

# Weaving Safety Nets



**Dana for Water, Education, Orphans, and Villagers**



As we begin a cycle of offerings, we invariably learn of many projects that need support. Sometimes people approach us directly with requests, and at other times we hear of worthy projects from friends who know of the work we do. So in addition to our regular offerings, we provide support to many of these other worthy causes. It's a wide range of offerings, with our intention being to better the quality of life and the futures of as many beings as possible.

## Water Projects

### *Nargis Villages*

In the last two years, we've offered rice, oil, and medicines to a number of villages in the Irrawaddy Delta. Now, almost two years after Cyclone Nargis, it was clear that the kinds of offering we had been making were no longer the best way of offering support to the people whose lives were turned upside down by the storm.

But we knew that people there were still had serious needs that were unmet, and so we wanted to continue our support for these communities in some way.



*Houses in Dedan Village, Irrawaddy Delta.  
Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink!*

We already knew that the most pressing need was for safe and reliable sources of drinking water. It's ironic that in an area where there's so much water, decent drinking water is in such short supply. But the net of innumerable rivers and channels that surround these villages are often too brackish to be potable. The closer to the coast one gets, the more likely this is to be the case: in these areas, the rivers are tidal, full of sediment and mixing with ocean water.



*Water catchment in the rainy season*

In the rainy season, people use large clay vessels to hold catchment water from their roofs. But in the high of the dry season this is obviously not an option. Wells in these areas are prohibitably expensive and unreliable: one has to drill hundreds of meters down, and even then there is no guarantee of striking pure water.

The more we learned, the more we wanted to use some of the dana you offered for water projects in these areas, and in a way that would benefit to the most number of people.

So we visited Father Cyril, a Burmese Catholic priest who runs an NGO called Shwe Thahar. After Nargis, Shwe Thahar did a great deal of relief work in coastal villages in the Laputta area, providing homes and boats for whoever needed them, regardless of religion. He confirmed that drinking water is still an urgent need. In the year after the storm, NGOs provided bottled water; now the people only have pond water. The salinity level is high, so there's a general shortage of potable water (especially in the dry season).



*Father Cyril  
receiving the  
offering*



Shwe Thahar is building new ponds in these villages so that when it rains they will fill with good water. They've also built 12 Ferocement catchment tanks. The technology is from the Philippines, and they train and hire local people to do the construction themselves. So the villagers derive economic benefit as well as health benefit from these tanks. Each one holds enough water to last 200 families through the dry season. I knew this kind of tank well: in parts of Hawaii, they're a very commonly used catchment system, known for their reliability, longevity, and for being quite economical. So we offered dana which will be used to build another 9 water tanks at a cost of about \$500 each--enough for 1800 families.

### *Upper Burma*

Not long before we were to leave Yangon to travel to Sayadaw U Indaka's village, we were asked for assistance by the abbot of a monastery in Sadaung, a market town of about 10,000 people not far away. He was in the finishing stages of building a hospital that will serve the town and 80 villages in the region, but there was just one remaining challenge: potable water. We learned that there's a very good well built by a Japanese NGO that supplies the drinking water for the town; unfortunately it's a mile and a half away! So everyone goes down the road on foot, or with their oxcarts, motorbikes, or cars to collect water; the hospital would have to do the same thing.



*The hospital in Sadaung*

On our way to Thaleba, we were given a tour of the impressive and very modern new hospital. And when asked if we could help by funding a water pipeline to supply both the village and the hospital, we immediately agreed to consider the proposal.



*From well to user...a long and dusty road*



*Drinking water: a universal need*

Fortunately, we were accompanied on our trip by Ite Wiersma, who works in the agricultural sector in Holland. Because he knew the necessary technical considerations, he could thoroughly examine the plans. And after his questions about design and construction were answered satisfactorily, we were very happy to agree to fund the project.

The cost was an astoundingly modest amount: only about 7000 USD! The experience reminded us how much more a relatively small amount of cash can do in Burma as opposed to in the West--where a similar sort of project

can cost in the millions of dollars! And with that 7000 dollars 10,000 people in the town (and the 80,000 people in the surrounding villages who will be served by the hospital) will have clean water to drink.

## Support for Children *Orphanages*



*The impeccable grounds of HHHP*

### Happy Haven Humanitarian Project (HHHP)

Once again this year, we were happy to be able to make a generous donation to Happy Haven Humanitarian Project: 10 Lakh Kyat, about 1000 USD. HHHP runs an Orphanage on the Eastern fringes of Yangon that takes in children who face the most unfortunate of circumstances: they've lost parents to HIV, but they are also HIV positive themselves.

After we made our offering, we were showed around the carefully maintained grounds. Since we had been there last, they had completed a new dormitory building, and inside the kids were playing, taking classes, or (if they were very little) being cared for by

the kind and compassionate staff.

In the sunny playroom, there was a rambunctious passel of kids, doing what comes naturally to kids anywhere. One little girl came shyly up to Daw Ariya Nani and whispered something in her ear. Seeing the wide smile in response, I was curious to know what sort of fantastic girlish secret she'd just been told. But it turned out to be no secret, but a shyly rendered little song, just for Daw Ariya Nani!



Next door in the classrooms, the older children were hard at work at their lessons, in this case English. The words from the copy book of one young man were immensely poignant--about a friend in Yangon who he must now miss.



