

# Private Sector and Humanitarian Relief in Myanmar



**A study of recent practices of business engagement in humanitarian relief to assess  
the potential, modalities and areas for future cooperation**

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## List of Acronyms

CPWG	Myanmar NGO Contingency Planning Working Group
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
KII	Key Informant Interview
MMRD	Myanmar Marketing Research & Development Ltd.
MPMEEA	Myanmar Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Entrepreneurs Association
MRCCI	Mandalay Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MSWRR	Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Aid
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RUMFCCI	Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry
SCiM	Save the Children in Myanmar
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPA	Serge Pun & Associates
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TEPM	Total Exploration & Production – Myanmar
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USD	United States Dollar (USD 1 = Myanmar kyats 830 in October 2010)
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Executive Summary

A number of global trends indicate that the private sector is increasingly engaging into humanitarian relief. Such business engagement was particularly important after the 2004 Asian tsunami. Partnerships between humanitarian actors such as United Nations (UN) agencies and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and companies and “meta-initiatives” aimed at promoting and coordinating these partnerships increasingly focus on the core competences of businesses rather than on traditional philanthropy.

Lately, Myanmar has been struck by a number of natural disasters, including cyclone Nargis in May 2008 whose impact on the Ayeyarwady Delta and surrounding regions was unprecedented in recent history. In October 2010, cyclone Giri affected Rakhine State in the Northwestern part of the country and in March 2011 an earthquake hit Eastern Shan State. Myanmar civil society organizations responded swiftly and substantially to these disasters, demonstrating their dynamism. Moreover, anecdotal evidence indicated that the private sector, which has grown tremendously since the introduction of market-oriented economic reforms after 1988, had also supported the relief operations.

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore a topic with little existing literature. A team of six researchers, using interview guidelines, conducted a total of 60 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) from the humanitarian and private sectors. Two high ranked officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), members of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RUMFCCI) and related business associations, staff of international and local humanitarian organizations and managers of local and international companies that contributed to humanitarian relief in the wake of recent disasters were interviewed. The focus of the research was on non profit engagement of businesses in relief, but commercial engagement was also explored marginally. There were limitations in terms of access to certain key respondents and to the depth of some data, yet the data collection and analysis was completed in about three months.

The research found that compassion towards fellow human beings as well as religious principles and attachment to one’s ethnic or geographic community ranked high in the **motivations** of business respondents to engage in relief. A number of companies, especially large scale domestic conglomerates, participated at the request of the State or the desire to please its civil servants. A few business respondents also displayed an understanding of and interest in CSR principles.

**Implementation** of assistance had been undertaken by businesses by themselves in many cases. However, cooperation with faith-based organizations, informal aid groups, NGOs, professional

associations and authorities were also frequent. **Sectors of intervention** were limited by the fact that most private companies provided in cash and in kind donations, rather than participated on the basis of their core competences. A few competence-based interventions in food, health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), logistics, education, shelter and agriculture were identified.

The **outcomes** of recent business engagement in relief are substantial yet difficult to quantify due to the absence of monitoring of inputs and outputs of such assistance, as well as to the limited accountability and transparency that can be found in Myanmar society in relation to donations. Still, it can be asserted that along civil society organizations and traditional humanitarian actors, the private sector contributed greatly to helping victims of recent natural disasters. After cyclone Nargis, it assisted with access to the Delta, an issue of particular importance in a context where humanitarian work was constrained for a few weeks by the reluctance of the government to grant access to the area to foreign relief workers. Moreover, cyclone Nargis especially incited some private sector actors to scale up their philanthropy and/or to professionalize their involvement in social work.

Beyond donations, few examples of **cross-sector cooperation** were identified. They took place mainly between the private sector and traditional welfare actors such as faith-based organizations and informal aid groups, in an organic manner due to well established trust, long term relations and social networks. Cross-sector partnerships are far from obvious by definition, and this is especially the case in a country like Myanmar where doubts about the agendas of the government, private sector and NGOs are numerous.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Trócaire initiates a **national level public private partnership in disaster response**, by promoting dialogue between the **RUMFCCI** and the **Myanmar NGO Contingency Planning Working Group (CPWG)**. Though challenging, such an initiative offers great and sustainable potential rewards. **Creating bridges between umbrella organizations is also a means to create partnerships between specific entities within them.** It is also recommended that Trócaire explores **explore cooperation with faith-based organizations** to increase their capacities at tapping in the core competencies of the private sector, and to improve their operating standards as well as those of their private partners.

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## 1. Background

### i. Global trends of business engagement in humanitarian relief

For decades, the private sector has engaged in humanitarian relief in two manners. First, it has participated as a contractor through the commercial procurement of goods and services for humanitarian actors. Second, it has acted as a benefactor through the philanthropic contribution of funds and goods to the same actors.

New forms of business engagement in humanitarian relief have emerged in recent years. One of them is the competition between nonprofit organizations and commercial providers for the planning and implementation of aid projects. However, this extension of commercial engagement in aid by companies is still anecdotic and rather circumscribed to reconstruction and development rather than to relief operations<sup>1</sup>.

A second new form of business engagement is direct yet non commercial business participation in humanitarian relief operations. Such increasing direct engagement by companies, usually based on their core business competencies, was categorized into three types by a 2007 research paper<sup>2</sup>:

- *Single company engagement*, such as the IBM Worldwide Crisis Response Team that since 1993 is part of the corporation's shift in strategy from philanthropy to unilateral business engagement;

- *Partnerships*, for example between Motorola and Care International that aims at providing remote communities with communications technology. Matching services such as Global Hand<sup>3</sup> and Business.un.org<sup>4</sup> have been established to encourage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).

- *Meta-initiatives*, whose goals are to enhance coordination in humanitarian relief, to share lessons learned and sometime to create standby capacities. For instance, the World Economic Forum launched the Humanitarian Relief Initiative (HRI) in 2006 in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which resulted in the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Bidder & Jan Martin Witte, *Business Engagement in Humanitarian Relief: Key Trends and Policy Implications*, Humanitarian Policy Group Background Paper, Overseas Development Institute, June 2007, pp.19-23

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp.9-11

<sup>3</sup> Global Hand website, <<http://www.globalhand.org/en>>

<sup>4</sup> Business.un.org website, <<http://business.un.org/en>>

publication of non binding “Guiding Principles for Philanthropic Private Sector Engagement in Humanitarian Action”<sup>5</sup>.

This extension of traditional business philanthropy takes place in the context of growing influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and it was stimulated by the massive response to the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Yet, it can be described as a “mix of last minute engagements, memoranda of understanding, isolated interventions and long-term commitments. This does not reflect any consistent pattern, other than the fact that both sectors are more willing to collaborate and that collaboration seems to be growing<sup>6</sup>”.

Non commercial business participation in humanitarian relief also remains a niche phenomenon due to limited funding compared to overall corporate philanthropic contributions, private individual donations and government aid for relief operations. However, the impact of this new form of engagement based on core business competencies seems to extend beyond funding, especially for partnerships that are conduits for the sharing of knowledge and expertise between traditional humanitarian actors and private companies<sup>7</sup>.

## **ii. Recent natural disasters and humanitarian relief in Myanmar**

The word natural disaster is not a new terminology in Myanmar since storms and cyclones, floods, earthquakes and landslides occur commonly, notably due to its location in the western part of South-East Asia, next to the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea with a 2400 km long coast line. Tropical cyclones usually form in the Bay of Bengal at pre-monsoon period (April, May) and post-monsoon period (October, November). Myanmar has a long coast that normally experiences severe cyclones once in every three to four years. Myanmar is located in a tropical region and thus receives heavy rainfall with floods occurring during the southwest monsoon period, from June to September. Earthquake and landslide are not common in Central Myanmar but take place mostly in hilly regions in the northern, north-eastern and north-western of the country. These regions are remote areas and are sparsely populated. Fire is the most frequent disaster in Myanmar. Fire normally breaks out due to poor quality of construction materials, hot weather and negligence of human being all year round but less frequently in the rainy season.

Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar on 2-3 May 2008 and caused widespread destruction and devastation in the Ayeyarwady and Yangon Regions. According to Government of Myanmar

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<sup>5</sup>UNOCHA public-private partnership principles,  
<<http://www.un.org/partnerships/Docs/Principles%20for%20Public-private%20Collaboration%20for%20Humanitarian%20Action.pdf>>

<sup>6</sup> Dr Randolph Kent & Joanne Burke, *Commercial and Humanitarian Engagement in Crisis Contexts: Current Trends, Future Drivers*, Humanitarian Futures Programme Report, King’s College London, June 2011, p.26

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Bidder & Jan Martin Witte, p.12

(GOM) figures, almost 140,000 peoples were either dead or missing and nearly 20,000 were injured. Nargis was said to be the worst natural disaster in the history of Myanmar with 2.4 million people affected severely. The impact on the Ayeyarwady Delta was particularly severe. In addition to the lives lost, the timing and extent of the natural disaster greatly affected the critical rice planting season in what is Myanmar's breadbasket region, with significant quantities of seeds and harvested crops lost. In the first weeks after the cyclone, the delivery of international aid to affected areas was made challenging by the reluctance of the Myanmar government to grant access to foreign relief workers.

