

Use of the PD Approach in Maternal and Newborn Care in Myanmar

Background on Merlin's work in Myanmar:

Although Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) was not severely devastated by the 2004 Asian tsunami, the waves did reach the shores of three districts, killing 86 people and leaving more than 5,000 homeless. Laputta Township, in Ayeyarwaddy Division, was the worst affected, with approximately 47 deaths and more than 2,000 people displaced.

The disaster not only made the impoverished population even more vulnerable, but also weakened what was already a fragile health system. Lack of clean water and sanitation facilities in Laputta contribute to a high risk of waterborne disease outbreaks such as dysentery and cholera. The tsunami worsened this situation and also caused water shortages after wells and water storage tanks were contaminated with seawater.

The existing public health system is struggling to cope and this has had a particularly detrimental effect on women and children. According to the World Health Organization, around one in 10 children in Myanmar dies before the age of five. Maternal death rates are also high – the lifetime risk of dying in pregnancy is one in 75.

Improving mother and child health care using the PD approach

Merlin is currently working in Laputta Township where it is helping to improve the overall health of the population, especially mothers and children. The PD approach has been successfully implemented in two village-tracts (30 villages) in Laputta Township. The communities are very receptive, welcoming, and eager to learn; a great asset to apply PD in this culture and environment.

Mohammad Shafique, Merlin Behavior Change Communication Specialist, who had used the PD approach in Pakistan, shared the impact of the PD process in the communities.



“The PD process was great fun in these two village tracts. The community participation was high at every step. The most interesting thing was that during feedback session, while discussing the positive behaviors, we invited the real PDs to tell their real behaviors and stories to the community. This emotional and motivational event turned the community feedback session into a highly effective advocacy platform for maternal health. Villagers are very open, bold and if mobilized properly, feel proud of sharing their stories with the community. And after this motivational feedback session, you can imagine the excitement of the community members to become a PD activist or volunteer”.



“Using the PD approach, we always go for the culturally appropriate and sensitive communication strategy to get community acceptance, support and ownership of the program. The Burmese communities are fond of music, singing and dancing which are great assets to utilize in PD. Together with community members, we have developed a street theatre group on maternal and newborn issues, which is a big success in the community.”



“Despite a very sensitive political environment where one cannot gather more than 10 people for anything, we have developed very strong relationships with the authorities by involving them in the process and generating their interest in finding and building on the positive behaviors within the communities. This resulted in getting

strong support from the authorities who allowed us to do street theatre which attracts 500 persons on average”.

