CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

This chapter explains why it is critical for communities to manage their own recovery to achieve the best possible outcomes. It also highlights the important role of recovery agencies in supporting communities in driving their own recovery and building local capacities for recovery processes. The chapter summarises the assets that contribute to a community's sustainability within the disaster context. The attributes of resilience and vulnerability are described for community levels. The benefits of community development approach to achieve more sustainable community recovery outcomes are also discussed.

This paper has presented the case study of Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village, Ayeyarwaddy Region, Myanmar after the area was hit by Cyclone Narigsin 2008.Based on field visits, interviews with local residents and NGO leaders, and an analysis of secondary materials, the study has argued that villages with high levels of social capital may have better resilience in recovering from disaster situations. However, while villages more tightly linked to outside organizations experienced better post-disaster recovery, minorities and nonmembers in those people were often excluded from the assistance process. That is, the village which overcame collective action problems and efficiently extracted resources from donors and government officials also left out cyclone -affected villagers on the social margins of society.

I will also discuss the role of social capital in disaster recovery in this chapter.Social networks bring about different policy and governance outcomes for groups within the mainstream compared to those at the periphery. This chapter focuses on collective outcomes for the village recovery and it is possible to find

positive and negative aspects. I will also discuss the different kinds of social capital found in my study village, the results of this analysis, and I will conclude with policy recommendations and suggestions based on these findings.

7.2. Main Findings and Discussion: Social Capital in Operation

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework and literature review section, "social capital" means the network of the community, the trust amongst the community and the actors in the networks. It also means the culture and the practices of the community which creates collective action and builds solidarity in the community. Social capital refers to networks and relationships that people have that can help them in their life. It is the trust between people and their practices in working together. Social capital has to do with people's culture, their norms, beliefs and the things that they value. This social capital is most evident when people feel linked together. In Burmese there isthe proverb "Ein Ne Nar Chin SweMyo Yin", or "Our neighbors are our relatives". People who live in the same village, may feel as close as real relatives. This close connection is a result of the day to day interactions and common practices. Bourdieu defined social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition"(Bourdieu,in Bourdieu &Wacquant, 1992).

After Nargis, these kinds of relationships were become useful for the village community. The destruction and damage brought on by Cyclone Nargis exaggerated the needs of the people in the delta, making it imperative that people supported on the social resources that they had.Over one-third of the population of the Ayeyar-wadydelta was directly impacted by the cyclone, and thousands of people lost their lives, homes and livelihoods. Although devasted by their own losses, people in the affected villages immediately helped people who were in need of support. The rapid, generous, and resilient manner in which communities reached out and supported each other was unprecedented.The villagers felt they should help each other to be good

neighbors and relatives. The village has the regular practice of working together with different groups. Youth groups, elder groups and religious groups have been working together to organize religious festivals in the village, for generations. The village had also been hit by a cyclone in the past, therefore the villagers already had experience helping each other after disasters. Those experiences and practices helped them, to organize more quickly and to be more active when their village suffered from Cyclone Nargis.The community's religious leader, the *Sayardaw*,took the lead and helped with disaster preparation and aid distribution. The organized communities were also better able to mobilize and overcome barriers to collective action.

There are different kinds of social capital. In this study on disaster recovery, it is clear that diversified use of social capitalensures that the entire community had the capacity to recover more efficiently than others. Horizontal integration of the community can be defined as 'bonding' and 'bridging'. Bonding can be the state the relationships formed through a collection of common interests, like ethnicity and religion.Bridging is understood as the particular links that a community has outside their community. Putnam's (2000) study of social capital looks at relationshipsthat have transformed into collective action due to horizontal integration.Putnamalso posits that bonding social capital helps local community to work together. He also notes that bridging social capital is important for the long-term recovery process in a post-disaster context because of it serves to "encompass peoples across diverse social cleavages" (Putnam, 2000). On the other hand, for the vertical integration of social capital, Szereter and Woolcock (2004) discuss linking social capital that is composed of "norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society." Where bridging social capital connects individuals of more-or-less equal social status, linking social capital connects those of unequal status, providing them with access to power. 'Bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking" are the social capital that will help reveal the social systems that are more or less enabling the community recovery studied here.

The network of social connections that make up social capital are integral to people's lives. People from the community find jobs, education and information from their networks' members. In the pre-disaster period, the *Sayardaw* warned and disseminated information about the cyclone to the village.This is one of the reasons the death toll for the village was less than the other surrounding villages. The *Sayardaw* gathered information from his network and also his local knowledge. He got word of the storm and helped the village prepare. The *Sayardaw*'sgathering and spreading of information using networks, personal relationships and daily practices are social capital in action.

