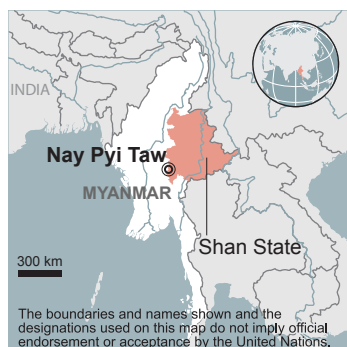


Support to ex-poppy farmers and vulnerable families in border areas



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Myanmar

Duration: March 2007 to December 2009

Implementing UN Agencies: WFP; FAO; UNODC; UNFPA

Other Implementing Partners: CARE; World Vision; World Concern; German Agro Action; AMDA; ADRA; MSF-Holland; REAM/KMSS (local NGO)

Budget: \$948,200

Key Words: Alternative livelihood; sustainable development; empowerment

BACKGROUND

Among poppy-growing farmers living in the highlands of Myanmar's eastern Shan State, opium had been a main source of income for over 100 years. By 2005, opium from Shan State accounted for roughly 95 per cent of the country's entire production, representing up to 52 per cent of the annual cash income for poppy farmers. Nevertheless, in a bid to eradicate opium, the Government banned locals from growing and selling poppy in different parts of the country. This plunged the vast majority of farmers into abject poverty, adversely affecting their food security and leaving them with little support or other sources of income. In some cases up to 82 per cent of poppy-growing households could no longer meet their food needs,

with roughly half of them reporting a shortfall in rice for up to three months. Coping strategies - including migration, fewer meals, taking children out of school to reduce costs, lower use of medical services and more reliance on slash-and-burn agriculture to grow maize - often increased the vulnerability of these households. Losing their livelihood posed additional threats, with families becoming even more susceptible to porous crimes such as human trafficking and, in some cases, returning to illicit poppy farming. In Shan State, the transition from a poppy-dependent livelihood to an alternative livelihood had proven exceptionally difficult, with many farmers lacking the skills to introduce sustainable agriculture.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This project's overriding goals were to protect ex-poppy farming households and poor vulnerable families from losing their livelihoods, improve their food security situation and to create and maintain the conditions for renewed self-reliance and rehabilitation. More specifically, the project aimed to: (i) increase food production and income generation opportunities; (ii) improve access to primary schools; (iii) increase

access to safe water and improve local capacity in the construction and maintenance of basic infrastructure; (iv) expand access to non-formal education among women and adolescent girls as well as empowering women through literacy training; (v) raise awareness on HIV/AIDS, health, hygiene and gender-related issues and; (vi) upgrade technical knowledge among community health workers and teachers.

BENEFICIARIES

Based on the communal efforts of participating villagers, this project set out to benefit some 150,000

people living throughout Shan State including the regions of Kokang, Wa, Lashio and Southern Shan.



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) In over 500 villages, more than 2,000 hectares of land were reclaimed and converted into paddy fields, terraced fields, tea and/or sugarcane plantations, leading to a 30 per cent increase in food production and improved income generation for over 30,000 ex-opioid farmers. Moreover, food security improved significantly, with the number of food insecure households decreasing from 40 per cent in 2007 to less than 20 per cent in 2010.

(ii) Building on the preferences and the existing skills of farmers, the selection of new agricultural products and practices led to much higher yields in food production. Moreover, farmers were offered a series of intensive training opportunities to build their capacities on alternative crop production techniques including seed technology for various crops,

composting and fertilizer use, integrated pest management, and food processing.

(iii) More than 40 schools were either constructed or renovated and were equipped with blackboards, latrines, and better access to safe drinking water. These changes ultimately helped improve the learning environment and increased regular attendance by 20 per cent of school children.

(iv) 50 per cent of community health workers and 80 per cent of teachers living in villages within Shan State received training on topics related to health and nutrition. Similarly, villagers and rural trainers benefited from campaigns on public health education, as well as sessions on maternal and child healthcare, human trafficking, sanitation and hygiene, and HIV/AIDS awareness.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project highlighted the importance of a combined protection and empowerment framework for achieving human security. Not only are both components necessary but they need to be implemented in an integrated and mutually-reinforcing manner if they are to alleviate human insecurities and advance sustainable change. Subsequently, while the empowerment components of the project yielded notable achievements in terms of developing alternative livelihoods and addressing economic and

food insecurities within the communities, a lack of coherence in policy decisions at the local and national level threatened to reverse the achievements made at the community level. In particular, the decision to expand commercial rubber plantations in the region led to growing demand for land and labour, leaving villagers highly vulnerable to labour and land shortages, and making it extremely difficult to sustain and expand the achievements attained into the future.