

HEAR US

STORYBOOK

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Project Background

In late March 2025, a powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar, leaving a trail of devastation. The disaster not only damaged buildings and infrastructure but also deeply affected lives, families, and communities. In response, Doh Eain launched the “Reach, Relieve, and Recover” campaign, aiming not only to address immediate relief needs but also to support recovery and long-term rebuilding efforts.

As communities began to rebuild, Doh Eain emphasized that true recovery starts with people - ensuring that individuals feel safe, supported, and emotionally ready to move forward. Transitioning from the relief phase to recovery, psychosocial support (PSS) activities were implemented as part of the campaign, in collaboration with 20 local groups, reaching communities across Mandalay, Sagaing, and Inle/Nyaung Shwe.

A key component of these activities was the collection of local stories, with the local groups conducting interviews to document the experiences of affected survivors and community supporters. This storybook features 20 stories, organized into 2 main sections: Survivors and Supporters. The stories cover diverse demographics, including residents of IDP camps, small business owners, LGBTQIA+ individuals, the elderly, pregnant women, persons with disabilities (PwD), religious leaders, educators, healthcare workers, CSO members, and community leaders.

By bringing these stories together, the project preserves the lived experiences of affected communities and highlights the essential role of localized psychosocial support in fostering resilience.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

This storybook aims to highlight the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds affected by the 7.7 magnitude earthquake and to demonstrate the importance of psychosocial support (PSS) in fostering resilience in the aftermath of the disaster.

Objectives

- Document experiences: Share stories of survivors and community supporters to reflect the human side of the earthquake.
- Showcase psychosocial support: Highlight how PSS helped individuals and communities cope and recover.
- Promote empathy and inclusion: Represent diverse groups and foster awareness of challenges, support systems, and community-based approaches.

Who is this storybook for?

This storybook is intended for a wide audience, from community members affected by the earthquake, to organizations and humanitarian actors involved in psychosocial support, as well as students, researchers, and the general public interested in understanding the human side of disaster recovery.



Part I - Survivors

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1.1 HOPE

Persona:
Resident of IDP Camp

Author:
Hub of Mandalay Em-
powerment (HOME)

Region:
Mandalay



It was 12:30 PM on March 28th, right in the scorching heat of Mandalay. I was on the main street in front of my house, just like any other day, talking on the phone with my cousin to ask about some details of my work that I didn't understand. That's when something happened, something I had never encountered or even imagined in my life. The ground roared with a huge sound, and the world shook violently. When the first jolt hit, I immediately ran to my mother's house and told her, "Don't run, sit down!" But the earthquake didn't stop, and it got worse. I told my mother to run outside, and right then, I heard a loud shout from the direction of my house. With the ground still shaking, I had to run back to my wife and children. I had two daughters: the older one is 21, and the younger one is in Grade 4. The children were in their upstairs room and didn't know how to get out. The inside of the house was chaotic. The cabinets holding pots and dishes had fallen, blocking the staircase. I managed to pull the children out of the house. Then, I looked for my wife. She was in the kitchen at first, but I don't know how she ended up under the staircase. I had to pull her out of the house, too. The earthquake caused the brick walls on the ground floor of my house to break open. It was uninhabitable. Fearing another earthquake, my family and I slept outside on the street for two nights after the quake. I wasn't the only one; everyone was scared and slept outside. I consider myself lucky that all my family members are alive and well. Some people lost their lives, you know. I was still better off. Later, all the people in this neighborhood whose homes were too damaged to live in moved to the Yadanar Thiri Monastery at Aung Myay Shwe Bohn Quarter, thanks to the help of the Abbot. There were over 300 people, and we had to live in tents pitched on the ground. As you can imagine, when it rained, it was impossible to stay there. So, we had to climb up and sleep inside the monastery building. It was hard to sleep, though, with some people staying up all night talking. It was a fun time, though, really.

Living at the monastery, we didn't have to worry about immediate living expenses because many organizations and donors came to contribute and donate supplies. However, what I always think about is: How will I sustain myself in the long run? How will I get through this situation? I am who I am, though. Why should I be depressed for too long? I just have to find whatever work I can, do odd jobs, and move forward with life. In times like these, I heard that bricklayers were getting 30,000 Kyats a day and went to try, but I couldn't find work. Before, I used to earn an average of about 450,000 Kyats a month. Now, I can barely scrape together 200,000 kyats a month. I don't want to dwell on these things. Why? Because I am a person who has

overcome all kinds of work and all kinds of difficulties. I know I can't afford to stay depressed for a long time.

In between, I can't remember which organization's teenagers they were, but they came to provide psychosocial support or something. They played games with us and talked to us. For a moment, I forgot my distress and was happy along with them. I think it's been a while since they came. I look forward to their visits because when they come, even if only for a short time, I forget my troubles and am happy. That time, we played a raffle game, and I won a big box of laundry detergent! It was hilarious because other adult men and heads of households won things like clothes hangers and laundry baskets. It was as if only the people who don't do laundry were chosen to win those prizes! When various organizations like that came, I thought, "Wow, even in this difficult time, these kids are coming to help us." That gave me the mental strength to continue living.

Well, I've been talking about myself for quite a while now, and you must be bored. I have to go now; the monastery called me to go see the health organization which is coming this evening. Finally, let me tell you this: No matter what kind of difficulty you face, focus on moving forward and accept what went wrong, and think about how you can fix them. Now, I'm off to the monastery!

“ Because I am a person who has overcome all kinds of work and all kinds of difficulties. I know I can't afford to stay depressed for a long time. ”



1.2 Because of a Single Flutter of Butterfly Wings

Persona:
Resident of IDP Camp

Author:
Summer Shelter Library

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



"It's going to be four years now since I last returned to my hometown," says Ma Thae, a mother of two and a conflict-displaced woman who cannot go back home. Because her town was not safe, she had to move from place to place until she finally settled in one part of Shan State. The local community there welcomed her warmly. They gave land specifically for displaced families like hers and others who had been forced to move for different reasons. They offered kind words, and whenever necessary, they helped.