Bonding social capital is often associated with local communities where many people know many other people in their own community. Bonding social capital is associated with norms and trust which can have both positive and negative manifestations and implications for social exclusion. In my research, the village head and his committee made the decision to turn down a new housing project that an INGO was proposing.This can be seen as negative social exclusion because the decision was made by only those in the management group. The greater community, who had a stake in the potential benefits of that project, were notincluded in a democratic way. The Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village in the post-cyclone deltawas governed by the village recovery committee these reinforcing existing ties between members and governance.Unfortunately, it often excluded women, newcomers, and minorities from participation. The bonding inside the management group became strong and this sometimes made the group even more exclusionary. The issue of the new comers to the village not being able to get aid since they were not on the village registration list can be seen as exclusion because of the bonding social capital in the village.

Bridging social capital is the linkage to external assets that connects individuals across typical cleavages. Bridging activities and organizations bring together individuals from different neighborhoods, ethnicities, and race.For example, the Parent and Teacher Association in the village brought together parents of various ethnic backgrounds and religions, not only from the village as well as nearby villages. Where bonding social capital reinforced obvious affinities between residents, bridging social capital can connect diverse individuals. Linking social capital brings together

citizens with decision makers and leaders who hold positions of authority and can distribute often scarce resources. For example, most villagers living in Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village never interacted directly with government officials or NGO representatives. After Cyclone Nargis, the village recovery committee developed direct connections with outside organizations, including independent aid agencies, international NGOs, and civil servants within the Myanmar government. In other words, the village developed "linking" social capital. However, linking connections with outsiderswere made solely by direct contact through the village committee, Thisgave the village committee a lot of power over what gets done in the village and leaves potential open, yet again, for exclusions to occur.

The emergency responses of the village showed the solidarity of the community and the high level of social capital in the village. Disaster-affected people, households and communities understand their needs better than any of the professional, government, non-government or corporate supporters. They have the capacity to work together but they don't know how to negotiate with the outside actors. The community hashigh social capital and solidarity, which should be actively engaged within the emergency and recovery phase. The government and recovery agencies such as NGOs should recognise and try to understand the communities' social capital as the strength of community. At that point they should attempt to maintain and integrate the community's strengths into the recovery project.

A community's social capital and its leadership have been found to be the most effective elements in enhancing collective actions and disaster recovery in my study village. It is shown that the local and international humanitarian organizations and also local government should be facilitators of sustainable disaster recovery. This can be by usingthe ability to leverage resources, self-reliance and self-determination, pre- and post-disaster recovery planning, identification of local, increasing the use of collaboration practices and strengthening community social capital.

The study village is very united and has strong social ties.The social hierarchy of the village with the Buddhist monks and the elders holding positions of leadership is also very strong. The monk regularly works with the groups in village such as the

youth group, elder groups, and musician groups in order to organize religious and social activities in the village. After the cyclone hit the village, the villager groups came to work together through collective action to help their own village, all under the management of the Buddhist monk.They also tried to find help from outside actors. These groups from village initially used their "bonding" social capital (that is, assisting in-group members). Then theyutilized their "links" with outside agencies. Before the cyclone, the communities were said to lack connections to and awareness of NGOs.They hasweaklinking social capital.But the disaster brought them new roles in their social environment and the urgency of the situation forced them to expand their social networks like never before.Villagers built bridging social capitalbetween themselves and external aid organizations and the government. Government officers and NGO decision makers also stated that local groupsare the institution that can provide continuity, growth and indeed sustenance to the process of reconstruction initiated in the villages.

7.3. Looking to the Future of AyeyarwaddyDelta

Cyclone Nargis brought incredible devastation to the Ayeyarwaddydelta and made negative impact on the communities there. Yet, it also seems that the devastation from the cyclone alsobrought on some other culture changes for the community. The post-Nargis reconstruction in Myanmar has involved a large number of actors: the government as well as the private sector, religious groups, local and international aid organizations, ASEAN and its member countries, UN agencies, local and international NGOs and several bilateral donors. Depending on the content of each actors' interests, there was a need for constant negotiation among the actors in the aid distribution process, the community engagement processand in the organization's efforts to meet the people's needs.

This was a new experience for many Burmese communities. The village communities were isolated before Nargis. In the Burmese culture, people believe that they have five enemies for their lives which can bring harm to them. These five traditional enemies are water, fire, the king (now thought of as the

government),thieves, and one's personal enemies. Therefore, in general, many peoples living in the rural areas are apprehensive about dealing with the government and also with outsiders. Before Nargis, the local communities were more isolated and less confident to communicate with outsiderssuch as authorities and NGOs. The chaos after the cyclone and the delayed government response, meant that local groupshad to stand up and try to survive with their own effort, later working on relief projects together with NGOs.The necessity to evolve and make gains for the community encouraged the groups to take on new kinds of activities and created a new active culture within the local community.

