

This brief represents the main findings from the first round of the village-level community assessment of Myanmar COVID-19 socio-economic monitoring. A total of 224 individuals (4 per village, selected for their knowledge of the situation of the village and representativity of key sub-groups) were interviewed across 56 villages, in two townships in every state/region across the country.

DATA COLLECTION

JULY 2020

# Myanmar COVID-19 Monitoring: Community Assessment



## Health & Behavior

1 Village heads indicated that fear of contamination was by far the main concern of villagers.

2 Adherence to social distancing measures and government regulations waned over time.

*"At first everyone wore a mask when going out. Now, they don't wear masks. My family looks at me like I am strange if I wear a mask going out."*

3 Fear of COVID-19 and mobility restrictions impacted the availability of COVID-19 related health services in villages, because mobile clinics, midwives, and township health officers no longer travelled to villages for routine care.

## Compounded effects on the most vulnerable

The economic impacts of the virus were particularly felt in areas that were already vulnerable: villages affected by natural disasters, with a recent history of poor harvests, reliant on border trade, near active fighting or land mines posing foraging dangerous, or with large populations of casual laborers, or households reliant on remittances from migrant workers.

## Social Cohesion

1 Accounting for the fact that villagers faced extreme and sudden stress, social relations in the research villages remained remarkably strong.

2 Where village relations worsened, it was with regards to two factors: Temporarily, returning migrants were viewed with suspicion and fear in many villages; and the distribution of the government's aid created tensions around eligibility criteria.

## Leadership

1 Local leaders collaborated with each other in 40 out of the 56 research villages.

2 Where leaders collaborated, villagers received more aid.

3 Trust in local leadership had an important positive impacts on how villages perceived and accepted COVID-19-related health measures.

## Aid

1 Most village heads reported that their village received some form of aid.

2 Aid was generally viewed as supplementary, rather than a significant source of support for families during the April-May lockdown period or thereafter. An aid recipient of the 15,000 kyats cash transfer noted:

*"What can be done with this amount of money? I mean thank you, but it is like ringing a bell with a leaf - no sound comes out."*

## Livelihoods & Migration

1 The crisis has taken a toll on rural livelihoods, with mobility restrictions leaving farmers without labor to harvest and plant or cash to pay workers or buy inputs, negatively impacting current harvests and future production.

2 Traditional ways of making ends meet, such as migration and advanced wages before the harvest were severely impacted, primarily affecting casual workers.

3 Most village representatives reported that households were seeking to reduce their expenses wherever possible by living on less food or lower quality food, foraging, using their savings and selling or pawning assets or land.

*"Right now, I am mentally very tired. As one day ends, I always find myself worrying about how I will eat the next day - even at night I cannot sleep thinking about it, until dawn."*

## Debt

1 The pandemic significantly increased the debt burden and impaired villagers' ability to repay existing debt. Village representatives reported that a significant number of villagers in three quarters of research villages tried to take out new loans to cope with the crisis.

*"What can we do as the debts must be paid back? We have to take out new loans from different sources again to repay back old ones and also apologize to others and try to postpone payments for a while."*

## Women

1 Women, often those responsible for household finances and cooking are disproportionately affected by the crisis.

*"Women are most affected by this outbreak. They have so many burdens, as managing money and preparing food are their duty, they worry about debt and food shortages."*

2 There are also worrying signs pointing to increased domestic violence.