Living in such a supportive environment was a blessing for Ma Thae and her family. Yet at the same time, life was far from easy. Their greatest struggle was survival - they had no jobs and no income. "When I don't have work, I feel so stressed," she confided. To get by, they had to depend on aid and stretch whatever relief items were shared with them.

Then, on March 28, 2025, like many across Myanmar, Ma Thae's family also experienced the massive earthquake. "At that moment, my house was shaking like this," she said, moving both hands left and right to show. She and her children, frightened, rushed outside and found others also checking their surroundings. Fortunately, their camp was far enough from the quake's center that they were not seriously harmed. Though relieved, Ma Thae was saddened when she heard that many other places had suffered heavy destruction.

Two days later, earthquake survivors began arriving at their camp. Their faces showed deep sorrow, their eyes filled with the weight of tragedy. They looked exhausted, drained. Seeing them reminded Ma Thae of her first days in the displacement camp. Because she and the others understood their pain, they did their best to encourage and support the newcomers. Sometimes they gathered in small circles, sharing their stories: some cried, some grieved, while others offered words of strength. "Wherever you are, try to live with joy..." This was the phrase Ma Thae often repeated - to others, and to herself.

She would also say, "Even if I don't have a house anymore, even if I have to live in a tent, I won't give up." Those words revealed her resilience and determination, which she used to lift up those who had lost hope.

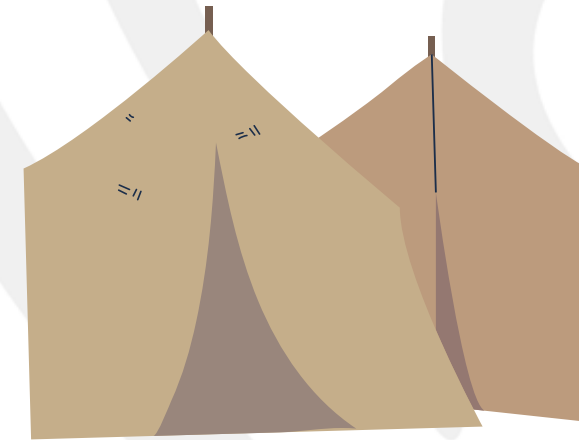
But fate did not spare Ma Thae and the others. Conflicts arose within the camp over the distribution of aid, especially between the existing displaced families and the newly arrived earthquake survivors. Tensions grew so strong that it nearly divided the camp into two groups. Still, one truth remained: they were all human. Compassion, empathy, and the need for each other lived inside them. Because of this, the disputes did not last long. They reconciled with kindness, and old accusations faded away when people chose to understand

each other's suffering. Ma Thae said, "In difficult times, people tend not to speak gently and calmly. No one takes offense, because it's not just one person facing hardship - it's everyone."

Though they overcame those hardships, their path remained uncertain. Aid supplies were becoming scarcer. Rice, oil, and salt were now below emergency levels. The earthquake had also damaged roads, making it harder to bring in goods from outside. Life in the camp grew tighter, more restricted. Unemployment rose, frustration deepened, moods shifted quickly, and the smiles on people's faces became fewer.

Even so, Ma Thae and the others held on to hope. They believed they could overcome these struggles too. "Planting a spear in low ground," says a local proverb - and they had already survived worse.

"When someone else is suffering, the least we can do is understand them and help however we can. I don't want displaced people to be looked down upon. I don't want them to be treated differently. After all, we are human beings too. These are the words from Ma Thae's heart" - words she holds close, as the wind continues to blow through her camp.



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When someone else is suffering, the least we can do is understand them and help however we can. I don't want displaced people to be looked down upon. I don't want them to be treated differently. After all, we are human beings too.

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1.3 A Small Hope

Persona:
Small Business Owner

Author:
Economy & Education
- EnE

Region:
Mandalay



Life is never easy, is it? For me, happiness had been missing for quite some time. Every day I was weighed down by responsibilities, worries, and fears. Yet, my children were my only strength - the reason I kept walking on this rough and uncertain journey. Life was far from perfect, but I managed with what little I had. I sold traditional Myanmar snacks to make ends meet, cared for my family, and lived simply. Money was often short, but in our lives, we still found small joys here and there.

Then, one day, without warning, disaster came. An earthquake. That day, I was at home with only my baby boy, just one month old. My elder daughter had gone to the market with her grandmother.

I had heard of earthquakes on the radio and in the news, but I had never experienced one myself. I knew, in theory, what to do in such situations - books and TV had taught me that. But when it truly struck, I froze. I couldn't move. The ground shook violently, and fear overwhelmed me until even my legs felt too weak to stand.

I couldn't run. I couldn't think. All I could do was hold my little baby tightly against my chest, pressing him close, praying with all my heart that we would survive.

Though my family escaped without major injuries, our small home was badly damaged. And because of the aftershocks, we couldn't stay inside safely. At night, we laid mats on the roadside and slept under the open sky, filled with fear and uncertainty.

Even after the tremors stopped, going back inside did not bring peace. I lay awake at night thinking, "What if the house collapses while we sleep?" Nights were restless, and even a strong wind made me tremble, as if the earth might start shaking again.

Everyone suffered. Everyone lost something. The grief and shock were beyond words.

To make things worse, not long after the earthquake, my husband suddenly fell ill. My sorrow deepened. I felt like the weight of the whole world had been placed upon my shoulders. But I had no choice - I had to stay strong. My husband and children needed me.

I had no one else to depend on. Life was cruel and exhausting, but I refused to give up. Still, sometimes when I saw others laugh and live happily, I couldn't help but think, "I wish I could have that too."

We weren't wealthy, but we endured. We survived with what little we had, and we made it work. Even now, facing hardship again, I tell

myself: "I will not give in. I will not surrender. One day, I too will live with the joy I see in others."