*School is in session at HHHP*

The youngest children here are barely out of diapers, and the oldest are in their early teens. These kids live with the most unfortunate of circumstances, and under normal circumstances, they would simply be 'thrown out', ostracized by society-at-large.

But instead they receive love, care, education and medicine: everything that is necessary for their welfare and well-being. The staff are devoted to the children, and do everything they can to make sure that they get as 'normal' an upbringing as possible.

When we left, a small crowd of boys (shown on the cover page of this message) jammed together by the window, competing with each other for the best place to say goodbye. Their energy and eagerness (no different from healthy kids anywhere) spoke volumes to us about the care and skill that goes into making sure their lives are well supported.

### Sittwe Orphanage

Last year, when we passed through the West coast town of Sittwe on our way to Mrauk Oo, we learned of a poor orphanage that needed support, but we were unable to visit because of a lack of time. So this year when Marjo Oosterhoff was again in Sittwe, she brought dana to offer. As is very

common here, the orphanage is run by one of the local monasteries, providing social support that would otherwise be completely absent. The 5 Lakh Kyat (about 500 USD) that she offered will go a very long way to keeping food on the table for the many children that live there.

## *Education*



*A Braille lesson for Marjo*

### **Sittwe School for the Blind**

Marjo also learned of a school for the blind in Sittwe run by the monks of another local monastery, so she went to find out about the work that they do, and to offer a donation of 5 Lakh Kyat. During her visit, she was given a demonstration of how the students use braille tablets for writing. Blindness is a huge challenge anywhere but particularly here, where many blind people have no education and so are forced to subsist by begging. The students here may have an uncertain future, but they are most fortunate to receive a good education, with the head-start that it provides.

### **Helping Hands Scholarship Project**

School attendance is compulsory in Burma, and there are state-sponsored schools in most villages and neighborhoods that are theoretically free of charge. But there are hidden costs that make education a luxury for many. One must pay a small (to us) fee, buy uniforms, books, and school supplies. Students may also require extra after-school tuition, because the poor conditions in many schools make learning difficult. Many teachers rely on the extra income that this private tuition brings, as they are paid next to nothing for their regular work.

All of this adds up to between 10,000 and 20,000 Kyat per child per school year, about 10 to 20 USD. When the average daily wage for a 'good' job being about 1000 Kyat, a family can be faced with the heartbreaking decision to keep one or all of the kids out of school.

A remarkable effort on the part of a Canadian school teacher in Yangon is helping hundreds of children stay in school. Glen first noticed that 6 kids on his street were not attending classes because of poverty, and so paid their tuition out of his own pocket. Now 7 years on, he has a number of local volunteers who canvas neighborhoods and arrange for school attendance of any children whose families cannot afford the costs. The number of kids being offered scholarship support has gone from the original 6 up to over 600--and this year Glen's volunteers are going to shoot for 1000! We were very happy to give 4 Lakh Kyat to his efforts, knowing that somewhere in Yangon this coming school year, 20 to 26 kids would be receiving an education because of your generosity.



*All dressed up and ready to roll! Boys in their school uniforms.*

### **Village Dana**

From time to time one of the monks at CMMC will tell us of something they've noticed when out on their alms-round--perhaps a crippled child, or a house that's in very poor condition. Or we discover that a lay helper at the monastery is struggling with a difficult living situation. We always consider making an offering in these situations, if the need turns out to be genuine and necessary.



This year we made a couple of offerings like this, totalling about 25000 Kyat. One of these was a window into a world that we had only read about. We had given one of the monastery helpers some cash to replace the thatch roof on his house. When it was finished, he invited us over to show what had been done, and to express his gratitude.

We arrived at his little house in the late afternoon and were invited inside by his wife, who rather shyly went back to tending the cooking fire outside. Over (extremely sweet!) beverages, we were introduced to his daughter, who works in a garment factory out on the main road, not far from the monastery.



*U Shwe Hla and his wife in front of their house – with the new thatched roof*



*U Shwe Hla and his daughter*

She's very grateful for the work because it means she can bring home 30,000 Kyat (about 30 USD) per month: which is all she gets for working 12 hours per day, 6 days per week--with only a half hour break for lunch and 20 minutes or so for tea late in the afternoon. While they sew, the workers are not allowed to talk. But it's a good job, and she feels happy to have it. For us, hearing this story was a sober reminder of a reality that lives just under the surface appearance of things for many people here in Burma.

When we reflect about the number of people who have directly benefitted from your generosity this year, it brings us much joy. In large or small ways, you have made it possible for countless people to have some of the basics that we all

take for granted: a drink of fresh water, a roof that keeps the rain out, medical care, education, a home for those who have lost parents... list goes on and on.

Burma is a land of great beauty and natural wealth, but it is also a place where most people have no access to that wealth, and live with the day-to-day grind of poverty. Under these conditions, the Burmese people themselves have stepped in to create a remarkable grass-roots safety net: singly or in small groups, monks, nuns, and many laypeople provide the social services that are not otherwise provided. We feel immensely grateful to be able to participate through your offerings in the weaving of a small part of this safety-net. Somewhere in Burma today, your donations are making a life easier. Somewhere in Burma today, who knows where, there is man or a woman or a child, chanting a blessing for you, in gratitude and joy for a life saved.



Daw Virāṇṇī  
Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre