

Digest of local Covid-19 responses from Myanmar media

Part of an on-going L2GP research into community responses to Covid-19

Yangon, June 9, 2020, by Kyaw Lin Htoon

1. Volunteering in Myanmar's quarantine centres

During COVID-19 period, Myanmar rely heavily on the help of volunteers throughout the country.

On June 3, the Myanmar Pressphoto Agency (MPA) covered the work of some of these volunteers. On that day, a group of Myanmar nationals returned from overseas and were taken to a quarantine centre in Hlaing Township in Yangon where they were placed in semi-lockdown.

The centre is run with the help of 20 volunteers - ordinary people and from different parts of Yangon and many of them have been volunteering since the beginning of Covid-19 in Myanmar. The volunteers call themselves a Medical Social Support Team and among other clean the rooms where the overseas returnees have to live for weeks. The teams wear PPEs and for instance sprayed disinfectants into a room where a suspected COVID-19 patient had just stayed. They then locked the room to avoid anybody else entering that room.

[This photo essay](#) on FB illustrates how hard it is to wear PPEs and Level-2 protective dresses for a long time as it is hot inside the rooms. After spraying the whole seven-storey building, the team went on to wash bedsheets. They washed them in a pond where the water was mixed with smelly chlorine and washing powder. By the time they were done with washing, evening had come along with heavy rains, so they finished their work and prepared to have an evening meal.

Apart from cleaning rooms and other facilities at the centre, washing clothes and bedlinen, the volunteers play other important roles. They accompany some of the guarantees when they are transferred for instance via the airport or highway stations to their areas of origin. Besides, they are involved in the activities of distributing things donated by the people, and organizations, to reach the right destinations – as well as in the handing over suspected COVID-19 patients to Wabargi and other hospitals.

Some of the volunteers have worked at the quarantine centre in Yangon for over two months. Because they do this work, they have not been able to go back to home in all this time. Prior to volunteering they attended COVID-19 related training.

The importance of the volunteers during this COVID-19 is widely recognized by all different layers of the society in Myanmar. The government has recognized the volunteers and praise them occasionally. On Jun 5, the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi mentioned that the state has to rely on the strength of the volunteers. “We appreciate the strength of the volunteers, and we to rely on those volunteers as well. None of the measures that we did to control the virus could have succeeded, if we did not have their efforts,” Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, said during an online meeting with the Union of Ministers on June 5.

Up to the morning of June 9, Myanmar had a total of 246 confirmed cases according to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Myanmar's first case was officially announced on 23 March. Currently, Myanmar has over 10,000 of quarantine centres and camps throughout the country. These places

are reported to host more than 46,000 quarantined people. The total number of the volunteers who have helped in the quarantine centres over the last months is reported to be around 45,000.

Ref: <https://web.facebook.com/mmpressphoto/posts/3955385567835774>

<https://7day.news/detail?id=188084>

2. Citizen support to vulnerable families in Paletwa

Paletwa is a township in Southern part of Chin State which suffer from a conflict between Tatmadaw (government army) and the Arakan Army (AA). The conflict has evolved over a couple of years, but the situation has become more bitter as COVID-19 emerged.

As a result of the suffering brought on by this conflict, people from including Chin and other States and Region have donated rice and other basic needs of food to Paletwa township. Much of this support comes from Chin people around Myanmar and overseas.

However, as the monsoon is moving across the country, the needs of internally displaced persons affected by the conflict and the impact of COVID-19 is growing. As a result, Chin people from other places have started thinking, how they can help.

On June 6, the [“7 Day News”](#) reported that there are over 15,000 IDPs in Paletwa Township and another 60,000 people stuck in their own places because of the double threat posed by the ongoing conflict and the factors associated with COVID-19. In the same news report, Mai Nan Wai, a Chin woman working and living in Yangon explained: “Before the heavier rains come, we need to send them more rice to make sure for their food security”. Mai Nan Wai is among those trying to involve more people in an attempt to help their fellow Chin people in Paletwa.

Ref: 6 Jun 2020 – [7 Day Daily newspaper](#)

3. Counselling the vulnerable people

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) is a local NGO in Myanmar, which usually works to support political prisoners and their families. But, during COVID-19 crisis, they have come up with a different idea.

In a statement issued on June 4, the AAPP announced that they also will offer counselling to people who are addicted to drugs, sex-workers, HIV-patients and also to members of the LGBT communities. “During this COVID-19 period, many people are suffering from additional stress and other mental pains. Therefore, we will attempt to reach out to some of those most in need of counselling. Many in these groups are overly stressed and need extra counselling, motivation and other kinds of humanitarian support.”

According to AAPP, during COVID-19, the risks of suicide attempts and violence has increased. In this situation, AAPP has stated a phone-in hotline for counselling.

Ref: 6 Jun 2020 – [7 Day Daily newspaper](#)

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