What gave me strength was not only my children, but also the kindness of the people around me. Neighbors, friends, and community members stood by one another. We shared what little we had, comforted each other with laughter despite our struggles, and supported one another like family.

"Through this, I learned an important truth: speaking about your pain, and having someone truly listen and understand, can ease the heaviest burden in the heart. Mental support was as healing as food or shelter. It reminded me that I was not alone in this vast world - that there were still people who cared, who understood."

Whenever I feel like giving up, I remind myself: "I must stay strong. I have children. I have the courage to face every hardship that comes my way." My children are my true source of strength.

And to all mothers and families facing struggles like mine, I want to say this: "Don't lose hope. Life will not always be smooth. There will be days of hardship, moments of fear, and times when nothing feels secure. But endurance is the key."

"Strength is not only about surviving disasters. It is also about smiling even through tears, moving forward when everything seems lost, and protecting those who depend on you no matter what. That is true resilience. That is true courage."



1.4 Tomorrow for Survival

Persona:
Small Business Owner

Author:
Athinkhayar Sagaing

Region:
Sagaing



I was sitting, working on the computer just before the earthquake, when I heard a sound. My 2 children were behind me. The sound was terrifying. Then, I realized it was an earthquake. As I was trying to get 2 children out of the building, the entire structure collapsed. During the first shake, there was no way out; we were trapped. We had to take a momentary refuge against a refrigerator in a clear spot. The earthquake shook again, and the view was completely blocked by dust. Everything collapsed and trapped us, and I lost consciousness. The children and I were all trapped. When I regained consciousness, I managed to crawl out through a gap that remained like a hole above me. Once outside, I thought I was alone. I saw that the beauty salon in front of my photo studio/home had also completely collapsed, with blood everywhere and people shouting for help. I immediately went to look for my wife. I found my wife trapped under a large fallen tree, with ceiling debris also crushing her from above. I removed as much as I could and managed to rescue my wife. I shouted for help, but there were no people around. Later, a couple from the neighboring house and 2 school teachers came to help. After everything was over, I felt like I was dead. I was diving into a water tank, then coming back up, checking myself. I was in a state of shock and disorientation until that evening.

Since the building had collapsed, we faced the difficulty of having no place to live in the city. We didn't have time to grab anything, not even clothes or food, so we even went through times with nothing to wear. At night, we slept on the street wherever we could. For over fourteen days after the earthquake, I could not sleep well at night. Every time I visited the site where our shop and home collapsed, the urge to cry was overwhelming. More than the feeling of loss that we lost the shop, the home, the motorbike, and the building - I was overcome with relief and wanted to cry because all 5 members of my family survived. I was affected by the emotion of simply being alive. I think fear was a big part of it. Why? Because there were smaller aftershocks in the days following the earthquake. The fear that an even stronger earthquake might hit again, something we had never experienced before, was, I think, the most difficult challenge.

Even though we lost everything, the fact that my family survived gave me strength. The survival of all my parents and relatives also gave me the resolve to continue working and face these challenges. In the days immediately following the earthquake, people from all over came to donate and help, and they are still doing so now. This helped the people of Sagaing affected by the earthquake cope with stress and gave them considerable strength. Regarding mental health support, what I distinctly remember is the financial support my children received through the connection made by Ma Toe and her Athinkhayar Sagaing group, who came right to our home. I still remember that vividly. The donations of essential items, from clothes to food, and the financial assistance we received during those difficult

times when supplies were hard to buy, all helped reduce our stress. Since houses had been destroyed, houses were donated. Those who lost family members also received compensation. The fact that the victims of the earthquake received something, whether small or large, provided a psychological lift. Over ten days after the earthquake, to deal with the stress of sleeping under the sky on the street, as a head of the household, I worked on rebuilding confidence and mental strength for my family. We stayed at a place arranged with the help of my parents, and I made efforts to act and behave in a way that made my family feel safe and confident to stay and sleep there, both day and night, allowing us to overcome the psychological trauma.

Self-belief is a crucial part of a person's life. Only when you can heal yourself and take action for failure and success will your mental health improve. We are all born alone and will die alone. Instead of being depressed and mourning what was lost, I want to advise everyone to strive to make the present moment the best it can be to strive to turn that "zero" into a "one." For psychological healing, since we cannot take anything with us from the time we are born until we die, we must think and consult with our friends and peers and work hard every day for tomorrow. Whether you lost family members, buildings worth tens of millions, or were simply affected by the earthquake, everyone must strive to survive and make the best of every tomorrow. In the future, even if we face such a natural disaster again, we must be able to teach the next generation how to overcome it. We must have the mental strength to strive for the best in the days ahead, no matter what we have lost.

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More than the feeling of loss that we lost the shop, the home, the motorbike, and the building - I was overcome with relief and wanted to cry because all 5 members of my family survived. I was affected by the emotion of simply being alive.

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1.5 Welcoming Tomorrow's Dawn

Persona:
Person with Disabilities
(PwD)

Author:
Sharing Myanmar

Region:
Sagaing



I live in Sitee village, a small place beside the Sagaing-Shwebo-Monywa road. Our little village is alive with the hum of buses and the bustle of travelers. Though small, it feels like a town of its own, full of noise and life. In my family, I have only one younger brother - Ko Latt. He runs a small barbershop and has always been the one to take care of me. Because of me, he never married, even now as he nears forty. He says he couldn't bear to leave me alone, knowing my disability. If he had married, he might have had a family of his own by now. Sometimes, when I think about him, my heart aches with guilt. You see, I was born disabled. I can move slowly if I hold on to something, but to sit or lie down, I need a chair or bed to support me. Life with such challenges is hard enough, and I know my brother's life is made even harder because of me. Yet still, I do what I can. With my hands, I cook. That's my joy. Even if my legs ache after standing at the stove, I push myself. And Ko Latt? He always says, "My sister's cooking is the best." Those words warm my heart.

