

LIFT's donors and partners respond to COVID-19



The multi-donor Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) is in its eleventh year operating in Myanmar. LIFT's donors are the United Kingdom, the European Union, Switzerland, Australia, the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. LIFT's funding to date is USD 574 million.

At the end of 2019, LIFT had worked in 269 townships, 82 percent of Myanmar's townships and reached 14.6 million people – or roughly 41 per cent of Myanmar's rural population.

LIFT is working with the Government of Myanmar Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI); Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MOSWRR), Health and Sports (MOHS) and Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP)) and with 54 partners, including civil society organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations, ethnic service providers, UN agencies, academic and research bodies, and the private sector.



On 23 March, Myanmar announced its first cases of COVID-19. In a country of 54 million people, with 24.8% of the population living below the national poverty line and a number of ongoing conflicts, a spread of the pandemic would have been disastrous. LIFT and its partners were well-positioned to adapt and assist in the management of the COVID-19 crisis and to respond quickly to the communities' needs.



USD 25.5 M

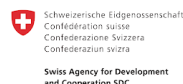
By the end of March, as the Government announced measures to contain the spread of the virus, more than 30 of LIFT's partners pivoted within their projects and repurposed USD 2.3 million for immediate preparedness and response activities in support of the most vulnerable groups. By mid-April, LIFT's donors had allocated a further USD 20 million to LIFT's COVID-19 response and, by July, a further USD 3.2 million to support communities suffering from the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. **In total, LIFT's COVID-19 support has amounted to USD 25.5 million.**

LIFT's donors adopted a strategic approach to provide: 1) an immediate frontline response to enable communities to prepare for and prevent the spread of the virus, 2) a medium-term strategic response in LIFT's programme areas of high need and 3) a longer-term response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, including through adaptation of LIFT's programmes in agriculture, livelihoods and the rural economy.

LIFT's breadth of partnerships enabled a rapid and impactful response to COVID-19 in Myanmar.



Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



Partners pivot quickly in immediate frontline response



LIFT's immediate response

The immediate need was to support communities to protect themselves and prevent the spread of COVID-19. LIFT encouraged all of its implementing partners to plan actions to increase vulnerable populations' knowledge and preparedness for COVID-19. As a result, within days, funding of almost USD 1 million was redirected, by the end of June this totalled more than USD 2.3 million.

LIFT's partners supported households and communities across the country, focusing particularly on people with a heightened risk to the global health crisis; the elderly, people with disabilities, migrants and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. Almost half of the people reached were women, 22 per cent were elderly and three per cent were people with disabilities. Partners provided vulnerable communities with hand-washing facilities, soap, sanitiser and personal protective equipment (PPE) and delivered information on the behaviours necessary to prevent transmission of the virus.

LIFT also supported state and township-level health and social welfare departments in their response, particularly with hand-washing facilities and PPE, for rural health centres, quarantine facilities and hospitals in Government and non-Government-controlled areas.



One of the first partners to transform its core work to respond to this urgent need was **Eden**, LIFT's partner working to protect and shelter trafficked women and provide career and vocational training. Eden engaged 738 women to make soap, facemasks and hand sanitiser and distribute these, as well as basic food items, to the extremely vulnerable in Yangon's peri-urban slums.



Co-funded by LIFT and Access to Health, **Sin Sar Bar and Community**

Partners International implemented a **"Stay at Home"** campaign through a [social media song](#) performed by well-known singers.



Launched in the run up to the New Year holiday Thingyan, the messaging was delivered via a catchy song in [Myanmar](#), [Kavin](#), [Kachin](#), [Shan](#) and [Rakhine](#) languages, appealing to the public to stay at home to prevent infection and further spread of COVID-19. The animated music video was published on Facebook and TikTok, and a specific [awareness-raising video with COVID-19 tips](#) by actor Swe Zin Htike aka Aunty Grace was also produced and shared on social media.



In Rakhine State, the **International Rescue Committee** constructed WASH facilities and provided hygiene kits and information to internally-displaced people living in camps.



Network Activities Group (NAG) supported quarantine facilities with hygiene and cleaning materials and provided food baskets and support to the families of vulnerable people quarantined. NAG also built linkages between frontline workers, leaders and the community, and used a tracking app and social media to help reduce transmission in seven townships in Magway.



LIFT's medium-term programmatic response

By early April, the Government imposed stricter measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus, including lockdown, travel restrictions and closure of all but essential services. As COVID-19 cases slowly crept up, the impact of these restrictions on earnings and livelihoods, particularly for vulnerable groups, was clear.

On 9 April, LIFT announced new funding of USD 15.8 million to a medium-term COVID-19 response in Myanmar, focused on migrants, pregnant women, women with young children, and the elderly.



