natural disasters and multiple, protracted conflicts, including a major refugee crisis which in 2017 saw an outpouring of over 650,000

refugees from Rakhine State over the border into Bangladesh. Inside Myanmar, over 240,000 people are displaced in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan and the South-East as a result of humanitarian emergencies, conflict and disasters. There are also 100,000 Myanmar refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border who have fled from conflict in the South-East of the country.

**POPULATION REACHED\*** (annual average)

**450,000**

## HOW OXFAM IS HELPING

In Myanmar, Oxfam works to reduce poverty and inequality through promoting the power of women and men to harness the benefits of political reform and economic development. This involves working with people to develop their economic livelihoods and support them to hold decision makers to account so that policies protect their rights and reduce inequality and poverty for all. It also means working with both government to strengthen its capacity to be more accountable and responsive to peoples’ needs, and with the private sector to be more accountable and transparent to communities and meet their human rights obligations. Humanitarian response is also central to Oxfam’s work in Myanmar: in Kachin and Rakhine, where hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by conflict, Oxfam works with local and national Myanmar organisations as well as directly with populations, to meet the humanitarian needs of affected people. As Myanmar is at severe threat from natural disasters and suffers from protracted humanitarian emergencies, Oxfam is also working with community leaders, in particular women, to build their resilience and prepare for the impact of disasters.



## RIGHTS TO LAND AND WATER



Land rights are central to the lives of tens of millions of rural people in Myanmar. For many people land is a critical asset yet peoples' rights to land in Myanmar are often weak or not even recognised: land grabs are common, many cannot easily register their land legally, and women face particular difficulties with claiming their land rights. With investment on the rise, there is a growing demand for land across the country. Oxfam is working with Metta Development Foundation, and local civil society organisations Kachin Conservation Working Group and Alin Bannmaw Local Development Foundation, to help protect the land rights of women, men and communities in uplands Kachin and Shan as well as working with Myanmar organisations at the national level

to strengthen the policies and laws that help secure peoples' rights.

Like land, access to water is a central issue for economic development in Myanmar. Major rivers such as the Salween and the Ayeyarwaddy run through the heart of country, supporting thousands of small communities that depend on them for their water and livelihoods. Oxfam is working with civil society, private sector and Government actors to strengthen the role of communities in governance of river water resources, and through partners like KESAN, Kalyana Mitta Foundation and International Rivers, build the capacity of communities to engage with decision makers on the development of hydropower projects. Hydropower projects often overlook the impacts they will have on communities, and on women in particular, so Oxfam is working with local organisations to ensure developers, Government and Ethnic Administrations address their impacts fully.

## RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

The private sector plays an increasingly important role in the lives of Myanmar people. But business investments can have both positive and negative impacts. Local communities can experience loss of livelihoods, land and restricted access to natural resources like water and forests. On the other hand, businesses can contribute to economic growth and provide new employment opportunities.

Oxfam works across Myanmar to improve how investment is benefitting communities. Together with our partners Scholar Institute and the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), we are supporting specific communities whose lives and livelihoods are expected to be heavily impacted by the development of investments including cement plants in Kayah and Kayin States, coal power plant development in Shan State, through acquisition of agricultural land in Magwe and through development of a Special Economic Zone in Kyauk Phyu, Rakhine State. Where investments like these are being developed, Oxfam and its partners work closely with local communities to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities that will come with the investments, and build accountability and transparency of how decisions about investments are made, to help ensure those communities have sustainable livelihoods now and into the future.



Equally important for how investment happens are the laws, rules and policies governing how investment is promoted and how companies behave. Oxfam is working with Government, Ethnic Administrations, the private sector and civil society organisations to help improve legal frameworks for how investment happens, and strengthen policies, such as the Myanmar Agriculture Development Strategy, to ensure they deliver for the majority not just the few.

## PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS



On paper, women in Myanmar are equal to men, but in reality, they face real discrimination. Less than ten percent of seats in parliament are held by women and research by Oxfam shows that women encounter enormous barriers to taking on leadership roles. Oxfam is working with local organisations and local government to change public perceptions about the value and legitimacy of women's leadership and to help duty bearers – such as Government – make sure women's voices are given space within important local planning processes.