But then came the day that turned our lives upside down – the day of the earthquake. I remember it clearly, though it pains me to recall. I was by the pond, fetching water, moving slowly along the edge. Suddenly, a loud rumble echoed, and the earth shook violently. I fell, struck hard, my body bruised and soaked. Stones and water thrashed against me as the pond's walls shook. It was chaos – voices shouting, children crying. I clung desperately to the pond's edge, whispering to myself, "I must hold on. I must live." Finally, my hands gripped tightly enough, and I managed to pull myself upright. My whole body throbbed with pain, but I was alive. And in that moment, I thought of only one person - my brother. Where was he? Was he safe? I shouted his name until my voice cracked. At last, he appeared, rushing toward me. Relief flooded my heart. He told me the shop wall had collapsed and he'd been struck by wooden beams, but thankfully, he was alive. With all his strength, he lifted me, and together we made our way home. Yet "home" was no longer there. Houses along the road had collapsed into piles of rubble. The once-bustling street had turned into a field of broken bricks, cries, and blood. I saw people searching frantically for family members, children screaming, bodies covered in dust. Tears streamed down my face as I thought of the children, of all the villagers whose lives were forever changed that day. March 28, 2025 – it became the day we would never forget.

For nights afterward, no one dared sleep indoors. Even the smallest tremor sent us running out. But for me, disabled as I am, I couldn't run like others. Fear consumed me. "If another quake comes, how will I escape? Who will carry me?" These thoughts haunted me, stealing my sleep. Over time, I learned to calm myself: "Whatever happens, happens. If I live, it is fate. If I die, it is fate too." But the fear never fully left me. "And the sadness deepened when I realised - no one can truly understand the heart of a person with disability in

moments like this. My brother noticed how I became quieter, more withdrawn, hardly speaking at all. He urged me to see a doctor, but I brushed it off, saying, "I'm fine." Truthfully, I didn't understand what was happening inside me."

Then one day, something unexpected happened. I was invited to join a sharing circle for earthquake survivors. At first, I hesitated. Security in our region is tough, and organisations rarely reach us. But when I heard they had especially invited people like me – persons with disabilities and mothers – I felt a deep sense of gratitude. For once, someone had thought of us. That night, I couldn't sleep from excitement, thinking of what I might say. The next morning, Ko Latt accompanied me to the session. And for the first time since the quake, I felt seen. They gave us space. They gave us time. They listened – truly listened. As I spoke, tears fell, but no one hurried me, no one dismissed me. They let me be heard. When I returned home, my heart felt lighter, freer. I slept peacefully that night for the first time since the earthquake.

That experience reminded me: hardship is never faced alone. Others, too, carry their own burdens. And when we share them, they become lighter. So, this is the message I want to leave with you: all of us – whether disabled or not – will face dark and difficult days. But just as night ends, dawn always comes. After the storm, there will be mornings of hope, painted in the red glow of sunrise. We may suffer disasters, but we will continue to live, to endure, and to find peace again. Tomorrow's dawn is waiting.

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My brother urged me to see a doctor, but I brushed it off, saying, "I'm fine." Truthfully, I didn't understand what was happening inside me.

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1.6 Life Knocks Me Down, But I'm a Weeble at Heart

Persona:
Person with Disabilities
(PWD)

Author:
Brave Myanmar

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



"Well, you and the child rest for a while. I'm going down to the water-farm to see if there's any work," said my husband as soon as we arrived home, and then he left. Since the child and I had just been discharged from the hospital, I placed her favorite ball near her, and then put away our bags and belongings. After putting everything away, I sat down to rest for a moment, exhausted, and watched my daughter play. It hasn't been long since she could play like this again.

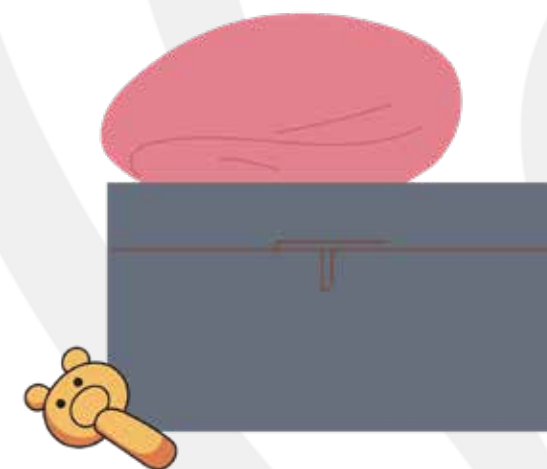
Back in March, when the whole country experienced an earthquake, our village was almost completely destroyed. It was even worse for those of us who had to build houses on the water, not on dry land. There's even a saying, isn't there, "Lost in water, all; lost on land, half." When the earthquake hit, my husband was away at work. My daughter and I were sitting peacefully at home when the earthquake suddenly struck. Since our house was already rickety, it collapsed. I quickly held my daughter and swam through the wreckage of the falling house. Perhaps you could call it luck, since our house was originally just made of bamboo mats, we didn't sustain any major injuries. My husband quickly returned from work and rescued us from the debris. Although we didn't have many external injuries, my daughter was very frightened, exhausted, fussy, and crying. Since our house collapsed, we had nowhere to stay, so we slept on a boat for exactly 5 nights. It wasn't a problem for us adults, but my daughter - being a child, and because of her congenital disability - was extremely shaken. Speaking of which, my daughter was born with a small lump on her spine. The lump on her back disappeared around 11 months old, but her head gradually grew larger, and her lower body became weak. She is now 7 years old. We have to take her back to see the doctors about once every 3 months. Although she cannot speak or run and play at her age like other children, I love my daughter very much. Even though she is 7 now, she doesn't talk much. She doesn't even know when to go to the bathroom.