The amount of aid flow to Myanmar has increased after Nargis and per capita aid increased from USD 4 in 2007 to USD 11 in 2008. However, it is only 14 percent of the amount received by Laos and Myanmar still receives the lowest among of aid per capita in the region due to its political situation and a ban on development aid by Western countries, which only provide humanitarian aid.

**Table 1. Official Development Aid to selected Continental Southeast Asian countries**

	2007		2008		2009	
	Gross (US\$ million)	Per Capita (US\$)	Gross	Per Capita	Gross	Per Capita
Cambodia	675	47	743	51	722	49
Laos	396	65	496	80	420	67
<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>7</b>
Vietnam	2511	29	2552	30	3744	43

*Source: OECD Development Aid Committee*

At the same time, cyclone Nargis brought people together and provided the opportunity for people in civil society to take action and mount a response to the disaster. This was of particular significance in the Myanmar context where civil society is struggling with the impact of decades of civil war and repression. It also helped to increase people's capacity in working with NGOs and authorities.

Cyclone Giri hit Rakhine State in Northwestern Myanmar in October 2010. According to official figures, 45 people were dead or missing, over 100,000 people became homeless, and a total of 260,000 were affected to some degrees as a result of the cyclone. The important role played by civil society including the private sector in the early days after the cyclone was acknowledged. In March 2011, an earthquake of magnitude 6.8 on the Richter scale hit the southern part of Shan State (Tarlay) in Eastern Myanmar. According to an initial assessment done by the UN, it was estimated that 702 houses were damaged and 3,152 people were homeless. Like after Nargis and Giri, civil society including the private sector was the first to respond, according to anecdotal evidence.

### iii. The private sector in the Myanmar economy

After the 1988 demonstrations, a military government took over power that introduced market oriented reforms and ended the “Burmese way to socialism” implemented by general Ne Win starting in 1962. As a result, the private sector participation in manufacturing sectors, in terms of ownership, increased from 54.2 percent in fiscal year 1989 to 71.2 percent in 1999. In 2009, the private sectors' share in the manufacturing sectors had reached 99.3 percent, according to figures from the official Central Statistical Organization (CSO).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flow into Myanmar increased with the introduction of economic reforms after 1988, but it stagnated after the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the introduction of Western economic sanctions. The total approved amount of foreign investment in Myanmar reached about USD 7 billion in 1998 and it was relatively stable until 2005 when a Thai investment in the hydropower sector worth USD 6 billion was approved. In 2009, Myanmar had an accumulated total of approved FDI worth USD 16 billion, and it more than doubled in 2010 with a massive inflow of approved FDI from Mainland China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Thailand in the oil & gas, hydropower and mining sectors.

**Table 2. Total Foreign Investment Permitted (USD Million)**

Year	Total	Cumulative Total
2005	6,065.675	13,842.854
2006	752.700	14,595.554
2007	172.720	14,768.274
2008	984.996	15,753.270
2009	302.350	16,055.620
2010	19,998.968	36,054.588

*Source: CSO, Selected Monthly Economic Indicators (various issues)*

Following elections in November 2010, power was transferred to a civilian government within a new constitutional system where the military maintains a large influence. The new government of President Thein Sein has announced a number of economic reforms that should improve the business environment in Myanmar and favor the growth of the private sector as well as attract more FDI.

***Highlight: Economic Sanctions against Myanmar***

A number of countries have diplomatic and economic sanctions in place against Myanmar, especially Western countries including the United States (US) and member States of the European Union (EU). Initiated in 1988 with the suspension of Official Development Aid (ODA) and arms embargos, these restrictive measures have increased in number and scope over the years. They can make it difficult, for legal reasons or due to perception, for humanitarian organizations to partner with private companies.

The US has the most comprehensive set of sanctions against Myanmar, including a prohibition on US investments to Myanmar since 1997 and, since 2003, a trade embargo that prohibits the export of Myanmar goods to the US and financial sanctions that prevent transactions with and provision of services to Myanmar. Since 1996, the EU has a common position against Myanmar that is agreed upon by all member States of the regional organization. From 2003, economic sanctions have been included in the common position such as a visa ban and the freezing of assets for “persons who benefit from policies of the regime” and the prohibition of financial transactions with “enterprises that are owned or controlled by the regime or by persons or entities associated with the regime”. In 2007, additional sanctions were introduced that prevent economic transactions with companies operating in three targeted economic sectors, i.e. gems, mining and logging.

The sanction policies contribute to making partnerships between humanitarian actors and the private sector in Myanmar challenging. However, reluctance to engage often extends beyond those companies explicitly targeted by restrictive measures, with UN agencies and NGOs being risk adverse in a complex political and economic environment. This is partly due to the fact that, beyond statutory sanctions, “naming-and-shaming” and boycott campaigns against foreign companies operating in Myanmar have been organized by activist groups since the mid 1990s.

## 2. Purpose & Objectives

As mentioned above, business engagement in humanitarian relief has expanded in scope and size in recent years, and Myanmar seems no exception to this trend. Anecdotal evidence indicates that, in the wake of cyclone Nargis in May 2008, numerous companies, mostly domestic but also international, contributed to the relief effort in the devastated Ayeyarwady Delta. Business engagement also seems to have taken place in post disaster interventions in Rakhine State following cyclone Giri in October 2010 and in Shan State following the March 2011 Tarlay earthquake.

Though anecdotal evidence is available on this effort by businesses to respond to emergencies in Myanmar, it has not been consistently documented, mapped or assessed in terms of motivations, implementation, impact, sustainability and potential for replication.

During emergencies, the private sector can provide funds and/or surge capacity to the overall humanitarian sector by bringing extra resources and skills. It can open and/or maintain humanitarian space. It can also bring new practices and perspectives to the humanitarian aid community that should be encouraged to cooperate with this upcoming aid actor, as recognized by a number of humanitarian actors such as UNOCHA or Oxfam<sup>8</sup>.

However, to ensure that voluntary or commercial support is provided strategically rather than reactively, the establishment in advance of an emergency of relations between humanitarian NGOs and the private sector could be encouraged.

It is to bridge this documentation gap and inform its humanitarian program in Myanmar that in July 2011 Trócaire commissioned the present study to Yangon-based research agency Myanmar Marketing Research & Development Ltd. (MMRD), with the following aims.

The overall objective of this study is to document and analyze recent practices of business engagement in humanitarian relief in Myanmar, to assess the potential, modalities and areas for cooperation between humanitarian actors and the private sector. Both philanthropic and commercial engagement of businesses in relief operations are considered.

First, the study aims at documenting and analyzing the motivations, processes and estimated outcomes of the private sector's humanitarian aid provided in the wake of recent disasters in Myanmar such as cyclone Nargis, cyclone Giri and the Shan State earthquake.

Second, the study's objective assesses the interest of private businesses to renew and develop their engagement in humanitarian relief, and whether they would consider doing so in

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<sup>8</sup> Oxfam International, *OI Compendium Note on the Private Sector and Humanitarian Relief*, November 2007, <[http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi\\_hum\\_policy\\_private\\_sector\\_0.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/oi_hum_policy_private_sector_0.pdf)>

cooperation with humanitarian NGOs. Areas for cooperation and the shape it would take are also identified.

In conclusion, the study makes operational recommendations for Trócaire to promote partnerships between the private sector and humanitarian NGOs and thus contribute to strategic joint responses to emergencies in Myanmar. In the appendices an exhaustive mapping of the sampled private sectors entities and their respective potential of involvement in humanitarian aid is presented.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **i. Approaches**

Desk research and qualitative research methodology (Key Informant Interviews – KIIs) were used for this study.

First, press articles, NGO reports, government documents and company reports that refer to business engagement in humanitarian relief in Myanmar were collected and reviewed.

Second, key informants were identified and interviewed to collect primary data on recent practices and future potential of the participation of private companies in relief. Both philanthropic and commercial engagements of businesses in relief operations were considered in the selection of respondents.

Prior to carrying out the desk research and key interviews, the team of researchers were trained in the practices and norms of relief work such as SPHERE minimum standards and the “Guiding Principles for Philanthropic Private Sector Engagement in Humanitarian Action”, to ensure researchers were sensitive to humanitarian standards and could identify cases where they were not met. Interview guidelines relevant for each type of informants (companies, associations, officials, NGO) were developed and researchers trained in their use. Notes taken during KIIs were structured into Myanmar transcripts which were then translated into English.

The local team was formed of two female and two male MMRD researchers, who were supported for the design, conduction and analysis of the research by a project-based lead researcher with experience working in the private sector. An expatriate project manager with experience working with both the private sector and humanitarian organizations oversaw the whole process, undertook a number of KIIs and lead the analysis and reporting. Trócaire was consulted at various stages of the project and was associated to the analysis of findings and design of recommendations.

