

Cyclone nargis essay sample



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Cyclone Nargis, crossing the south of Burma over two days, can accord recognition for bringing devastating loss to the Ayeyarwady Delta region , particularly to the extremely vulnerable social groups within. As the United Nation estimates, 2. 4 million people were affected due to this category 4 cyclone that sustained winds of 210 km per hour, and in light of this, the mitigation and response following the cyclone proved to be poor and limited. This was accountable to several factors including governmental suspicions of foreign aid.

Occurring in early May 2008, Cyclone Nargis proved to be one of the worst atmospheric hazards to hit Burma and resulted in major loss and minor immediate recovery. Catastrophic to such an extent due to its geographical location and its strength, Cyclone Nargis proved to impact several vulnerable groups that due to their less developed status, struggled to survive. After forming in the Bay of Bengal, Nargis continued to approach the land, striking low lying and coastal areas.

The force of this category 4 cyclone, effectively transferred into surrounding oceans off the bay, leading to massive storm surges, comparable to those carried out by cyclone Katrina. Following this idea, it is clear how Burma, a traditional tropical storm region, experienced such a devastating effect as with no protection to the coast, the cyclone hit the entirety of the Burmese coastal border. In addition to this, due to Burma's less developed status, the amount of vulnerable groups within society is high.

Groups such as women, children, the elderly and the impoverished (this impoverished status also applying to many of the other groups such as the

women, children and elderly) proved to be the most vulnerable to the impacts of Nargis. Women, for example, were found to be 61% of the deceased in the tolls, with numbers increasing that statistic in many villages. Children too proved to be at greater risk, mainly in terms of the aftermath of the cyclone as they are placed at greater risk in facing abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation in the desperate and critical times following the disaster.

In addition to this, despite Burma's relatively high literacy rate (of 92. 2%), following the cyclone and the difficulties in surviving, children would struggle to continue their education as families continued their own struggle in rebuilding their livelihood. Secondly, the elderly, the disabled or the chronically sick are also seen as extremely susceptible to the devastating impacts of the event as they do not possess the ability or are less able to rebuild their livelihoods on their own, and therefore this dependence on support from families or communities can put increasing amounts of strain and pressure on those around them.

In the face of the hazard people belonging to these social sectors also possess the inability to protect themselves and thus many drowned or were swept away in the powerful storm surges. Thirdly, those in poverty also saw themselves as targets to the impacts of cyclone Nargis, particularly due to their poor and insufficient shelter. With many living in run down and flimsy housing on the outskirts of Rangoon, these areas, collectively known as slums, were easily obliterated by the storms and the people within were either killed or left with support in disease prone areas without money, food, shelter, water, communication or medical aid.

Due to the heavy population orientated on the coast (because of the employment and resource opportunities) and the coastal path of cyclone Nargis, many social groups proved extremely susceptible to the impacts of the hazard. Following this idea it is then evident to see why the extent of the loss from only a category 4 cyclone was so high. With sustained 210 km per hour winds, storm surges and heavy flooding, the impacts of Nargis on Burma proved to be severe and long lasting on major aspects of society.

Following this atmospheric hazard, the losses that Burma experienced were concentrated in categories such as losses of life, economic loss, a loss in water sources and losses/damage to buildings and infrastructure. However loss was not restricted to such groups and proved to be major in other areas such as agriculture and industry and commerce. Firstly, there was a mammoth amount of loss on the Irrawaddy Delta. This area, where the major river in Burma meets the sea, is also the largest and most predominate growing area of rice in the country due to its fertile soil.

Because of its coastal location, the area was torn through severely by the cyclone and experienced major flooding and damage to crops. Not only would this have meant a loss of life for many living there or a loss of employment/livelihood for those working there but also it meant that the production of crops for the entire country was significantly and dangerously decreased, leading to major food shortages and the possibility of future famine. In addition to this, the production of rice came down by at least 2%, impacting local food supplies and export revenues.

Collectively the floods covered and thus destroyed 600, 000 hectares of agricultural land. Although a widely accepted impact of an atmospheric hazard yet always a devastating one, the loss of life in Burma proved to be major, especially due to the vulnerability of so many social groups. With the 2. 4 million people affected, 53, 836 were reported still missing a year after the event in addition to the estimated 84, 530 that were determined deceased.

As families' livelihoods were wiped out overnight, such as the destruction of crops the death of 50% of draught animals, many people died not in the first effects of the hazard but rather in the weeks following due to famine, exhaustion and disease. The losses of life and the agricultural loss can accord recognition for being two of the mainly affected aspects of Burma life. However, there were several other losses to significant aspects of society that slowed down Burma's ability to recover.

Losses in aspects such as the damage to water sources and building and infrastructure are evidence of this. The damage to water sources was due to the cyclone and the tidal surges that it caused. The powerful water surged in along on the coast, damaging vital open water ponds by contamination of soil waste, salt water and corpses carried by the water. Results of this meant there was a lack of water to be provided to those in need, despite the fact that already Burma contains a significant amount of people that experience a difficult struggle in obtaining clean water.