So, when the earthquake happened, she must have been terrified, unsuited to her age. After the earthquake, she would get startled and have a seizure even if a motorboat passed by the house. If something drops loudly inside the house, she gets startled and has a seizure. When that happens, we have to rush her to the hospital. As you know, with the current cost of living, my husband's daily wage, and the money UNICEF provides monthly for my daughter, it all gets spent. Even though it's spent, it's for our daughter's well-being, so we don't complain. If my husband and I were to feel discouraged and depressed, how could this child ever recover?

In the meantime, an IRC training came to the village, and I attended it. When I learned about how to prepare for natural disasters, what to

do, and the importance of mutual support and understanding, I felt much stronger. I became warmer toward my child and showed her more affection. To keep her from being afraid, I constantly told her, "Mommy is here, don't be afraid, my dear." Since my daughter also likes festivals, we go to weddings and donation ceremonies. Also, since she loves playing with a ball, I play with that ball with her. Because I did these things, my daughter gradually started to smile and laugh again. She started talking again like before. When I say we're going to take a picture, she can even raise her hands and pose. "Mommy... I want to eat Man-Man (rice)," my daughter called out, stopping my thoughts about the earthquake. I put the rice packet I had bought for her into a plate and gave it to her.

Watching my daughter eat, I thought, "Oh... because of this child, I have gained more knowledge, love, and understanding. Go ahead and test me, World! I don't care, because I am a woman like the Weebles..."



“Watching my daughter eat, I thought, "Oh... because of this child, I have gained more knowledge, love, and understanding. Go ahead and test me, World! I don't care, because I am a woman like the Weebles.”

1.7 A Natural Disaster Survived Amid Fears

Persona:
Pregnant /
Lactating Woman

Author:
Naw Yukiko

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



She belonged to a family that once lived happily and peacefully by the shimmering waters of the beautiful Inle Lake. Surrounded by the lake's gentle ring of water and lush green hills, they lived close to nature. Their days were filled with traditional crafts – weaving Inle fabrics – and fishing. They glided from place to place in small motorboats, living each day simply yet joyfully.

Then, without warning, their lives were turned upside down by a natural disaster - an earthquake. It was something no one had expected. It struck on 28 March 2025, at around 12:50 in the afternoon. That afternoon, the little novices sat in the monastery, reciting their lessons. After the monks and novices had had their midday meal, we cleaned up the tables. Then we were all gathered together, preparing to eat, when the earth began to shake. Everyone froze in terror as the ground roared and shook. When the second, stronger tremor struck, I truly thought I would die - words failed, and no action seemed possible. For a moment, we were all paralyzed, not knowing what to do. "When we finally dared to look around, everything had changed." Houses had collapsed. Some people frantically searched for their children, while others stood frozen among the rubble. For some families, it struck just as the children were leaving school – a moment when the village was usually busy and alive with noise.

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When we finally dared to look
around, everything had changed.

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Yet out of that calamity, something powerful emerged – we grew closer. Strangers who had never exchanged a word before began to share their stories and offer one another help. The village youth gathered in groups, working side by side to repair the broken water pipes. Relief groups soon arrived, helping to rebuild homes. Some organizations donated money and essential supplies. People came to offer emotional support too, and their presence lifted our spirits when we were at our lowest. Even now, the memory of the earthquake lingers, leaving anxiety in our hearts. But for the sake of our children and our family, we strive to live the best life we can. To those who face similar hardships: hold on – life is not always this hard, brighter days will come. Every effort never goes to waste. May all families continue to live together in peace and happiness.



1.8 A New Perspective

Persona:
Pregnant /
Lactating Woman

Author:
Pyit Tine Htaung

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



My name is Ma Pont. I am 35 years old, married, and a mother of 2 children. My eldest son is currently 11, and my daughter is just over 1 year old. We are a family of 4. We live in Ye Ma Lel Quarter, He Ya Ywama Village Tract, Nyaung Shwe Township, and my husband works in the goldsmith industry. On one unexpected day, March 28, 2025, around 1 PM, an earthquake suddenly struck the Inle region where we live. I was working at the time. Both of my children were not home. I had briefly left my youngest daughter at someone else's house. She was only 6 months old then because I was bringing hot water to a friend who was sick and hospitalized. My 11-year-old eldest son had just left the house with his friends just before the earthquake. In that brief moment, the earthquake hit. I was anxious and worried about both children. The house was swaying and looked like it was about to collapse. I couldn't go down under the house. Only when the shaking gradually subsided did I shout for the children and run out without even wearing shoes! Thank goodness nothing major happened to the children. A big building nearby collapsed, and my eldest son was coming out from that area. A large bamboo pole fell and hit his shoulder. His friend was hit on the head and had a minor head wound. What a relief that it was only that much. Just thinking about it still makes me feel a little scared. After the earthquake, the electricity was out, and drinking water became

difficult to access. It was a great struggle to cook and do laundry. With a young child, it was very inconvenient. I was worried, mainly about the children. For about a month, I didn't dare sleep properly. We had to sleep under the house. Since the area behind the house was open, if we heard any warning news, I wouldn't sleep. With a child, I would just immediately go down and sleep in a small tent underneath. During the time immediately following the earthquake, local aid workers came to the village. They provided food, cash assistance for house repairs, water, and health education. Thanks to this, we achieved physical recovery. One day, a psychosocial support team called "Pyit Tine Htaung" came to our village and conducted an educational seminar to help with emotional recovery. That's when I learned things I had never heard of before: the importance of mental care, correct ways to relieve stress when it becomes overwhelming, methods to access mental health support, and the importance of self-care and caring for family members to cultivate positive new thoughts. They taught us that only by thinking with a positive perspective will our feelings be good, and only when our feelings are good will our actions be good. When I learned about these things, I decided to stop dwelling on stress and worries. Instead, I chose to move forward in the coming days with positive new thoughts that will empower me for the future of my children.

“

They taught us that only by
thinking with a positive perspective
will our feelings be good, and only
when our feelings are good will our
actions be good.