## ii. Introduction of Respondents

A total of 61 KIIs were completed for the research. Key informants were purposively selected to cover the following pre determined categories:

- High ranked officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) that oversaw the relief operations in regions recently affected by disasters. These interviews were conducted in the administrative capital of Myanmar since 2005, Naypyitaw.
- Members of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RUMFCCI) and related business associations that did participate in recent post-disaster relief or could do so in the future. These interviews took place in the two commercial capitals and most populated cities, Yangon in Lower Myanmar and Mandalay in Upper Myanmar.
- Staff of international and local humanitarian actors that cooperated with private businesses, both in non commercial and in commercial manners. These interviews took place in Yangon and Mandalay.
- Managers of local and international companies that contributed to humanitarian relief in the wake of recent disasters, both in philanthropic and in commercial manners. These interviews took place in Yangon and Mandalay.

**Table 3. Completed Key Informant Interviews per Category**

<b>No</b>	<b>Type of Organization</b>	<b>Number of Key Informant Interviews</b>
<b>1</b>	Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (deputy director general level)	2
<b>2</b>	UMFCCI and affiliated associations	5 in Yangon, 2 in Mandalay
<b>3</b>	International and local humanitarian actors that cooperated with private businesses	17 in Yangon, 2 in Mandalay
<b>4</b>	Local and international companies that contributed to relief operations	23 in Yangon, 8 in Mandalay
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>

Desk research and interviews with Ministry officials and associations' members supported identification of companies and humanitarian actors to be interviewed in Yangon and Mandalay. MMRD also used its expertise on the private sector in Myanmar to identify and contact possible respondents. Trócaire assisted with a number of KIIs with humanitarian actors.

Regarding humanitarian actors that cooperated with private businesses, 9 international ones and 11 local groups were interviewed. A sample of large, medium and small organizations was purposively selected. Cooperation between the private sector and humanitarian actors in relief operations was considered mainly from a philanthropic point of view, though commercial services by companies to aid actors in the context of emergencies was and cooperation in non relief situations were also considered marginally.

Regarding contributing companies, 8 international ones and 23 local firms were interviewed. Business engagement in emergency operations was considered mainly from the point of view of philanthropic contributions, but companies that participated in relief on a commercial basis were also interviewed. Large, small and medium private sector entities were purposively selected and interviewed.

### iii. Limitations

A number of difficulties were encountered in the course of the research leading to limitations in the outcome of the study. They are mainly related to the type of respondents interviewed and to the depth of the data collected.

Regarding respondents, the scarcity of documents and information on the role of the private sector in emergencies in Myanmar made it challenging to identify most relevant respondents. Also, access to some key informants was not possible, such as high ranked officials or large local conglomerates with close links to the government that could have offered insights on public-private cooperation in relief operations. Last, the extensive scope of the study made it necessary to interview a wide range of respondents to explore many sectors. It was thus challenging to look in depth at specific industries. Overall, this study does not offer a representative sample of the humanitarian and private sectors due to the difficulties stated above as well as purposive sampling and limited geographic and sector coverage. However, it identifies key players and major trends and could support further in depth research in some of the issues of particular interest for Trócaire.

Regarding data, it was found that there is a lack of information including figures on aid provided by the private sector. Officials interviewed had limited knowledge on the nature, areas and scope of companies' participation in relief operations due to limited monitoring capacities of local authorities. Some private sector respondents could not provide specific details on their engagement in relief and had difficulties estimating the total amount spent. Also, some respondents were reluctant to share information, for example in relation to the process of cooperation with the government. Last, most of the data collected was related to post Nargis interventions, as the level of engagement by the private sector after other natural disasters was much lower. Still, a large amount of data was collected overall and a number of interviews presented below provided detailed and comprehensive information on the issues of interests for the study.

## 4. Findings

### i. Motivations and interests

#### a. Religion and patronage

In Myanmar, religious values are pervasive throughout the State and society and they strongly influence attitudes and behaviours, including in relation to the act of donation. Most private sector respondents, when asked about their motivation for engaging in humanitarian relief, referred to principles associated with their faith among other reasons.

About 90% of the Myanmar population is of the Theravada Buddhist obedience. In this form of Buddhism also found in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, lay persons can gain merits through ritualized donations to the community of monks known as the *Sangha* in Pali, the sacerdotal script of Theravada Buddhism. In Buddhist philosophy, this practice is also a virtue that is known as *dāna*, also a Pali word. The willingness of Buddhists to gain merits is to affect positively the *kamma*, the sum of actions accomplished by a person, and associated consequences, that influence one's present life and future reincarnations. In all forms of Buddhism, the believer aims at freeing oneself from the cycle of reincarnations and merits contribute to such an endeavour.

*Dāna*, as well as other Buddhist values like *metta* (loving-kindness) and *karuna* (compassion), were often mentioned as reasons for engaging in philanthropic activities, in relief operations but also throughout the year. Indeed, many respondents explained that the assistance they provided after recent natural disasters had to be looked at in the context of their frequent donations to various religious and social causes. Some respondents also explained how, after cyclone Nargis, they had decided to donate after hearing appeals to do so by one or several *Sayadaw*, a Myanmar word designating venerable monk(s). *Sayadaw* were also actively involved with monastic groups in the collection and distribution of in cash and in kind donations for affected persons. Such monastic groups participate of the socially engaged Buddhist movement whose most famous representative is *Sayadaw U Nyanissara* who founded Sitagu Association. The Myanmar *Sangha* has contributed to social welfare for centuries, mainly through monastic schools. Yet, some components of the monkhood have advocated in the last two decades for a growing contribution to social work. That involved being very active in recent post relief operations, including receiving donations from lay persons.

Mandalay, the second largest urban center in Myanmar, is a pious city famous for its numerous monasteries and its large population of monks. The joint secretary general of the **Mandalay Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MRCCI)** explained how in May 2008 Dhammazedī *Sayadaw U Kawthanla* came to Mandalay and made a sermon asking for assistance to be provided to the Nargis' affected region. The *Sayadaw* also collected in cash and in kind

donations. The owner of **Swan Ar Electric Mart**, a prominent local businessman and member of the Chamber, was also in the process of collecting donations when the sermon took place. The two benefactors were introduced and coordinated their work. The owner of Mandalay based **Tiger Sunflower Seeds Enterprise** is a member of a local group offering free funeral services and of three faith-based associations, including *Mahlone* which organizes the collect of food for the *Sangha*. After Nargis, he decided to give over kyat 1 million after listening to sermons given by Dhammazedī *Sayadaw U Kawthanla* and Sitagu *Sayadaw U Nyanissara*. His donation was made to the groups led by these prominent monks, in which he has total trust. After cyclone Giri, he donated kyats 300,000 to Tipitaka Yammarwady Sayadaw. The owner of **Ngwe Sabai Sugar Mill**, also located in Mandalay, donated about kyats 1 million to Sitagu *Sayadaw U Nyanissara* after Nargis. A devout person, he donates every year about 10% of his annual profit to religious causes.

Charity work was also undertaken by persons of non Buddhist obedience, including Christians, Hindus and Muslims. **Naing Family Group** is a home decoration and interior design business owned by a muslim family. The managing director explained how, based on Islamic principles, 4% of the company's yearly profit is allocated to good deeds such as funding a muslim orphanage. After Nargis, the firm directly provided in kind assistance to muslim communities in Bogale, Labutta, Mawlamyinegyun, Pyapon and Kyaiklat.

In addition to religion, ethnicity and attachment to one's place of origin are also motivations for private businesses to engage in relief. **Jupiter Kyaw Maung** is a seafood export company based in Yangon whose managing director is from the Rakhine ethnic group. Chairman of the Rakhine Youth Association, he is very active in the community. After Nargis, he led the collection of donations and distribution in various areas of the Delta, notably for Rakhine communities in Ahmar Township. After cyclone Giri, he again took a leading role collecting donations. He explained how the Rakhine communities in the Delta with which relations had been established after Nargis donated money for their ethnic brethren. **Thahara** is a Rakhine cultural association established in the 1930s, with branch offices in Yangon and across Rakhine State. It is well connected to the private sector through Rakhine associations for sailors, traders, fishers, etc. After Nargis, it offered limited support and mostly to Rakhine communities from Ahmar Township. After cyclone Giri, however, the association used its charity budget and also collected kyats 10 million through its networks inside and outside the country. It used volunteers to distribute the assistance, including some Rakhine doctors from Yangon who established mobile clinics in the affected areas. The association also received in kind support from local businessmen, for instance free or discounted boat transportation. The executive director of **Yupawady Manufacturing Co. Ltd**, a firm that produces cement among other goods, provided support after Nargis to the hometown of the female owner, where her brother is the village chief.

## **b. Obligation to the State**

A number of respondents from the private sector stated that they had been asked by authorities to contribute to relief operations following recent natural disasters. Large domestic conglomerates and professional associations were mostly asked for their support by national officials such as Ministers while Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were contacted by local authorities usually from the Township General Administrative Department (formerly Township Peace and Development Council). Both in kind and in cash contributions were asked for; it is unclear whether specific amounts were set.