LIFT Fund Director Katy Webley said: *"The COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge to Myanmar and its people, today and for the foreseeable future. In preparedness and response, we must seek to support the most vulnerable members of society and do so in a way that lifts the nation. With the funding from our donors, LIFT is proud to be able to offer assistance, working with civil society, the Government, ethnic service providers and all our implementing partners, to support preparedness, response and resilience at this crucial time in Myanmar".*

Supporting migrant workers caught by the pandemic



Migrant response

For internal migrants the most significant problems were the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions as, by June, around 150 Yangon factories had either permanently or temporarily closed. The shuttering of factories has disproportionately affected the livelihoods of women, who represent 90 per cent of the workforce in the garment sector. Myanmar's poorest peri-urban communities quickly experienced an acute lack of income. Migrants and their families living in densely populated peri-urban settlements lacked savings, hygiene items, and knowledge regarding COVID-19, and families desperate for income could become increasingly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, including forced and child labour.

Direct assistance was delivered to migrants in crisis situations, including food assistance, cash transfers, shelter and transportation, and through counselling and legal services to those who lost jobs in Yangon's manufacturing sector.

ActionAid and **CARE** delivered cash transfers to marginalized groups within the migrant population without access to other forms of support, including people with disabilities, people living with HIV and informal sector workers (such as domestic workers, day labourers in construction, rickshaw drivers and sex workers).

People in Need provided psychosocial counselling services to help workers cope with increased stress caused by the outbreak and loss of livelihoods (addressing concerns around COVID-19, the impact on their relationships and the welfare of their families). **Women's Organization Network** delivered much needed temporary accommodation and food assistance to women migrant workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 through 4 Migrant Support Centers in Hlaing Thar Yar and Dagon Myo Thit.



Save the Children provided garment industry workers with a one-off cash transfer of MMK 120,000 (USD 85.5), equivalent to a salary for 25 days' work, to lessen the impact of jobs lost. In its assessment, Save the Children found that, with household incomes greatly reduced, two-thirds of those interviewed had changed their food consumption behaviours to maintain their food security.





**117,000
returning
migrants**

By June, at least 117,000 international migrants had returned to Myanmar, primarily from Thailand and China. The closure of border checkpoints and imposition of travel restrictions left thousands of Myanmar migrants stranded in destination countries. Information, hygiene and personal protective equipment was distributed by LIFT's partners at border crossings, communities of origin and destination.



**1,282,000
CDC
approved
reusable
masks**

IOM and its CSO partners provided material support in the form of food, blankets, hygiene and medical kits, non-touch thermometers, masks, PPE suits, hand gels, gloves and soap to migrant workers at community health centres and quarantine locations, as well as increasing access to wash facilities through the installation of wash basins. To meet the demand for personal protective equipment, **CARE** brokered the low-cost production of over 1,282,000 CDC-approved reusable masks through a dozen garment factories, helping to ensure the continued employment of hundreds of migrant women.



Migrant returning from Thailand:

"At Myawaddy gate 2 there were many people. I arrived at night and had to sleep there to wait for the bridge to open. I rented a car to cross with many people as usual, but this time had to pay a lot of money - 1,300 baht (USD 41) per person."

"[Once in Myanmar] I came back to Keng Tung by bus and my brother picked me up at the bus terminal. There were many people in the bus, so I was worried about getting infected. I had my temperature tested at three checkpoints on the way back. As I didn't have a fever, they allowed me to go home. I was so afraid of the authorities at the checkpoints. I worried that I wouldn't be able to go home if I had a fever."

The International Labour Organization (ILO) provided emergency assistance, health information and counselling about COVID-19 and quarantine to returning migrants at the main border crossings with Thailand.



ILO also provided paralegal assistance to support returning migrants in resolving grievances and claiming social protection benefits due.



1,000,000
beneficiaries

LIFT's migrant response has provided assistance to over 1,000,000 direct beneficiaries; 63 per cent of them women, through nine implementing partners working across 12 states and regions of Myanmar. In addition **BBC Media Action** and others leveraged social media to disseminate information on COVID-19 to a much larger audience, directly engaging at least 664,000 people and viewed by 13.6 million more.

LIFT also supported the **Government and Ethnic Service Providers** by distributing medical equipment and supplies to health facilities, hospitals and quarantine facilities.



Karen National Union (KNU) administrator of a quarantine centre:

*"In my opinion, the current **support provided by LIFT is useful and helps to encourage patients** to follow the quarantine centre's discipline. Patients expressed that they got the proper care and necessary support. The purpose of setting up the quarantine facility for COVID-19 prevention and control has succeeded in my area."*

Civil society groups were essential to the speed, reach and scale of the response



LIFT's partners **Karuna Mission Social Solidarity**

(KMSS), Metta, Land Core Group (LCG), Network Activities Group (NAG) and Gender Equality Network (GEN) reached more than 1 million people, half of them women, in the first month of the emergency response. These CSOs delivered information about COVID-19 prevention directly to communities and mobilised local resources to build trust and relationships with frontline leaders and service providers in Government and non-Government-controlled areas.

