



**“Knowledge for Life”  
International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) 2015**

**Report on media event, Yangon, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015  
“Local and Scientific Knowledge for Disaster Risk Reduction and  
Emergency Response”**

**Background**

The media event, organized under the umbrella of the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group by the Myanmar Consortium for Community Resilience with support from UNDP and with funding from the European Commission and the Prudence Foundation, had the following aims:

- To raise awareness about the importance of local and indigenous knowledge and practices for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and emergency response
- To share examples of how communities have used local and indigenous knowledge and practices for DRR and emergency response, including during the recent floods
- To highlight the benefits of combining local knowledge and practices with scientific information
- To communicate the importance of involving all members of society in DRR efforts

Over 100 participants attended the event, including journalists from print/online/broadcast media, school teachers and principals and members of the DRR Working Group (international/national/local NGOs and Civil Society Organisations). The outreach to journalists was undertaken with the expectation that they will produce content (print/online articles, broadcast footage) to communicate the event’s key messages and raise awareness amongst the wider general public.

**Panel speakers**

The event began with short presentations from seven panel speakers, including four community members from Ayeyarwaddy Delta, Rakhine and Chin States, one representative each from the Relief and Resettlement Department and the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology and one representative from an INGO. The speakers gave brief presentations from their communities/areas of work:

- **U Min Min Htun and U Aung Myo Naing (Rakhine State), U Ling Thang (Chin State) and Daw Moe Moe Than (Ayeyarwaddy Delta)** spoke about the local knowledge that they use in their communities to help predict weather patterns and oncoming hazards.



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Such knowledge includes the behavior of animals and birds, as well as the water levels and floral blooms of some plants and flowers, which can indicate good or bad rainy seasons ahead or an upcoming storm/cyclone. Daw Moe Moe Than also spoke about the increasing role that women in her community are taking in DRR and emergency response, and how there is a need to further increase the capacity of local communities to prepare for and respond to disasters

- **Daw Su Su Tun from the Relief and Resettlement Department (RRD)** spoke about the efforts of her department in supporting DRR at the local level, including through the training of more than 10,000 DRR Youth Volunteers. She also shared about RRD’s role in supporting public awareness on hazards and preparedness measures, and provided an update on the government’s efforts in response to the ongoing floods response and recovery.
- **Daw Nyein Nyein Naing from the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology (DMH)** presented on the ways in which DMH undertakes constant monitoring of weather patterns and potential hazards such as cyclones, through technological equipment in various locations across the country. She also highlighted the critical importance of making sure that such information – including in relation to early warning of approaching hazards like cyclones – can reach and be understood by communities at local level.
- **Mr Shihab Uddin Ahamad from ActionAid** spoke about the importance of recognizing that communities are the first responders in any disaster. Community members themselves have a lot of knowledge about their own environment, which has been passed down through the generations. He also shared stories from Thailand during the 2004 tsunami which showed how children who had learnt about indigenous knowledge through the national education system were able to recognize the signs of a tsunami coming (such as the receding tide) and were able to evacuate in good time. Mr Shihab also highlighted the important role the media can play in “demystifying” technical concepts and disseminating simple messages on hazards and disaster preparedness to communities. Lastly, he talked about the risk that many parts of Myanmar – but particularly urban centres including Yangon – face in relation to earthquakes.

### Questions from the audience

Following the speaker presentations, questions were invited from the audience. Audience members asked the following:

- From the scientific knowledge that is available, what disasters is Myanmar likely to face in the near future? How can we reduce this risk?





- Why, when so much has been achieved in relation to DRR in the years since Cyclone Nargis, did people seem so unprepared for this year's floods?
- How does the Myanmar Disaster Management Law compare to those of other countries?
- What is your assessment of the technological capacity of Myanmar to predict disasters?
- How correct is the local knowledge of communities and how widely accepted is it?

After answering the audience questions, the formal event was closed and journalists present were invited to further engage with and interview the panel speakers.

### Quotes from audience members



*“This was the first time I have seen collaboration between INGOs, government and community members together on a panel – this is new for me! It was interesting because we could hear about the strengths and weaknesses on DRR from all the different panel speakers. As a journalist it is my responsibility to report this information so I will write an article for our print publication. There should be more events like this for journalists” – Win Oo (left), Ayeyarwaddy News Journal*

*“This event was interesting because it raised awareness of the links between local and technical knowledge and it was also good to hear about the role of women in DRR and emergency response. I will report in the daily and weekly news” – Aye Myat, Myanmar Cable Network*



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## Photo report



U Aung Myo Naing from Rakhine gives the first of the panellist presentations



U Ling Thang from Chin State talks about the signs communities observe from birds and animals which indicate weather patterns or approaching hazards



Daw Moe Moe Than from Ayeyarwaddy Delta talks about the role of women in DRR and emergency response



Audience members listen as panel speakers present



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Daw Su Su Tun from the Relief and Resettlement Department presents



Mr Shihab Uddin Ahamad from ActionAid discusses the importance of recognising the value of local knowledge in DRR and emergency response



Daw Nyein Nyein Naing from the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology talks about the role of scientific knowledge in supporting early warning



Audience members ask questions to the panellists





Daw Su Su Tun from RRD is interviewed by journalists following the event



Daw Moe Moe Than from Ayeyarwaddy Delta gives an interview to journalists



School teachers and colleagues from Myanmar Red Cross Society also joined the event



Mr Shihab Uddin Ahamad (ActionAid) is interviewed



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