According to the **Deputy Director General of the Department of Social Welfare at the MSWRR**, such requests were made due to *“limitation in financial and technical capacities of the State”*. Following cyclone Nargis on May 2-3 2008, an emergency meeting of the then ruling regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), took place during which relief operations in affected Townships were put under the supervision of Ministers. For instance, the minister of Forestry Brigadier General Thein Aung was made responsible for Bogale Township and the minister of Agriculture and Irrigation General Htay Oo for Labutta Township. In a second time, *“companies with capability to perform relief operations were given duties and responsibilities”* by Ministers, according to the same Deputy Director General.

**Diamond Mercury** is a large local conglomerate with interests in the export and transformation of wood logs, in plantations and in construction. Its general manager explained how on May 8, the Minister of Forestry instructed the company with which it had a working relation to support the relief operation in Bogale Township for which he was responsible. First, Diamond Mercury mobilized its staff and organized distribution of food, medicine and clothes worth kyats 5 million in the following days. In a second phase, the conglomerate participated in the recovery effort by building 36 schools, 110 houses in a village and a cyclone shelter in another village, according to the general manager. She also mentioned how about half of the cost of construction had been paid for in kind by the Ministry through the provision of wood logs at a discounted price.

After cyclone Giri hit Rakhine State in Northwest Myanmar in October 2010, Diamond Mercury contacted the MSWRR to propose the same type of assistance as after Nargis. However, the conglomerate was informed that its help in relief would not be necessary. It contributed to the recovery only, with logs being cut into planks in its factory at a very low price set agreed on with government and planks delivered for free at Yangon Port Terminal. According to the Deputy Director General of Social Welfare, affected Kyauk Phyu Township was managed by the Minister for Industry 2, while Myebon Township was under the supervision of the Minister for Forestry. Yet, he said *“it is the Rakhine State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) that organized support from some private companies whose donations were donated through local authorities”*.

As for professional associations, **the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RUMFCCI)** was requested by the Minister of Commerce to

support the relief operation in the three most affected Townships of Bogale, Pyapon and Labutta after cyclone Nargis. The Chamber set up a Task Committee with 37 members from its various sub-associations, which were assigned activities based on their respective competences. For instance, the **Myanmar Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment Entrepreneurs Association (MPMEEA)** collected from its members donations of medicine worth about kyats 1 billion that were distributed through the Ministry of Health, according to its chairman. He also mentioned that after cyclone Giri, in cash donations of a total of kyats 4.3 million were collected from members and again distributed through the same Ministry. In Mandalay, the **Beans & Pulses Brokers and Millers Association**, also known as the **Maha Kha Htain Taw**, provided beans and rice worth kyats 30 million after cyclone Nargis at the request of the Mandalay SPDC, according to its chairman.

However, not all donations to government institutions are made on their request, some respondents stating their proactive approach to working with the State. For instance, the owner of Mandalay based soft drink manufacturer **Diamond Juice** reported how during the 2011 floods, he assisted in the collection and packing of meals for affected households in coordination with ward authorities, a cooperation described as a traditional practice in Mandalay. The owner of **Hla Ka Lay Sein Pudding Confectionary** donated kyats 1 million to Mandalay's General Administration Office after cyclone Nargis, "*under no influence, just to help*", after she had learned about the situation through the media.

The owner of a bus company said that after cyclone Nargis, he had refused to give to the SPDC officer who had come and requested money: "*The government should have money ready for disasters, and not ask businessmen for it when a catastrophe happens!*". He had preferred to give kyats 2 million to **Swan Ar Electric Mart**, whose owner was actively involved in the collect and provision of help in coordination with monastic groups. Still, the same person provided Kyats 300,000 to the local SPDC when floods happened in Mandalay in 2011.

The joint secretary general of the **Mandalay Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MRCCI)**, which donated in cash through the General Administration Department after Giri cyclone and recent floods in Mandalay, regretted that cooperation was not always possible. He said the organization would like to work with authorities to prevent disasters in Mandalay, notably in relation to floods and fire, but that departments such as the fire brigade would not accept support from the Chamber.

Other respondents seem to give also to be in good terms with the State. It was asserted during a KII that during the visit of Vice-President Tin Aung Myint Oo to areas in Shan State affected by the March 2011 earthquake, many conglomerates pledged large amounts of money to the relief and recovery operations, yet that some of these pledges had not been fulfilled. Reporting on a donation by State-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China's official press agency Xinhua reported that "*Since entering the market, the CNPC has always attached*

importance to Myanmar public welfare and social responsibility [...] When cyclones or earthquakes occur in Myanmar, the CNPC always lends a helping hand to Myanmar, donates money and materials<sup>9</sup>. In Mandalay, the owner of a confectionary manufacturing company, whose mother is the chairman of the regional office of Government-controlled Myanmar Women Affairs Association (MWAA), asserted that “*The government should guide in case of emergencies and others should follow*”. She has been conferred, as a lay donor, the title of Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Theingi for her outstanding contribution to religious causes.

**Highlight: Titles offered by the State to outstanding lay donors**

The government of Myanmar confers titles to monks and laymen for outstanding religious acts. Such titles have been conferred annually since the days of Burmese kings. Among the titles offered to laymen for being outstanding donors for religious purposes, *Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Manijotadhara* is the highest among gentlemen and *Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Theingi* is the highest for women. The announcement is normally made on the day of independence (4<sup>th</sup> January) and received on full moon day of Tabaung (middle of March).

**Table 4. Titles offered by the State to lay donors for outstanding contribution to religion**

No	Titles	Remarks
1.	Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Manijotadhara	For Gentlemen
2.	Maha Thiri Thudhamma Manijotadhara	
3.	Thiri Thudhamma Manijotadhara	
4.	Thudhamma Manijotadhara	
5.	Agga Maha Thiri Thudhamma Theingi	For Ladies
6.	Thiri Thudhamma Theingi	
7.	Thiha Thudhamma Theingi	
8.	Thudhamma Theingi	

Source: *Than Tun (Mawlamyine)*

<sup>9</sup> Xinhua, 3 October 2011, “China firm donates 1.32 million USD to build 8 schools in Myanmar” <<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7610061.html>>

### c. Corporate Social Responsibility

A 2011 report notes that at the global level, “philanthropy which is assumed to be the main humanitarian support mechanism of the commercial organization no longer appears to be the first and last resort. In kind contributions and innovation, as well as the active intervention of experts, are increasingly coming to the fore of the commercial-humanitarian action[...] Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly being subsumed within a more holistic corporate policy approach to external engagement, focused on demonstrating that the company can reconcile commercial success with community engagement<sup>10</sup>”. This strategic CSR approach, rather than philanthropy was adopted by a few private firms in recent relief operations in Myanmar, yet such firms are by far the exception rather than the rule currently.

Still, a number of respondents stated their awareness and interest in CSR, for instance the director of **AA Medical**, a large local company that imports and distributes pharmaceutical products, when she said: “*We are disinterested and just feel a social responsibility towards our people*”. Three local firms explained how they had adopted a systematic approach to CSR. **Ananda Travel**, a travel agency also with interests in coffee plantations, used to save USD 5 from each travel contract for social work activities; it also finances health facilities and schools near its coffee plantation in Kayin State. The owner of Mandalay based soft drink manufacturer **Diamond Juice** explained how the money gained from selling empty bottles and paper boxes and other discarded materials of the factory is earmarked for religious and social activities. **Myanma Awba**, a manufacturing and distributor of fertilizer & pesticides, has established in 2005 a fund that finances education, health and transportation-related projects in rural communities. The main reason for this fund is that Awba wants to make up for the negative effect of its products on the environment, according to the Director of Public Relations of the firm. Before cyclone Nargis, most of the fund was used in Upper Myanmar, but it was reoriented towards the Delta in 2008.

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<sup>10</sup> Dr Randolph Kent & Joanne Burke, pp.28-29

***Highlight: The implementation in Myanmar of a global logistics partnership with UNOCHA***

Immediately after Nargis, an **international logistics company** helped with the unloading and storage of relief shipments at Yangon airport for about three weeks, after which it handed over to a local company. *“Since the Asian tsunami, [the company] has forged a role as an airport logistics provider following natural disasters [...] We have committed to help at all large scale natural disasters if it is safe to do so”*, wrote its Director of Humanitarian Affairs in an email exchange. The company has a global partnership with UNOCHA, and in Yangon it worked with this UN agency as well as with the World Food Program (WFP) especially. It sent about 10 trained company volunteers from Singapore and Bangladesh - whose nationals could easily have visas, and also used local staff and local hires. *“By clearing unattended freight from airports and storing it properly so it can be forwarded it to beneficiaries, the services helped all aid organizations”*, wrote the Director. The company kept a low profile in Myanmar to prevent assistance turning into a threat to its commercial position. It considers it also benefited from its participation in the post Nargis operation, *“through heighten reputation as a company that would help in difficult situations, and through now having experienced volunteers who learnt a great deal from participation”*.