Civil Society response

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been instrumental to response efforts. Local organisations already work on the 'frontline', they have extensive local knowledge, relationships and networks across wide geographic areas and at all levels of administration, from grassroots through to the national level. More than 80 per cent of LIFT's response activity has been undertaken by local partners who access villages, factories, quarantine centres, camps and border gates that staff from international organisations cannot reach.

In Kachin State, the **CHAD Community Health and Development** and the **Kachin Baptist Church (KBC)** alone provided support to 19 camps for internally displaced people and 15 surrounding communities in Kachin State, that few organisations are allowed to access, reaching 10,000 people with information, education and communication materials and personal protective equipment and hygiene kits. **Nyein Foundation** supported 30 camps for internally displaced people with handwashing points and upgrading water systems, in addition to general awareness activities.

The Border Consortium (TBC) and their extensive network of partners have ensured COVID-19 support to communities in non-Government-controlled areas through working with CSOs and ethnic service providers in Kayin and Kayah State and Tanintharyi region. Assistance included training and awareness-raising, screening and border monitoring, establishment of quarantine procedures and centres.

Metta, a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), organised information and hygiene awareness campaigns and provided WASH facilities, soaps and disinfectants to internally-displaced people living in camps and surrounding communities in Kachin State. Metta provided social support for vulnerable groups and ran campaigns to prevent domestic and gender-based violence.



COVID-19 awareness session at a village meeting in Nar Hit, Taunggyi



In Kayah State, Metta has been conducting COVID-19 awareness raising sessions in coordination with health workers, forming village response committees and assisting in the preparation of village response plans.

Recognising the constraints to travel and access in **Rakhine State**, LIFT and Metta quickly moved to establish a small grants fund to support CSOs in Rakhine, with USD 2 million additional funding.

Supporting vulnerable populations with essential cash



400,000 + households
(200,000 elderly pensioners and 242,000 mothers)

Social Protection response

Around the world, social protection measures are an effective way to support families affected by job losses and other hardship, and assist with essential food and health costs. LIFT donors allocated USD 9 million to provide cash transfers to more than 400,000 households. Building on existing social protection programmes and working with the Ministry of Social, Welfare, Relief and Resettlement's Department of Social Welfare and with HelpAge International, this cash transfer of MMK 30,000 (USD 20) reached 200,000 elderly pensioners country-wide and 242,000 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in Rakhine, Chin, Kayah and Kayin States and the Naga Self-Administered Zone.





The **Department of Social Welfare's Director General, Dr San San Aye**, said: *"Myanmar's vision for social protection is an **inclusive, equitable and sustainable** system that facilitates access to essential social services, protects people from risks and shocks, addresses economic and social vulnerabilities and food insecurity, promotes economic opportunities and alleviates social exclusion, as per the Government of Myanmar's National Social Protection Strategic Plan of 2014. In times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, **we will build on and strengthen our outreach to Myanmar's most vulnerable people**. The cash transfers to mothers and older people are a symbol of this, and will be followed by further efforts as outlined in Goal 4 of the **Government's COVID-19 Coordinated Economic Relief Plan**, in our effort to ease the impact on households".*

"I'm so grateful for this support at this difficult time. I can use this money either for food or for making a donation, so I'm really glad!"

— *Daw Ohn Saing,*
South Dagon, Yangon



To ensure longer-term support and strengthen Government capacities to respond to shocks (such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural resource disasters and other significant co-variant emergencies), LIFT approved USD 496,000 for HelpAge International's collaboration with the the Department of Social Welfare to strengthen its shock response capacity.

The project has three main work streams: (1) Technical assistance (capacity and systems strengthening) for delivering shock responsive social protection; (2) capturing and sharing policy lessons in shock-responsive social protection through national and regional events; and (3) preparing pandemic safety information for recipients of national social pensions and their respective households.

Capital injection to microfinance to boost monsoon resilience and rural investment

Financial Inclusion response

The most significant impact of COVID-19 on the microfinance sector was a decrease in the liquidity, or available loan capital, to microfinance institutions (MFIs). The consequence was a decrease in the quality of financial services available to vulnerable clients. This pushed farmers, among others, to take unaffordable loans, as reported by the Myanmar Times, with LIFT quoted, and providing a lot of the background information for the article.

A further USD 3 million was approved by the LIFT Fund Board on 20 April to increase liquidity for microfinance institutions (MFIs), supporting up to 600,000 households and small businesses at this turbulent time.



