

PROFILE: MYANMAR



Rich in oil, gas, timber and gemstones and renowned for its fertility, Myanmar was once called the 'rice bowl of Asia'.

But today one in three children in the country are malnourished and one in five people lack access to safe water, according to the Human Development Index.

Thousands of people work as unpaid labourers, and the marginalisation of minority ethnic groups has led to half a million people being uprooted from their homes and hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to Thailand and Bangladesh.

A military junta has ruled Myanmar for nearly five decades. Despite Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy winning elections in 1990, her party never took power. Before her joyful release in November 2010, she had spent many of the intervening years under house arrest.

The same month, Myanmar saw its first elections for two decades. A partial return to civilian rule ensued, but the impact on ordinary people remains to be seen.

Myanmar is disaster-prone, suffering cyclones, floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides and food shortages – the latter sometimes caused by infestations of rats.

In 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated the Ayeyarwaddy delta region of south Myanmar, killing at least 138,000 people and laying waste to countless livelihoods.

TEARFUND'S WORK IN MYANMAR

Involved in Myanmar since 1997, Tearfund currently has five church and NGO (non-governmental organisation) partners. These partners played a key role in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, bringing aid and restoring livelihoods. More than 120,000 survivors have been helped.

Experience gained from Nargis means our partners are well equipped to respond to future disasters. Communities are also trained to be more resilient.

Increasingly, Tearfund's partners are mentoring churches: teaching leadership skills and showing congregations how to set up development projects. Tearfund also supports church programmes providing home-based care and addressing issues surrounding HIV, such as stigma and discrimination.

In addition, Tearfund is helping churches address the vulnerability of ethnic minority children in the mountainous eastern Shan state. The children often spend most of the day looking for water, which affects their health and school attendance. A key focus, therefore, is the introduction of safe water supplies at village level.

One of our partners has helped the government develop a national plan to tackle the plight of people marginalised by disabilities. To help outwork the plan, the partner offers community-based rehabilitation, physiotherapy services, life skills training and non-formal education. Disabled people are helped to develop independent incomes through small business loans.

- **Pray for people living in poverty in Myanmar.**
- **Pray for our Myanmar partners as they seek to help others.**
- **And pray for Myanmar: for justice, peace, health and hope for everyone.**