In addition to this, the building and infrastructure destruction relates to an approximate 800, 000 housing units affected. With 4500 units destroyed and

350, 000 heavily damaged, the total of damage losses accounted to a major 686 billion kyats, with over 195, 000 relating to the majorly affected areas of Ayewaddy and Yangoon. Other losses include the loss in communication with the destruction of power lines and cables and a damage to industry and commerce, seen statistics that depict the total loss in industry accounting to 1, 997 kyats and in commerce, 521 kyats.

With its category 4 status and strong storm surges, cyclone Nargis proved to cause major damage over a large range of areas in Burma. This including the major agricultural sector, thousands killed and major set backs to industry and commerce. In comparing the extent of the damage to the response of the hazard, it is evident that the thousands of people in desperation following the event were not properly aided and thus struggled for longer periods of time in worsening conditions. This was due to a number of factors that effected the relief response.

Following this idea, it was also evident to see that due to the limited response, the recovery therefore was also limited. In terms of short-term response, actions taken out was lead mainly by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with its emergency rapid assessment team (ERAT) coordinating the disaster management. Due to political turmoil failing to accept major international relief, it was also in the interested of several neighboring Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand to give financial food and aid, sending relief teams to make a collaborative effort in providing relief to victims.

In addition to this, locals with the ability to have joined together, partially rebuilding about 80% of houses within the first year of the earthquake, however these houses were smaller and made of bamboo due to the lack of resources and therefore will prove to last only temporarily as shelter. With over 2 million left without adequate water, food or shelter and with a displaced population of 800, 000, the total in recovery needs became \$1billion (US) over the three years. This included providing priorities such as food, agriculture, housing, basic services.

Despite the international aid providing major assistance towards victims, they were slow to help- purely due to the government's suspicions. With concerns that accepting international help would make them look weak or inadequate and that the international powers would try and influence the citizens of Burma, the government banned all foreign aid for 2/3 weeks and forcing all carrier planes to fly through Thailand for inspection, inspections that usually sent the planes backward with the food, water and medical aid for victims still on board.

However as the damage became more apparent and the desperation increased, the government quickly allowed foreign aid to enter the country and without question. With the help of foreign aid such as ASEAN and the UN many more lives were spared, however how many died during the first few weeks of the governments stubborn nature was unknown. Looking at the long term recovery and mitigation strategies of Burma proves to be slightly more proactive than the short term relief and recovery, as Burma now takes its steps to rebuilding lives and preparing themselves adequately for a future disaster.

Following the disaster, the Red Cross played a major role in providing a helping hand to the disaster-stricken country. Devising a three-year recovery program, which targeted 100, 000, affected households in 13 townships. This involved rebuilding shelter, providing basic healthcare and psychosocial support, in addition to the access to clean water.

The beneficial outcome of this program can be seen in evidence such as 12, 404 families have been provided with new homes, 25 schools built, 171 community buildings repaired, 19, 353 people and their families have regained or strengthened their livelihoods in crop and vegetable farming, fisheries, 160, 014 people have been provided with basic health care and 247 Red Cross volunteers along with 4, 358 community volunteers now act as trained residents in health and first aid. In addition to this major program, Government mitigation, while minor has been significant.

Prior to the cyclone, and also one of the reasons why Burma remained so unprepared was that despite it being a region for tropical storms, a cyclone was never expected. However now the government of Myanmar have established a National Natural Disaster Preparedness Central Committee (NDPCC) where meetings will be held to determine priorities for relief such as the provision of houses, buildings, hospitals and schools. The committee also have set plans to increase community early warning systems with an addition of more forecasts and communications from the newly advances Myanmar Meteorological Department (MMD).

In reference to the major amounts of reconstruction in the long term recovery process, part of the mitigation strategies were to “ build back

better”, setting guidelines for housing, trained builders and to incorporate technology in addition to the protection of water within the house and the sanitation of the infrastructure. The proposed subsidy for brick construction remained at \$200 million. In addition to the government’s role in mitigation, members of the community have also now taken part with over 4000 people from 136 villages being trained in community-based disaster risk management, along with 300 school children and 20 teachers.

In reference to vulnerable communities, their resilience also improved due to a restoration and expansion in clean water sources, improved hygiene, disease awareness and prevention, advanced planting techniques, improved livestock management, and much more. The picture of long term recovery and mitigation in Burma sees a collaborative effort from the government, communities and foreign aid to provide not only a basic relief but a stable future for the citizens of Burma.

Cyclone Nargis proved to test Burma in its strategies of response, relief and mitigation as after devastating loss, particularly to many vulnerable groups, the country was left in ruins. After a slow response due to an instable government, the introduction of foreign aid set the wheel in motion in terms of response, with relief teams providing basic necessities to those who needed them. In addition to this, the mitigation responses and long term recovery after proved to be the area in which Burma excelled, providing major amounts of effort to create a better-functioning, cleaner and more prepared society.