**Total Exploration & Production Myanmar (TEPM)** mixed the strategic CSR approach and traditional philanthropy in its response to cyclone Nargis. Given its long term presence in the country, the company’s global CSR commitment resulting in an extensive Socio-Economic Program (SEP) in Myanmar, but also the controversy around its operations there, TEPM immediately organized a response to the emergency. The company’s headquarters in Paris donated USD 2 million to the **International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC)**. In Myanmar, an expatriate staff from the SEP with experience working in the humanitarian sector was named emergency response coordinator. He oversaw the distribution of assistance to affected company employees but also engaged with the aid community. This engagement with NGOs took place directly or through the cluster system, in two sectors where TEPM identified linkages between its competences and the needs of humanitarian actors. First, transportation, TEPM’s supply boats being able to carry freight from Ranong harbor in Thailand to the company’s jetty in Yangon, one of the few not to be obstructed with boats’ wreckage after the cyclone. A number of containers were transported for free for **Save the Children in Myanmar (SCiM)**, the **French Red Cross**, the French-Myanmar association **Isha Tanaka**. Moreover, TEPM donated 100,000 litres of fuel to aid organizations, some through the **logistics cluster** and some directly to organizations. The second area where TEPM could contribute was access. A few days after the storm, when it had become difficult for expatriates to go to the Delta, TEPM was still able to organize helicopter trips to its offshore platform in the gulf of Bengal, trips which requires to fly over the Ayeyarwady Delta. Also, TEPM deployed staff from its SEP in a village in Ahmar Township where the company keeps a helipad for emergency landing. Following a rapid needs

assessment, the team set up an integrated relief program funded by the company, which handed over and pulled out of the village when NGOs were granted access to the area.

**Mamee Double Decker Instant Noodles**, a Malaysian food manufacturing firm operating in Myanmar under a joint venture agreement, is a regular donor to orphanages and clinics treating people living with HIV. After cyclone Nargis, it organized its employees for the distribution of its instant noodles to affected areas. The company also increased the number of shifts at its Myanmar factory to ensure supply, and it sold products to NGOs at a discounted price, according to the interviewed head of sales & marketing. After cyclone Giri, the company donated kyats 3.5 million worth of instant noodles, and it sponsored a fundraising concert in Yangon in cooperation with watch distributor and retailer **Cherry Oo**.

After the March 2011 earthquake in Shan State, **Unilever Thai Trading Ltd** provided 36,000 pieces of Lifebuoy anti-bacteria soap through **World Vision**, which had a large operation in the affected area. The decision was taken to donate given Unilever's similar contributions in other countries, for example after the 2004 tsunami in Thailand. In August 2011, a number of Lifebuoy anti-bacteria soaps were distributed through local NGO **Swanyee Development Foundation** to Bago floods victims.

CSR projects can also be marketing channels for companies, philanthropy being not always fully disinterested. The sales manager of a food manufacturing company explained how talks about nutrition are organized, with the agreement of local authorities, in schools around the country that end with the provision of new blackboards as well as free samples of the company's products. **Myanma Awba's** free trainings to farmers on the use of pesticides and fertilizers are also a way for the firm to introduce and sell its products.

## ii. Patterns of business engagement in relief in Myanmar

### a. The implementation process

A number of patterns were identified in the implementation process of non commercial domestic private relief, a schematic description aimed at supporting analysis rather than at offering a comprehensive understanding of a multiform and fragmented phenomenon (see figure 1 in appendix). Commercial engagement by the private sector as well as the role of foreign companies are considered separately.

**Three main sources of private assistance** in time of natural disasters were identified in the domestic private sector, i.e. private donors, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and large firms. These three types of actors sometimes engaged in relief on their own, yet they also frequently cooperated with a range of actors.

Among **individual private donors** are found business owners and managers and employees from private companies. These individual donors usually collect and donate cash and support items and volunteer with **faith-based organizations** that are leading actors in the response process, such as monastic groups formed under the guidance of *Sayadaw*. They can also aggregate into ad hoc **informal aid groups** formed around pre existing social networks, such as high school and university alumni or sport associations. The expatriate partner from **Gulliver Travel** explained how after cyclone Nargis, money was collected from foreign individual donors through a website documenting the tragedy and asking for funds to be donated to the association **Isha-Tanaka** that partnered with the travel agency. In addition, the firm received donations from its employees, from expatriate families based in Yangon and also contributed some of its own money. It purchased items deemed necessary for affected families such as rice, cooking oil, water, tarpaulin for shelters, etc. Using rented light trucks, its volunteer staff joined private aid convoys led by a famous Myanmar rock star whose influence ensured access to the Delta, and with whom the expatriate partner from Gulliver Travel was personally acquainted before the cyclone. A few weeks after the cyclone, relations had been established with monastic groups in the affected areas and recovery work started to be implemented in partnership with these groups.

A second source of assistance is **SMEs**, which contribute as companies rather than as individuals. SMEs also form or join **informal aid groups**. They also donate through professional associations spontaneously or at the request of those. The manager of Yangon-based pharmaceutical distribution company **Thukadana** explained how the company first distributed food and clothes by itself in nearby Kunyangon Township. In a second time, it provided medicine to the MPMEEA after the trade association had been requested by its umbrella organization the RUMFCCI to collect in kind donations from its members.

A third source of assistance in the domestic private sector are **large conglomerates** which were requested by the government to take part in the relief effort, as shown above with the example of **Diamond Mercury**. They also contributed to trade associations given their membership in the RUMFCCI.

**Five actors assisting in the implementation of private disaster response** were identified. First, **faith-based organizations** which are particularly important in a country as devout as Myanmar. For instance, **Brahmasoe** was originally established as a free funeral society in Mandalay but its actions have extended to other types of social work. After cyclone Nargis, under the leadership of *Sayadaw U Taikka* it collected from lay donors including businesses in kind assistance worth kyats 300 million. Before distributing the goods in affected areas of the Delta it contacted local authorities and 10 household leaders to compile lists of beneficiary households. After Giri, it collected kyats 5 million that were donated to *Sayadaw Shwe Hsan Nwe*. After the Tarlay earthquake, it again collected about kyats 5 million that were handed to Tachileik *Sayadaw*

Ngwe Taung Oo. Among its private sector donors are the main professional associations of Mandalay such as **Maha Kha Htain Taw** and the **MRCCI**.

A second actor in the implementation process is **informal aid groups** formed around pre existing social networks. They are a symptom of the dynamism of Myanmar civil society. After cyclone Nargis especially, some of these informal groups decided to become more formalized and professional organizations, such as **Myanmar Business Executives (MBE)**.

A third actor in the implementation process is **NGOs** with which informal aid groups and faith-based organizations cooperate for the distribution of relief assistance. For instance, **Charity Oriented Myanmar (COM)** collected donations from overseas after documenting the tragedy on internet. It also used its network in Yangon and received funds from individual private donors and also from a number of private companies. Within these NGOs, some are the humanitarian outfits of socially engaged private sector entities. For instance, the **Myanmar Business Coalition on AIDS**, formed in 2004, is a nonprofit organization formed by a group of business leaders and headed by Myanmar-Hong Kong businessman Martin Pun. After Nargis, it promptly organized a relief operation using its numerous contacts in the business sector including large investment holding and operating company **Serge Pun & Associates**. Agriculture focused NGO **Radanar Ayar** was created as an informal group after cyclone Nargis to provide aid to affected farmers by influential persons from Bogale including retired government officials and businessmen, such as 3 rice mill owners and members of the Myanmar Rice Industry Association (MRIA) who are part of the management team, whose vice-president is a director of Ayeyar Delta Agri-Export Company. The NGO registered after the 2010 elections and is currently implementing a livelihoods project funded by the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT).

A fourth actor in the implementation process is **professional associations**. The RUMFCCI is the main business association in Myanmar with Chambers in all States and Regions and 32 sector specific trade associations. After Nargis, it was contacted by foreign trade promotion agency **Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)** that introduced a number of Japanese NGOs willing to contribute with the RUMFCCI. Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed between these NGOs and the Federation, which referred the aid organizations to relevant trade associations. For instance, the **MPMEEA** cooperated with a health-focused NGO as well as with the **Myanmar Medical Association** for the distribution of medicine and the setting up of mobile clinics in affected areas.

A fifth actor in the implementation process is **authorities**, both at the national level and at the local level. They provided some information and granted authorization for access and operation to various aid actors but also requested large companies and professional associations to contribute to the relief process. They can also be partners for the private sector, and the Director of **AA Medical** mentioned the readiness of the company to work with monastic groups but also with health authorities in case of an emergency for free distribution of medicine.

An interesting pattern mainly related to access and not included in the schematization presented above was the “subcontracting” of companies for the implementation of aid after cyclone Nargis. For instance, **Jupiter Kyaw Maung** seafood export company received in kind support worth kyats 5 million of rice, cooking oil, blankets and tarpaulin from nonprofit Gitameit to distribute in affected villages.