”

1.9 The Life of LGBT (TG)

Persona:
LGBTQIA+

Author:
The Help

Region:
Mandalay



My name is Thi Thi, and I am a Transgender (TG) and a makeup artist. When the earthquake hit, all three members of our family ran out. My younger brother was in the kitchen, and when the kitchen collapsed, it fell on his leg. He had to stay in the hospital for about two months. Now, we don't have a place to live. My mother and my brother have gone back to the village to stay. I am renting a room alone in Amarapura. The earthquakes happen so often that I don't dare to stay in a building, so I'm renting a place for 60,000 Kyats per month. Since the earthquake, I haven't been able to do makeup; it's a struggle just to eat. Renting a place makes things even worse. The local ward/neighborhood hasn't provided any support. The only things we received initially were the rice and oil given by the "The Help" organization. Life is very difficult. I feel depressed and sometimes suicidal. Because we are transgenders (TG), jobs are scarce; we can't get work anywhere. The only thing I have is makeup, so I'm in trouble. I really need more support like this. I haven't received help from anyone else before, so I'm happy to get this. It

helps me to think that I am not the only one who suffered from the earthquake, which brings me some mental strength. The event "The Help" organized, where we could play and have fun, has helped relieve my stress and made me happy. What I really wish for is to do more makeup work and to be able to pay my house rent. If I can get those things, I will be fine. My message to others is to all my fellow TGs and everyone else who suffered from the earthquake, please do not lose hope. Let's all try to live and keep striving.

“

The only thing I have is makeup, so I'm in trouble. I really need more support like this. I haven't received help from anyone else before, so I'm happy to get this.

”



1.10 U Nyein's Journey

Persona:
Elderly

Author:
Hand to Hand Charity

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



(1) Is this journey far or near?

Based on the natural disaster that struck in March 2025, from a distance you can see the whole of Myanmar as disaster-affected; up close you see how many different aspects of people's lives were hit. Among them is U Nyein's small family as well. "Is this journey far or near..." – this question keeps coming back to U Nyein's mind. U Nyein and his family live in Kyaysarkone village, Nyaung Shwe township in Southern Shan State. He is 74 years old but, despite his age, his spirit remains unbroken, still pushing against the burdens life has thrown at him.

(2) Turns and twists of life

For U Nyein, such a severe event is a first in his 74 years of life. Before the earthquake, he had once experienced flooding like he had never seen before. He was still repairing his damaged little house when this major earthquake happened again. When the earthquake struck, they temporarily stayed on a small raft that was in their house. His youngest daughter had to bring them food and drink. But even in such difficult times, he never wanted to burden others with his troubles. Although donors came to register and sometimes there was no follow-up, there were also things in U Nyein's heart he could not express.

(3) Struggling physically for survival

With these difficulties, their small roadside businesses selling fried snacks and warm tohu (tofu) also tightened up. Their slightly damaged shop had to be moved when the road flooded; they ended up living in the village school. With work unreliable, the combined effects of flood and the earthquake made it even harder for them to meet basic needs. They did receive some assistance - medicine, donated money, and occasional rice and oil – but it was very limited, not widespread. Donors became fewer, so his daughter had to work at a roll-making station to continue.

“ U Nyein now longed for something simple - just enough help to repair his home, and a peaceful village life like before. The road ahead was uncertain, but with quiet determination, U Nyein resolved to keep walking it - one step at a time. ”

(4) Family meal

After the flooding, U Nyein's wife needed emergency eye surgery. This time, it was the whole village community that stepped in, pooling together support so she could get treatment. Their grown children, however, could not offer much help – each of them was struggling to rebuild homes destroyed by the quake. Only their youngest daughter and a grandchild remained by their side, caring for them closely. Many of U Nyein's siblings are gone; leaving mostly children and grandchildren as his closest circle. He longed for the warmth of a big family household, but knew it was nearly impossible. His children were still fighting to restore their own lives. His dream of a secure, lively home was pushed further away.

(5) Is this journey near or far?

In the past, disasters like floods or earthquakes came once in a generation. Now, with climate change, floods seem to arrive once or even twice a year. That constant fear weighed heavily on U Nyein's mind. Even when the waters receded and people began rebuilding, he could not stop wondering the thought of what might happen next and when. "No one knows when trouble might strike. Having once fled in the night, U Nyein now longed for something simple — not riches, not luxury. Just enough help to repair his home, and a peaceful village life like before. The road ahead was uncertain, but with quiet determination, U Nyein resolved to keep walking it – one step at a time."



1.11 The Injured Family in Zayargyi Village

Persona:
Elderly

Author:
Kayah Tagon

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



The family consists of 4 members: a son-in-law, a daughter, a grandson, and a 94-year-old grandmother who sustained injuries to her lower abdomen and left leg. They lived in a large two-story wooden house.

Before the earthquake, the grandmother was watching TV downstairs, and the grandson was cooking for her. The son-in-law and daughter had gone to a charity event in another village. Only the grandson and the grandmother were left at home.

Suddenly, the house began to shake and sway violently. The grandson ran out of the kitchen, not knowing what was happening. A moment later, the large house tilted and plunged into the water. All the belongings inside crashed down, the house's posts broke into 3 pieces, and the roof also collapsed.

At that time, the grandson searched for his grandmother in the tilted, sinking house. He found her with a large door plank pinning her lower body. With great difficulty, he pulled the grandmother out from under the door. The grandmother was crying in pain. He carried her out of the ruined house and carried her through the water to a safe place. He saw belongings floating on the water or simply sinking.

There was no one around to take care of the grandmother. They had no change of clothes, so she had to remain in her wet clothes. After the earthquake, the grandson took her to an undamaged house and was at a loss for what to do next. They had no food or medicine. After a long time, the father and mother arrived and searched for the grandmother and grandson. They initially thought they had lost the mother (grandmother) and son. When they found them at the other house and saw the mother's condition, they prepared to rush her to the hospital. However, they immediately faced financial difficulty in hiring a motorboat to go to the hospital. Since the journey had to be made by water, they searched for a boat and made an emergency journey from the village to Taunggyi. They had to ask for help to gather the necessary clothes and blankets for the grandmother.