In my study site, Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village, the villagers appreciated the intervention of outsiders when they neededit most. While the communities have a positive attitude towards the international and local NGOs, they were pessimistic about the responses of the local authorities. In terms of future disasters, the villagers now feel that theyshould contact the NGOs next time there is a disaster, but they still doubtful about whether it is a role that the government could play or not. Moreover, the villagers believe that the disaster management from the government at the local level was not well organized; they do not think it could deal with natural incidents as well as the pre and post disaster responses. The villagers think their community still needs more skills and knowledge and disaster preparedness for the future.

A positive note would be that communities are aware of and recognize the importance of the participation of women, however it is still controversial. The response to the cyclone and lots of contact with outside NGOs meant that women in the community were given opportunities for decision making and leadership that weren't possible before. Even with these gains,there is still a need to empower women to speak out and to attain meaningful participation. There are still many ways they are left out of processes, but compared to before Nargis, they feel the culture of women's participation and leadership has somehow changed.

Disaster recovery processes are often a time of strong reflection for individuals, families and communities when new choices and learning can occur. The sensations of disorientation and disequilibrium following a disaster can enhance individual and

community abilities to address change and adopt new learning. In my study village, people came to learn how to work together more systematically within teams. They also learned improved health, water and sanitations habits. The communities' value of education is also increased and people want their children to become educated. These changes are all indicators of how local people's mind-sets and thinking are transforming from local to global. They are starting to think and see globally when they think about their future.

The aftermath of Cyclone Nargis presented both opportunities and challenges for disaster risk reduction planning and implementation. The recovery operations out of the Ayeyarwaddydelta had various levels of success. The learning out of these experiences is thatmore of the recovery and continuing development activities needed to consider community participation and sustainability. Local Myanmar NGOs and existing networks, throughout the country, should reflect on their understanding of the local context and awareness of the systems and structures already in place. The recovery agencies should recognise and potentially use individual, community and organisational capacity in the recovery process to support enhancing community capacities which help the community to become more resilient. The government and the NGOs should support the self-help and strengthening of the resources, capacity and resiliency that is already present within individuals and communities. These community empowerment approaches are the keys to successful recovery.

Empowering communities to create their own solutions can improve overall social cohesion, and this is critical to sustainable recovery outcomes. By helping them to solve their own problems with collective solutions suitable to local culture and social settings, this ultimately leads to the creation of a more proactive and more disaster resilient community where preparedness prevails.Therefore, community development recovery programs that aim to support long-term sustainability can facilitate processes whereby individuals and communities can review their decisions and lifestyles and assess future directions.

Unfortunately, even three years after Cyclone Nargis, affected communities still need assistance.They still face hardships and their livelihood situation has not fully recovered. On the other hand, most of the projects from outside organizations

havewithdrawnor stopped already; leaving the community again to its own devices The NGOs are working with strict time frames.They must operate according to the budgets and time limits. While this is intended to uphold accountability and anti-corruption ideals most of the projects fail to lead to community sustainability.

Farmers that have been trying to recover for three years are still far from the situation they had before the cyclone. They are in a debt cycle. Some farmers lost their family land to money lenders because they never really recovered financially after Nargis. Fishers are finding the fish population in decline.There are fewer varieties of fish -far fewer than before - and most fishermen have now turned to causal labor or migration to find jobs at other cities or town.

I have seen that the people in the area have become more aware of the risks of cyclones, floods and other natural disasters. Yet they are still in need of knowledge on how to take actions for improving their resilience to sustain their life. Local communities still face social and economic hardship, but the assistance from the government and NGOs has started to decrease and in some cases completely dry up. Moreover, the local non-government agencies in Myanmar, after years of active involvement in relief and recovery initiatives in the Nargis affected areas, have gained considerable experiences and capacities. Cyclone Nargis provided the entry point and a means to further consolidate people and organizations towards sustainable development and empowerment. Therefore, in partnership with the relevant government departments, the international organizations could provide technical and organization development inputs to local NGOs and help develop their management skills and expertise in specific fields. This is a dependable means of ensuring the delivery of quality services in responses to disasters in the future.

Finally, I would like to offer some recommendations to government and to NGOs, policy makers or project implementers. In a natural disaster emergency, they should first ensure that recovery and rehabilitation plans do not destroy existing social capital through the recovery processes.

Their intervention should use an empowerment approach when workingwith local residents so that they themselves recognize the benefits of maintaining and strengthening networks after the cyclone. Disaster relief and recovery policy should ensure that wherever possible, societies should work to build up the bonding and linking social networks of vulnerable communities to ensure that they will be better positioned against future disasters.