***Highlight: Large scale implementation by a private company after Nargis***

**Serge Pun & Associates (SPA)**, a large investment holding and operating company with both Myanmar and foreign ownership and interests in banking, health services, construction and manufacturing, received more than USD 500,000 from the Singapore Red Cross Society, among other local and foreign private donors, to implement a relief and recovery program in the Delta, through its Singapore-listed sister company **Yoma Strategic Holding**. The secretary-general of the Singapore Red Cross stated in May 2008 that “[the company] can gain access to areas that are not approved [for foreign aid agencies] by the government as yet – and as a result be the supply system for our aid<sup>11</sup>”. **SCiM** also used the boats, warehouses and volunteer staff of the firm to channel food, shelter and medicine to affected parts of the Delta<sup>12</sup>. The company also constructed a model Environmentally Sustainable Pilot Village with 125 households, a primary school, a health clinic and a storm shelter that is fully solar powered.

Foreign companies were more likely than local ones to work with NGOs in recent operations, and especially with international organizations. **TEPM**’s cooperation with the logistic cluster is of particular interest as the company decided to work with specific organizations but also within the UN coordination system, an engagement that was also made possible by the large size of its commercial operations in Myanmar. Others such as **Unilever Thai Trading Ltd** did after Giri and Tarlay opted for a one-off donation to NGOs. **Uniteam**, a German company with an office in Myanmar since 1986 and interests in recruitment for the marine and oil & gas sector as well as in the tourism industry, preferred not to work with NGOs but to provide support by itself in Yangon and surroundings and in partnership with a monastic group in a village of Pyapon Township.

Commercial engagement by the private sector in recent relief operations was prompt and efficient, according to a long term resident of Myanmar who works at the **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**. He explained that domestic market actors had been able to meet most demands of the humanitarian sector in terms of supply of goods and services, both after Nargis and Giri. Respondents in the pharmaceutical import and distribution sector regretted that most INGOs did not use their services to procure needed medicine. The country

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<sup>11</sup> Jinny Koh, Today Media Corp Press, “S’pore-listed firm’s lifeline at Ground Zero. Its Myanmar staff brought aid to 250,000 survivors in hard to reach areas”, May 29, 2008

<sup>12</sup> The Economist, “Crony Charity. Big Business to the Rescue?”, June 21, 2008

director of a health-focused INGO asserted that while for non medicine items it was appropriate to use local suppliers, this was not the case with medicine as the current business environment in Myanmar did not provide enough assurances that certain medical goods would be of sufficient quality. He also explained that many INGOs procured wholesale through their headquarters that then redistributed to country offices as needed. In the logistics sector, dominant local firm **Ever Flowing River Group (EFRG)** and foreign company **DB Schenker** explained that they handle the international and domestic freight of UN agencies and INGOs on a regular basis and that after recent emergencies their services to these actors had circumstantially increased. A number of respondents mentioned that some domestic companies had grown substantially following the inflow of aid money after Nargis especially. No case of competition between nonprofit organizations and commercial providers for the planning and implementation of aid projects was found during the research.

Also at the intersection of the private sector and nonprofit sector are a number of social businesses that operate in Myanmar and partner with businesses to do so. **Population Services International (PSI)**, the world's largest social marketing firm, is in the process of establishing a partnership with **AA Medical** (see below).

***Highlight: Improving the supply of safe water through a social business model***

**Thirst Aid** is a small social business that works with local small and medium pottery manufacturers to make and sell Ceramic Water Filters (CWFs) and improve the supply of safe drinking water. Since 2005, it operates in Myanmar with the support of aid organizations. It started with training one supplier of CWFs but, after Nargis, demand for the product skyrocketed and is expanded quickly, to reach a number of 5 suppliers in Lower Myanmar currently. It is currently setting up a partnership with the **Sagaing Women's Pottery Cooperation** in Upper Myanmar, to which it was introduced by the Mandalay YMCA. Needs for safe water are very high in this area part of the Dry Zone and the cooperative should soon produce CWFs in addition to the usual vases and water pots. Thirst Aid still relies on NGOs that help procure CWFs from its partner suppliers, but it aims to sell CWFs on the consumer market in the long term.

## **b. Sectors of intervention**

Sectors of non commercial business engagement in Myanmar are limited by the fact that most private companies provided in cash and in kind donations after recent natural disasters, rather than participated on the basis of their core business competences. In cash donations were used as deemed appropriate by the organizations that received the funds.

The clusters established after Nargis under the UN-led coordination system went into dormancy at the end of June 2009 as the recovery phase started. The clusters remain however on standby under a countrywide Contingency Plan agreed structure. Information on the non cash contributions of the private sector after recent natural disasters and beyond is organized below under the cluster categories of this Contingency Plan<sup>13</sup>.

In terms of **food**, a number of respondents used their core business competences to answer to these needs. After Nargis, **Mamee Double Decker Instant Noodles** increased the number of shifts at its Myanmar factory to ensure supply, and it sold products to NGOs at a discounted price, according to the interviewed head of sales & marketing who also said the same discount could be repeated. After cyclone Giri, the company donated kyats 3.5 million worth of instant noodles. Domestic instant noodles' manufacturer **Yathar Cho** also donated some of its products after Nargis. The Mandalay based **Maha Kha Htain Taw** collected rice and beans from its members who are large scale brokers and millers of beans & pulses. Rakhine association **Thahara** mentioned that it is planning to support its branch associations located in areas at risk to keep a stock of 1,000 rice bags in case of an emergency.

In terms of **health and WASH**, **AA Medical** explained that in addition to donations of money, food and clothes, after Nargis it also donated medicine and mobilized doctors among its staff to help as volunteers. Some of its staff also delivered community trainings on health and hygiene. The **MPMEEA** regretted that its Japanese partner NGO after Nargis had an approach and medicine too sophisticated for the Myanmar context and that the association could help foreign organizations select more appropriate goods and practices given its expertise of the country's health situation.

In terms of **logistics**, a number of large companies such as **TEPM** and **SPA** helped NGOs with international freight forwarding and, for SPA, with the delivery of goods to beneficiaries. Since the mid 2000s, representatives from a number of foreign companies operating in the oil & gas sector in Myanmar (TEPM, PTTEP from Thailand, Petronas from Malaysia and Daewoo from south Korea) meet once a month to exchange about their respective Socio-Economic Programs, and this forum could be an entry point for organizations willing to engage in future crises with a sector that has tremendous logistic capacities. From a commercial point of view, **DB Schenker** ensured international and domestic freight forwarding for a number of aid organizations at a slightly discounted price after Nargis, according to the branch manager. He also mentioned that in spite of increased demand for such services, the company had been able to find quickly trucks and warehouses as needed thanks to its well established network of suppliers.

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<sup>13</sup> The Cluster Approach in Myanmar,  
<<http://onerresponse.info/Coordination/ClusterApproach/Pages/Myanmar.aspx>>

In terms of **education**, it is a favorite sector of philanthropy and many private companies were willing to donate for the reconstruction of schools or, for **Uniteam**, to contract and oversee the process in a number of areas.

In terms of **shelter**, large firms from the construction sector such as **Diamond Mercury** assisted with the reconstruction of household and community buildings, often at the request of the government.

In terms of **agriculture**, **Myanma Awba** explained how it donated kyats 20 million as well as cattle after cyclone Nargis through its established network of sales manager. It also reoriented its philanthropy fund that used to be focused on projects in Upper Myanmar to the affected Ayeyarwady Delta. It has also set up an emergency fund of kyats 70 million. As their sales are dependent on the prosperity of farmers, such companies have strong incentives to support the prompt recovery of their clients.

No example of the use of core business competences was found for nutrition, telecommunications, early recovery and protection, coordination and camp coordination/management.

***Highlight: Scaling up the fight against malaria through social marketing***

**Population Services International (PSI)** is the largest social marketing firm in the world. It uses commercial techniques and channels to promote social good, with a focus on the health sector, and operates in Myanmar since 1995. Its market-based approach provides PSI with an unparalleled coverage, where it holds 85% of the condom market through its subsidized product Aphaw, for instance. It also works with Sun Quality Health (SUN), a network of private physicians that PSI trains and monitor on reproductive health services and treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, pneumonia and sexually transmitted infections. Following cyclone Nargis, PSI was able, among other activities, to work with members of the SUN network located in the affected Ayeyarwady Delta to deliver assistance. PSI is currently looking at introducing Artemisinin-Combination Therapies (ACTs) in Myanmar, where the pervasiveness of artemisinin monotherapy treatments have led to the development of malarial parasites resistant to the drug, especially in the Eastern part of the country. Thanks to a market research, PSI found that **AA Medical** holds about 80% of the market for artemisinin through its distribution channels. It is currently in discussion with the company to replace monotherapy treatments by ACTs, whose higher cost would be subsidized by PSI. The importer and distributor of medicine is willing to cooperate with PSI in this endeavor, to provide a socially responsible product to its consumers. PSI country director said that it is easy for his organization to interact with the private sector, *“we speak the same language”*.

