

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR REMOTE TOWNSHIPS



Implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

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The Community Development for Remote Townships project is one of 10 projects under the United Nations Development Programme's multisectoral Human Development Initiative Extension (HDIE) programme in Myanmar. The Remote Townships project aims to provide basic social services to people in 12 townships in the remoter areas of western and northern Myanmar. It also stimulates opportunities for local people to generate income, and involves them in making decisions that affect them.

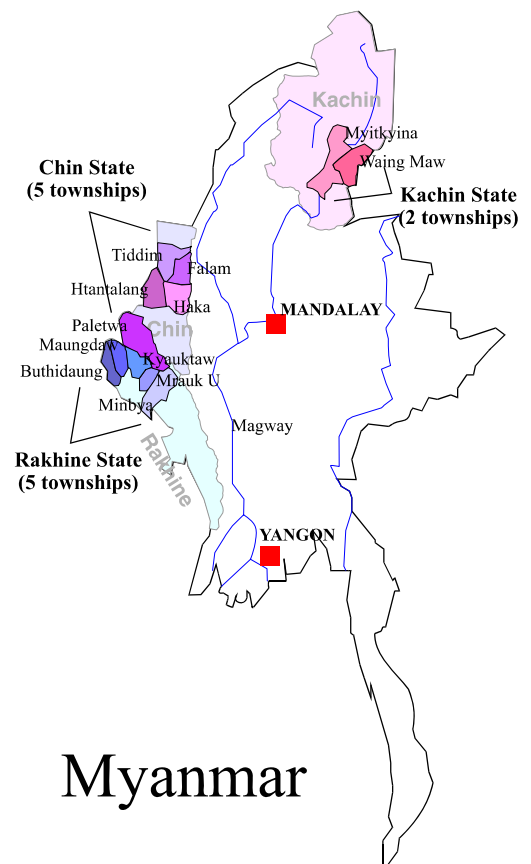
## Project townships

The project serves 12 townships in three states: Kachin, Chin and Rakhine. All these areas are inaccessible and lack infrastructure such as roads and schools. There are not enough trained teachers, and schools lack basics as textbooks and teaching supplies. Malaria is the most common killer; other major health problems are tuberculosis, water-borne diseases such as dysentery and cholera, and acute respiratory infections. Iodine deficiency is a serious problem in hilly areas in Chin and Kachin. Hospitals and health centres are few and poorly staffed and equipped; many people rely on traditional medicines.

Rivers and springs are often polluted, making water unsafe to drink. Few families have latrines, and many people know little about hygiene and sanitation.

In mountainous Chin and Kachin States, decades of shifting "slash-and-burn" cultivation have deforested large areas, stripping away topsoil, and disrupting water resources. In Rakhine, the rising demand for charcoal and farmland has led to the destruction of coastal mangroves, harming the local fishing industry. Farmers raise pigs and cattle, but there are few animal health services.

In Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships in northern Rakhine, some 250,000 Muslim people who had fled to Bangladesh in 1991–92 have returned home; the project builds on relief work begun by UNHCR to help reintegrate these returnees into Myanmar society.



## Approach

The Remote Townships project tackles these problems through a three-pronged approach:

- Promoting **social development** by strengthening primary health care and primary schooling, improving water supplies and sanitation, educating people about the dangers of HIV and AIDS, and advocating improvements in the management of the environment.
- Helping local people **generate income** in agriculture, forestry, livestock, fisheries and small businesses, and by providing them with credit on easy terms.
- Building **local people's capacity** to improve their own well-being further.

Within the HDIE programme, the Remote Townships project is the only one to cover all HDIE subject areas: primary health care and HIV/AIDS awareness, education and training, food security and the environment. It draws on the expertise of the other HDIE projects, and on the skills and experience of national and international nongovernment organizations working in the project area. The HDI Support project provides services such as training, monitoring and evaluation.

## Project activities

In common with the other HDIE projects, the Remote Townships project focuses on the poor and disadvantaged, using participatory approaches to identify the poorest and to empower local people to solve their own problems. It identifies the neediest villages in each township by mapping local resources, surveying households, and through consultations with local communities. Within the villages chosen, participatory appraisal exercises identify key problems and potential solutions, then local people and project staff together decide which solutions to put into practice. Their decisions are based on the productivity and cost-benefit of each option, its technical and socio-cultural feasibility and sustainability, and whether all people in the community (especially women, the poorest and most disadvantaged) will feel the benefits. Much of the project's work is facilitated through groups of interested villagers, who help identify problems, constraints, opportunities and possible solutions, as well as doing much of the work involved. The technologies used try to blend the best of outside knowledge and local expertise to ensure that they are appropriate for local conditions.

### Primary health care

The project repairs and improves basic health-care facilities, such as clinics, and trains health workers. It provides drugs and minor equipment to combat killer diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, diarrhoea and pneumonia. It promotes family planning methods and the production and use of iodized salt, and helps integrate handicapped people into the community. It supports and educates traditional healers (such as the birth-attendants many mothers rely on) and the blending of traditional and modern treatments.

### Basic education

Many schools in the project townships are in poor repair, and many villages lack a school altogether. The project renovates and upgrades primary schools, including supplying water and building latrines. It trains teachers whose salaries are paid by the community, and provides schools with learning and teaching materials. It supports non-formal education and training for children, youths and adults, like that in monasteries, churches and community facilities. It helps parent-teacher associations start businesses to generate income for the school.

### Water supply and sanitation

Together with local people, the project repairs water-supply systems, and digs wells and lays pipes to serve villages lacking an assured supply of water. Water-user committees in each village maintain the systems and decide how to charge for water. The project educates villagers on sanitation, and helps them build latrines for their own homes and for the local school.

### Environment and agriculture

The project educates people on conservation, and promotes ways to prevent further degradation: restricting cutting of trees, replanting forests and establishing woodlots, planning land use, and suitable cropping patterns on steep slopes. It promotes efficient stoves to reduce the amount of wood that has to be cut for fuel.

The project increases the amount of farmland for landless households by developing fallow and cultivable wasteland in environmentally safe areas. It develops irrigation systems and helps form water users' associations, provides seeds, fertilizer, vaccines and other inputs, and promotes improved farming practices such as mixed cropping, terracing, livestock production and animal traction. Support for fishing includes credit to purchase improved equipment and the development of aquaculture.

### Small businesses and credit

The project trains local people to set up small businesses, and provides credit to help them get started. Examples include cotton ginning, weaving, basket-making, tailoring, pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, bicycle repairs, trading, transport and ploughing services, handicrafts, tree nurseries and the processing of farm produce.

Groups of villagers can borrow money from the project to invest in their farm or other businesses. After an agreed time, they must repay the money (with interest) to the group. This capital becomes the property of the villagers themselves: a continually growing "revolving fund" that can be lent it out and reinvested.

Each community is given a small contingency fund that it can use on projects not covered by the project activities described above. The villagers must agree on how to use the money: for example to repair a bridge or road or help people recover from a natural disaster.