When the grandmother was treated and examined, they said that the bone in her upper thigh was dislocated. Because of her age, the

doctors informed them that the bone could not be set back together and that they could only manage her pain with medication. The grandmother had to stay in the hospital for about a week.

The son-in-law and daughter built an emergency tent in the yard for the grandmother to stay in when she returned. With the help and collective support of donors and local villagers, they were able to construct one temporary shelter. They survived on donated pre-packaged meals for about a week. They had absolutely no provisions, cooking utensils, or food left to cook themselves. With their home destroyed, they had no shelter, food, clothing, money, medical funds, or jobs. This made them deeply distressed and unsure of what to do next. "I cried, I felt depressed, but I encouraged myself." They managed to build resilience.

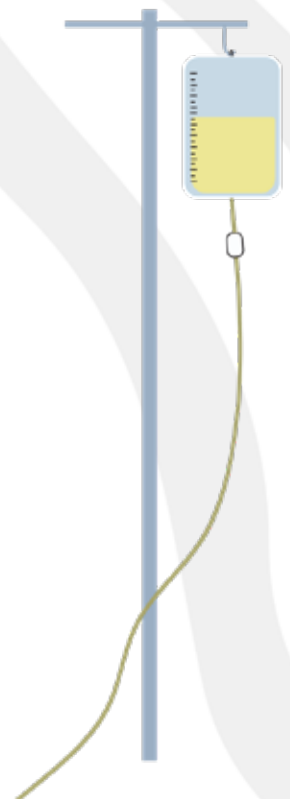
The first thing the son-in-law and daughter did was comfort the elderly mother, telling her, "Don't worry, just focus on your prayers. We, the family, will take care of everything else." With the assistance of the surrounding community and volunteer groups, they have now been able to build a small house. They know they must continue to strive.

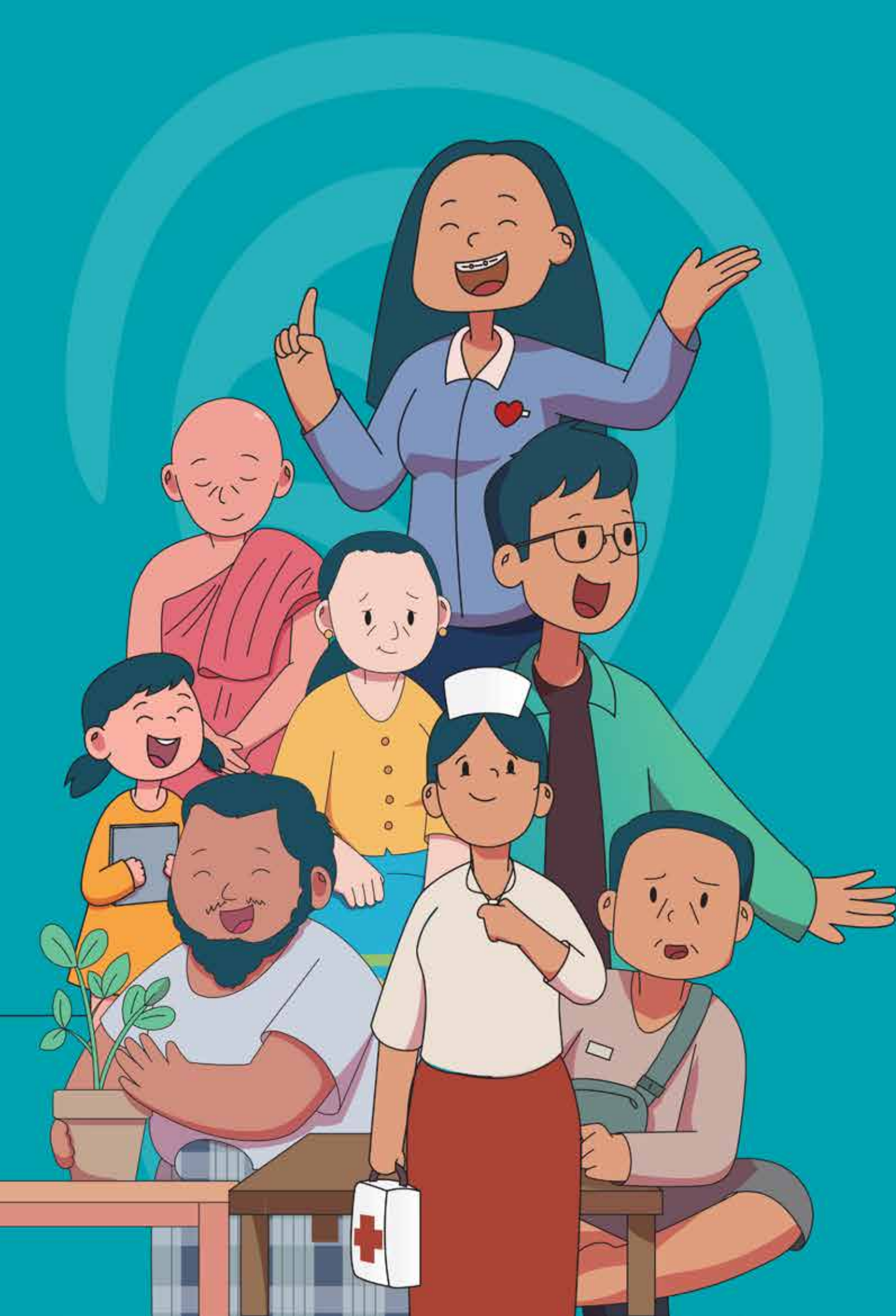
With the goal of building a home like the one the mother once built, they plan to move forward with a focus on their work, the mother's health, their children's education, and their livelihoods. They also aim for the community's mental health, community development, and to become a model village. The family, the community, and the volunteers will work together, physically and mentally healthy, to march towards this anticipated goal.