### iii. Outcomes of business engagement in relief

#### a. An imprecise yet substantial tally

It is difficult to quantify both the inputs and outputs of the private sector in recent responses to emergencies, thus resulting in an imprecise tally of the sector's contribution.

The first challenge is related to the absence of an entity able to keep track of such assistance. Few companies submitted reports to the MSWRR about their assistance after recent emergencies, mentioned the two **Director Generals** interviewed. Given its limited capacities, the Ministry could not properly monitor private interventions. Moreover, a number of private donors preferred to limit their relationship with authorities to a minimum, an attitude frequently met in Myanmar. Last, private contributions were not recorded by traditional aid monitoring systems that were focused on interventions by NGOs and UN agencies.

Second, private actors had limited or no knowledge of usual humanitarian monitoring & evaluation practices, which should be expected as they are not in the business of aid, and they tend to focus on inputs rather than to what extent the needs of beneficiaries have been met. The director of a large local company that distributes pharmaceutical products indicated that kyats 126 million had been donated to various causes between May 2008 and September 2011. In terms of output, she estimated that 80% of the support had been effective, a figure based on the fact that the company had distributed the aid directly and had thus limited expenses to about 20%. **Jupiter Kyaw Maung's** managing director explained how the number of households and population that benefited from in kind donations distributed by his company after Nargis had been recorded. The manager from another pharmaceutical distribution company stated that he "*believed*" the items provided to MPMEEA had appropriately reached beneficiaries.

The third challenge is due to the limited accountability and transparency that can be found in Myanmar society in relation to donations. Though religious groups were used as aid distribution channels by numerous private donors, they were not expected to report on the process and results of their interventions. It is considered culturally inappropriate to ask for such accountability in Myanmar, and especially from Buddhist monks, as it is associated with doubting about the intentions and practices of respected members of society. The same situation is found in the attitude of donors towards other types of organizations such as professional associations or authorities.

In spite of these challenges that prevent quantification of private assistance, it can be asserted that the private sector contributed substantially to relief after recent emergencies. NGO respondents stated how after cyclone Nargis all components of civil society, including businesses, mobilized immediately to provide assistance in affected areas. Several interviewees from the private sector explained how their closeness to local or national level authorities had

ensured continued access to the Delta, an issue of particular importance in a context where humanitarian work was constrained for a few weeks by the reluctance of the government to grant access to the area to foreign relief workers. Other respondents had been able to tap into their business contacts in Yangon and beyond to promptly collect in cash and in kind donations and organize their delivery.

### **b. A sustainable engagement**

As much as the private sector had a substantial impact in relief operations, recent natural disasters and especially cyclone Nargis influenced businesses in becoming more engaged in non profit activities, in two main manners.

First, a number of businesses decided to scale up their philanthropy. For instance, **Myanma Awba** has recently decided to set up a kyats 70 million emergency fund to be used to respond to natural and manmade disasters. The owner of **Hla Aye Yar**, a Mandalay based company that runs an edible oil mill, explained how he used to give more than kyats 10 million a year to Buddhist organizations for religious purposes. After Nargis, he witnessed the engagement in social work of many of his acquaintances and decided to do the same, contributing cash donations for the emergency response. He also became a donor to Na Lon Hla Foundation, a small charity that provides free healthcare to the poor of a ward of Mandalay.

Second, business persons who were interested in social work before Nargis decided to professionalize and formalize their involvement in the aftermath of the cyclone, in the context of a growth of civil society. **Ace Dragon** is a company that provides offset printing services, notably to UNICEF. When the managing director tried to donate money to the UN agency in May 2008, she was informed that the Myanmar office of the organization could not accept such donations. She then decided to create a small NGO with a number of friends, **Social Vision Services (SVS)**. Her company now sets aside about 10% of its profit for humanitarian work carried out by SVS. The managing director of **Mandalay Advertising** has founded with acquaintances also interested in social work a small group called **Hope** to implement aid projects, such as water distribution in the outskirts of Yangon during the 2010 dry season. The LNNGO **Myanmar Business Executives (MBE)** originates from a reading club set up among MBA graduates from the Yangon Institute of Economics and other business persons, which then transformed into a group offering business trainings. After Nargis, members of the group collected donations and organized for their distribution in remote areas of the Delta. It also established a partnership with **Caritas Switzerland** for which it implemented the reconstruction of schools in affected areas.

## iv. Past and future cooperation between humanitarian NGOs and the private sector

### a. The reasons for limited cross-sector cooperation

Overall, only a limited number of partnerships between the private sector and humanitarian actors were identified, and few used the core competences of businesses. Indeed, a number of challenges limit cross-sector cooperation.

The first issue is that partnerships are not obvious between two sectors with such different objectives and processes. Following natural disasters, a consensus can easily emerge on the need to save lives. Yet, the urgency of the situation makes such times especially challenging for trust to be built and objectives and operating principles to be agreed upon. Cooperation after natural disasters took place mainly between the private sector and traditional welfare actors such as faith-based organizations and informal aid groups, in an organic manner due to well established trust, long term relations and social networks.

Second, the humanitarian community might find it difficult to cooperate with the private sector due to the peculiar political situation of Myanmar. As an expatriate from an INGO stated, “*You do not know who are the good people and who are the bad ones*”, referring to the reputational risk, both in Myanmar and abroad, entailed by working with certain companies. The emergency response coordinator from **TEPM** explained how a number of INGOs refused to accept direct assistance from the natural gas operator due to sensitivities back home by the headquarters and public opinion. This is to overcome such sensitivities, among other reasons, that some of the fuel provided by the company was distributed through the logistics cluster. The Director of Programme of **Radanar Ayar** mentioned how the name of humanitarian actors could be misused by companies, giving the example of a fertilizer distributor claiming that its products are recommended by a NGO.

Third, many respondents from the private sector stated their doubts about the efficiency of humanitarian actors or of cross-sector cooperation. One interviewee mentioned: “*We heard that after Nargis a NGO imported purified water by plane! Why not use local capacities?*”. She also said that if there was another disaster, she would rather implement aid through its company, monastic groups and authorities, rather than to cooperate with NGOs. A manager from a food manufacturing company was of the opinion that 80% of the aid budget was used for NGOs’ expenses and overheads after Nargis, with only 20% reaching beneficiaries. He also mentioned that, in Myanmar, professional aid workers tend to have low skills and to lack motivation. The managing director from a construction firm said that collaboration entails time spent on negotiating and potential conflict as diverging opinions, which is why his company prefers to help on its own.

A fourth issue is uncertainty about attitude of the government towards humanitarian actors that are seen as having a political agenda by a number of businesses. Several companies including large conglomerate **Diamond Mercury** asked for the government to issue guidelines on how NGOs, the private sector and authorities should work together. The owner of a small company from Mandalay said that it rather not work with the State, which she sees as too slow due to bureaucratic red tape, however she asked for the government to grant permission and thus explicitly support cooperation with NGOs. The managing director of a medium size business based in Yangon regretted that after Nargis, unpredictability in the behavior of local authorities had been an obstacle to the development of joint responses. However, the Director of Program Operations of SCiM mentioned how after cyclone Giri, the owner of a marine products' processing business in Kyauk Phyu had been oriented towards the INGO by local authorities after expressing its willingness to support the reconstruction of a jetty.

***Highlight: The private sector and humanitarian practices***

The private sector is not in the business of aid and is in general unfamiliar with practices abided by in the humanitarian sector. The country director of **Caritas Switzerland** appreciated the dynamism, efficiency, project management and financial accounting skills of its implementing partner **Myanmar Business Executives (MBE)**, a LNGO founded by mainly female business owners and executives, which oversaw the reconstruction of 37 schools with funds provided by the Swiss organization. MBE was able to properly complete the delivery of hardware through the subcontracting of the building and quality control to skilled and cost efficient construction firms. Yet, she also noticed that the NGO lacked soft skills as it had difficulties communicating and working with local communities and had opted for the reconstruction of schools through consultation with the Ministry of Education rather than through a community needs assessment. The country director contrasted MBE's approach with that of its other partner **Metta Foundation**, a large LNGO, which consulted communities more thoroughly and had its own team of engineers who taught brick making to local workers and involved them in the building of schools. Still, she recognized the willingness of MBE to improve and learn about humanitarian standards if it had the opportunity to be granted such an opportunity.

## **b. Modalities and areas for future cooperation**

The research found two main areas where the potential for cooperation between the private and humanitarian sectors are highest in Myanmar. The first area is **access**, which was of particular importance after cyclone Nargis. Indeed, in the first weeks after the cyclone, the delivery of international aid to affected areas was made challenging by the reluctance of the Myanmar government to grant access to foreign relief workers. In such a situation, the role of civil society organizations and of private companies was of particular importance, especially given the exceptional scale of the disaster. The situation facilitated cross-sector cooperation, with SCiM engaging with TEPM and SPA to import relief items from Thailand and distributing them in affected areas, for instance.

After more recent natural disasters, however, access has not been such an issue and national level cooperation between aid groups and private companies has not taken place, many large firms preferring to give to government agencies rather than to NGOs. However, at the local level, in townships affected by cyclone Giri in October 2010 or in Shan State areas struck by the earthquake in March 2011, cooperation has taken place in an organic manner rather than an institutionalized one, between individual private donors and SMEs on one side, and informal aid groups, faith-based organizations, NGOs, associations and local authorities on the other side. In such a context, the focus of Trócaire should be on promoting **coordination** and **humanitarian standards**.

To overcome the challenges to cross-sector cooperation in relief, promote **coordination** and **standards** and maximize its impact, Trócaire could work with existing umbrella organizations from the private and humanitarian sectors, to promote a **national level public private partnership in disaster response**. Such an approach should be incremental and inclusive with limited and targeted goals. It should focus on identifying and working with key stakeholders with interest in cooperation in these organizations, and on building general but also sector-specific bridges between these stakeholders. It would be challenging but offer greater rewards than a focus on specific partnerships, and could lead to such specific cooperation in the process of a conclusion of a wider agreement.

The main organization for the private sector in Myanmar is the RUMFCCI, which has a network of Chambers in all the States and Regions of the country as well as 32 sector specific trade associations. After Nargis, it established a Task Committee to coordinate the contribution of its sub-associations and members. It was also an entry point for Japan trade promotion agency JETRO to facilitate partnerships between Japanese NGOs and sector-specific associations. During the course of the research, representatives of MMF and MPMEEA, two trade associations under the RUMFCCI, expressed strong interests in working with the humanitarian sector.

There exist a number of humanitarian structures dedicated to emergency in Myanmar. Of interest for Trócaire, whose long term focus has been the building of local capacities and support to civil society, is the **Myanmar NGO Contingency Planning Working Group (CPWG)** that brings together about 80 local organizations. Replicating the UN cluster system, it is under a Steering Committee, has 9 specialized clusters each headed by a lead organization, a Fund Board with a bank account and a Program Development and Policy Unit. The contingency plan under which it operates can be activated at a minimum threshold of an affected population of 50,000<sup>14</sup>. The CPWG has excellent relations with the MSWRR and its activation after Giri and Tarlay was deemed successful overall. During the course of the research, two organizations assisting the CPWG, Paung Ku and Oxfam, showed interest in engagement with the private sector.

The 9 clusters of the contingency plan are WASH, food and nutrition, agriculture, health, protection, education, early recovery, coordination and emergency shelter. While advocating for a wide partnership between the two umbrella organizations, Trócaire could assist lead organizations of each cluster to identify appropriate private partners for each of these clusters within the RUMFCCI's 32 trade associations and/or in the Federation's member companies. For instance, a relationship could be established between the MPMEEA and the lead organization of the health cluster that would result in donations of medicine to health-focused LNGOs through the cluster in case of a disaster. Companies that belong to the Myanmar International Freight Forwarders' Association could provide technical support to all the clusters based on needs.

Such an approach presents a number of challenges. Both the constituents of the RUMFCCI and LNGOs have limited organizational and staff capacities and it will be difficult to induce them into dedicating some of those to establishing a partnership. Extensive and progressive awareness-raising, networking and trust-building would be necessary to reach an agreement in a politically complex environment like Myanmar. Also, for the sake of planning, the benefits that both sectors will gain from the partnership must be clearly laid out and agreed upon, be it technical support through the secondment of qualified volunteers or the amount of in kind donations for LNGOs, and public acknowledgement or support to philanthropy initiatives for the private sector. A comprehensive mapping of both sides' capacities and needs would thus be needed.

These challenges are substantial but the rewards from a "meta-initiative"<sup>15</sup> like the one suggested would be high. An agreement between umbrella organizations would have a larger impact than "single company engagement"<sup>16</sup> or specific partnerships. It could also prove more sustainable if successful in its first implementations. Moreover, the dialogue between both

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<sup>14</sup> Myanmar NGO Contingency Plan, <<http://themimu.info/docs/MNGO%20CP%20Version%201.1%20-%20Oct%202010%20%28Eng%29.pdf>>

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Bidder & Jan Martin Witte, pp.9-11

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

sectors initiated on a consensual issue like how to cooperate in the response to natural disasters could, on the long term, extend to other areas related to social and environmental issues in the context of economic development in Myanmar. Last, from the process of advocacy at the management level of both umbrella organizations (“track 1”), and from dialogue with lead agencies of the CPWG and management of trade associations of the RUMFCCI (“track 2”), could ensue partnerships between specific entities of the private and humanitarian sectors that are related to these organizations (“track 3”). Indeed, a strategy that targets a wide cooperation through engagement with the highest bodies, rather than excluding initiatives between the components of these bodies, could promote them.

A second and non exclusive area for Trócaire to explore is cooperation with some of the faith-based organizations that played a key role in advocating for and channelling private sector’s support towards affected communities after recent natural disasters. These organizations have the potential to tap not only in funds but also in the technical capacities of the private sector, but they might need support to identify what are the areas where technical cooperations are possible and how to concretize them. Their awareness of humanitarian principles, standards and operating procedures might also be limited, like that of the private sector. Increasing the capacities of faith-based organizations in both **coordination** and **standards** would trickle down to private donors who operate alongside of them in relief operations.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The non commercial engagement of the private sector in humanitarian relief following recent natural disasters in Myanmar must be considered within the country context. A strong sense of social solidarity, the limited contribution of the State to social welfare and a buoyant and growing civil society explain the substantial extent of this engagement.

Motivated by compassion towards one’s fellow human being, by religious principles and attachment to one’s ethnic or geographic community, by the request of the State or the desire to please its civil servants, or by an understanding of CSR principles, business engagement in recent relief took different forms. Mainly, it consisted in kind and/or in cash donations to entities that would deliver assistance, be them faith-based organizations, informal aid groups, NGOs, professional associations or authorities. After Nargis especially, some businesses implemented assistance by themselves. Occasionally, cooperation with NGOs based on the core business competences of companies took place.

Globally and in Myanmar, many traditional humanitarian agencies fail at cooperating with businesses due to a lack of understanding of corporate culture and, perhaps more significantly, the lack of effective protocols and procedures linking private partners into work on the ground. Partnerships can help to fill gaps in humanitarian action though they are by no means a panacea. But they require time and resources to develop and maintain, and should focus on the development of standby capacity through the identification of core competencies and where complementarities can lead to cooperation.

Trócaire could **promote partnerships between specific companies and LNGOs**. This study identifies a number of businesses that have an interest in and potential for working with the humanitarian sector. However, given the lack of cross-sector trust and knowledge and the top down nature of Myanmar society, such an endeavour is likely to be a time consuming process with standby capacities of limited impact and sustainability.

Consequently, it is recommended that the organization initiates a “meta-initiative”, a **national level public private partnership in disaster response**. This overarching partnership would bring together the umbrella organizations of the domestic business and humanitarian sectors, which have both excellent relationships with the government.

The **Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (RUMFCCI)** has Chambers in all the States and Regions of Myanmar as well as 32 sector specific associations. The **Myanmar NGO Contingency Planning Working Group (CPWG)** brings together about 80 LNGOs organized in clusters to respond in a coordinated manner to emergencies.

Trócaire should assist in the **initiation of a cross-sector dialogue** between members of the two bodies, working conjointly with the leadership of these organizations as well as with specific members. A plan for the **overarching partnership** could be introduced to the Executive Committee of the RUMFCCI and to the Steering Committee of the CPWG. At the same time, a **sector specific partnership** could be presented, for example to the lead agency of the health cluster and to the MPMEEA.

It will take time to build trust in such a complex environment as Myanmar. But Trócaire should soon be able to identify obstacles and could work with supporters of the partnership from the two sectors to remove them. It might first reach a number of sector specific partnerships before the overarching partnership is agreed upon.

Challenges are numerous but potential benefits are substantial in terms of **access, coordination and standards**. The impact of partnerships between organizations would be higher and more sustainable than those between specific actors from both sectors. Also the dialogue initiated between the private sector and aid organizations could extend beyond humanitarian issues on

the long term. Last, by engaging first with the highest bodies from both sectors (“track 1”), options for partnerships between trade associations and clusters (“track 2”), or between specific private companies and NGOs (“track 3”), would also be created.

Simultaneously, Trócaire could **explore cooperation with faith-based organizations to increase their capacities at tapping in the core competencies of the private sector**, and to **improve their operating standards as well as those of their private partners**.

Finally, cooperation after natural disasters between the private sector and traditional welfare actors such as faith-based organizations and informal aid groups was found to be organic as based on well established trust, long term relations and social networks. The capacity of an outside agent like Trócaire to impact these organic networks should not be overestimated. While through working with LNGOs from the CPWG especially, Trócaire could help build formal bridges between this umbrella organization and the private sector.

## 6. Appendix

**Table 1. List of secondary sources used for the study**

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Material Type	Reference List
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<b>Press</b>	
<b>Material Type</b>	<b>Reference List</b>
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**Figure 1. Schematic Description of the Non Commercial Disaster Response Process by the Domestic Private Sector**