By June, seven MFIs and 12 investors had partnered with LIFT and USD 18 million in capital had been disbursed. Agreements for disbursement of a further USD 35 million are being finalised.

With 3 million invested into the Capital Markets Programme with The Currency Exchange Fund (TCX), LIFT anticipated leveraging up to USD 60 million in capital from international investors, allowing MFIs to offer loan top-ups of USD 100-200 to up to **600,000 households** and small businesses in areas hit hard by COVID-19, including 4,200 garment workers.



Agriculture, Finance and Rural Markets

LIFT and MOALI have also designed an innovative cash-for-work pilot in the Ayeyarwady Delta, focussed on improving infrastructure on government seed farms. Cash for work schemes are a key component of the Government's response to COVID-19. The LIFT/MOALI cash-for-work pilot, implemented by Welthungerhilfe (WHH) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation's Department of Agriculture (DOA), will improve local capacities to produce good quality early generation seeds and provide learnings about the design and implementation of cash-for-work programmes in the rural sector.

LIFT and LIFT's partners invested in early assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on the rural economy, including through Mercy Corps/Welthungerhilfe and Michigan State University (MSU)/International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

The Agriculture Value Chain Development programme led by MSU and IFPRI quickly adapted its policy design workstream to produce policy briefs analysing the impact of COVID-19 on the rural economy and making recommendations for short-term responses and longer term post-COVID-19 recovery strategies. LIFT provided funding to support a series of telephone surveys from June to December 2020 on the impact of COVID-19 on food security, community impact, agriculture production and urban food retailing. IFPRI's survey findings are now shared on a monthly basis with MOALI, other relevant Government officials, development partners and international organisations.



LIFT and partners will continue to monitor and observe the impact of COVID-19 on the rural economy. In addition to the impact on lives and livelihoods, there will also be a decline in migrants' remittances affecting the 2.1 million direct recipients (disproportionately women in rural areas). The World Bank estimates that formal remittances to low- and middle-income countries will fall by 20 per cent in 2020. If the large amount of informal remittances sent back to Myanmar are included, the decrease of remittances to Myanmar could be up to USD 2 billion this year.

Internally Displaced People response

Over 300,000 people (77% women and children) remain displaced in camps or camp-like settings and in host communities across Myanmar, after fleeing violence in Kachin, Shan, Kayin, Rakhine and Chin States.



Internally displaced people (IDPs) are poorly equipped to prepare for and prevent the spread of the virus. Coping capacities are too little to absorb the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and financial resources (income and savings) are too limited to stockpile.



***IDP camp
in a non-Government-
controlled area
in Kachin***



Job opportunities have decreased across the country, due to the general decline in the economy and restrictions on movement. A combination of the lack of meaningful occupations, privacy, and prolonged stay in camps is also affecting the psychological wellbeing of the population and risks an increase in gender based violence, trafficking or exploitation.

Shelters and the configuration of the camps and sites do not guarantee sufficient physical distancing and options are limited for quarantines. Current level of access to health care remains extremely limited and constrains capacities to prevent and control infections, with underlying medical conditions and chronic diseases common amongst IDPs. According to Human Rights Watch, "The lack of effective, quality health services for Internally Displaced People, combined with food security concerns, underlying illnesses among camp residents, and cramped accommodations, means the camps are like tinderboxes".

LIFT's donors have approved a cash transfer of 65,000 MMK (approx. USD 47.50) to 60,732 households (approx. 325,000 people, 70% women and children) in internally displaced people camps

and settings in Kachin, Northern Shan, Kayin, Rakhine and Chin States. LIFT's funding will be delivered through three modalities:

- **The Department of Social Welfare (DSW)** from the Ministry of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement (MOSWRR) will deliver cash transfers to approximately **52,000 households** (HH) of internally displaced people across five states (261,710 people).
- In areas out of reach for DSW in non-Government-controlled areas and other locations in Kachin and Northern Shan States, support for over **11,000 HHs** will be delivered through the **Joint Strategic Team (JST)**.
- For over **1,700** unregistered households in internally displaced people's camps in Rakhine State, cash transfers will be delivered through an **NGO partner**.

This cash transfer will support internally displaced people and their families to cover basic food needs, to purchase other basic items and essential services and to build resilience to the socio-economic impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learnings

Learning from partners' COVID-19 response, and the use of evidence to influence policy and further programming, is essential. LIFT will explore themes around **cash transfers**, such as the **impact of top ups on food security/nutrition/consumption**, how LIFT's social protection responses shaped others' spending, including that of the Government, and how LIFT **promoted inclusion and social cohesion** through these transfers. LIFT will also explore issues around **debt, credit, decent work and trafficking**.



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