Women's leadership training has proven a successful way of promoting women's rights across all walks of life, so across the country, Oxfam is providing leadership training to women

in Government and civil society as well as women community leaders. This helps to develop women's leadership capacity – formally, to stand for and hold elected office and build the skills needed to influence decision making by Governments and Ethnic Administrations, and informally, to develop their community leadership skills – activities which help to break the existing barriers that prevent women from participating in public life. Oxfam is also working with local partners, Members of Parliament and Government departments to embed models of gender budgeting – budget processes which take into account women's views and reflect the spending needs which are most important for them and their families. Including the needs and views of women in Government budgets often results in more spending on key services such as health and education.

## HOLDING DECISION MAKERS TO ACCOUNT

States have a responsibility to the public to be accountable, transparent and deliver basic services. This means that deepening accountability of decision makers, and holding Government and other duty bearers to account for how they spend budgets is key for democracy. Oxfam and local partners Scholar Institute and Spectrum are working in Ayeyarwaddy, Kachin, Kayah and Rakhine to support communities to understand and monitor Government budgets and demand greater participation and accountability in decision making. This gives people a chance to talk to the Government about what their needs are. Public hearing forums held in Ayeyarwaddy have allowed the public to raise their concerns on Government decisions, and resulted in land which was confiscated being returned to communities, and maternity fees at local hospitals cancelled. In Mon State, Oxfam works with UN Development Programme to support Government and Ethnic Administrations, communities and civil society to ensure that local level plans and budgets better reflect the needs of local communities.



Because budgets are such powerful tools for meeting the needs of a population, at the national level, Oxfam is working with civil society organisations and government towards more inclusive and transparent national budgets and stronger policies that help to improve how decisions affecting peoples' lives are made.

## RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES



Oxfam is providing emergency relief to over 100,000 people affected by conflict or the impact of disasters across Myanmar. Oxfam works with Government and non-governmental organisations to provide humanitarian assistance by building the capacity of communities and local organisations to deliver emergency relief, and where there is no other way to meet humanitarian need, by delivering relief directly to affected communities. In Rakhine, Oxfam is leading a consortium delivering safe water and sanitation directly to 97,000

people displaced by conflict and living in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In Kachin, Oxfam works with local partners such as the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), to provide food and cash assistance to those displaced by conflict in the State, who are unable to access livelihood opportunities. Working through local partners in Kachin enables Oxfam to strengthen the capacity of local organisations to deliver their own emergency relief and to reach remote communities that are in non-government controlled areas that international aid agencies cannot access.

## RESILIENCE & DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Myanmar is one of the most disaster risk prone countries in the world. Each year, people in Myanmar continue to be at risk of cyclones and flooding as well as droughts in the central Dry Zone of the country. Ongoing conflicts in Kachin and Rakhine also have serious consequences for communities' livelihoods and ability to access vital services like health and education. Building people's resilience is core to reducing the impact of conflict or disasters when they occur. To do this, Oxfam integrates resilience and disaster risk reduction into our work in Myanmar through supporting communities and local organisations to be better prepared to respond to acute disasters and conflicts. In Rakhine Oxfam is working directly

with local partner CERA and communities to better understand the risks posed by conflict and natural disasters, and develop mitigation and resilience strategies to reduce these risks – informed and led by the people themselves. The role of women in mitigating disasters and conflict has proven to be critical. Women are more likely to suffer a heavy impact from disasters and conflict when they occur, but they are often excluded from initiatives that help people prepare for these events. Core to Oxfam and partners' work is supporting the role of women leaders within village resilience and response planning for natural disasters and conflict.

## PROMOTION OF DURABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Inclusive, sustainable peace is essential if people are to live free from fear of the multiple and protracted ethnic conflicts. Whilst support for a peace process is vital at local, national and international levels, communities must also be better equipped to make the most of development opportunities and advocate for their needs and rights to Government and Ethnic Administrations. In Kachin, Oxfam is working in a consortium of international aid agencies and local organisations to support communities in achieving peace and lasting, sustainable development. Through an integrated approach which recognises the diverse needs of conflict-affected communities, the programme uses activities such as peace dialogues, education, creation of livelihoods opportunities and raising the voice of women to support communities to be agents of change in the development of durable peace and equitable growth in Kachin.



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