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This made them deeply distressed and unsure of what to do next. "I cried, I felt depressed, but I encouraged myself."

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Part II - Supporters

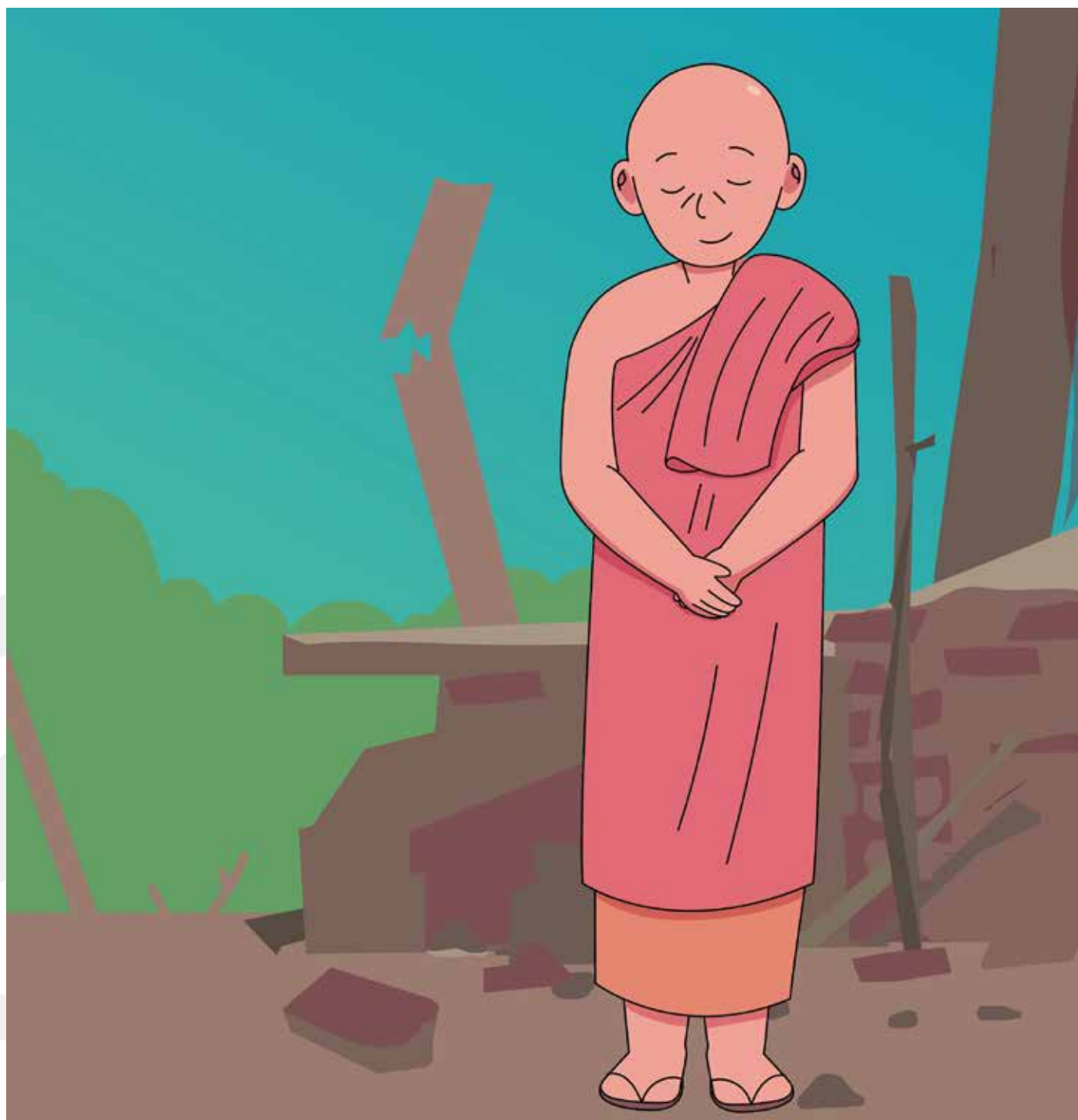
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2.1 Reflections of a Monk in the Aftermath of the Earthquake

Persona:
Religious Leader

Author:
Forerunners

Region:
Mandalay



"Lord, Lord, Lord..."

The venerable monk whispered from the depths of his heart, "Never in my whole life have I faced something like this."

It was not long ago that he had built a monastery school together with many monks, filled with the noble intention of spreading the Dhamma. The work was still unfinished. Yet now, a devastating earthquake has swept through, leaving everything in ruins.

The meditation halls where monks once sat in peace, the classrooms where novices received their teachings, the small temples lovingly built through the donations of lay devotees - every single one of them had collapsed.

In his heart, the monk felt immense sorrow. Still, one question kept arising again and again: "What must be done for the future?"

"This is but a reminder," he reflected, "that in this vast nature, all things are impermanent, nothing truly belongs to us. And yet, the Dhamma must be preserved with dignity and unwavering effort."

Voices of the lay donors and disciples filled the air: "Sayadaw, what do you need to rebuild the school? How can we help?"

The venerable monk, unable to give a direct answer, responded with his usual calm: "In the Sangha, robes or buildings are not the essence. What matters most is the mind and the practice of Vipassanā. Whether the monastery buildings stand or fall, they are impermanent and without self. But for the sake of your faith and spirit, we must keep striving."

Hearing this, the young novices replied together: "Sayadaw, we will not give up. We will work hard for this cause."

At that moment, the unity of the Sangha and the generosity of the lay community shone brightly. Though the earthquake had shattered buildings, it could not break their spirit.

The monk understood: though the monastery lay in ruins, this was not an end. It was a beginning - an opportunity to start anew.

"Before rebuilding walls and roofs, I must first preserve the strength of the Dhamma in the hearts of my disciples," he thought. "Only then can I truly continue my duty as guardian of the Sasana."

Plans slowly began to take shape. Some students worked on gathering materials. Others reached out to donors. Still others joined with villagers to organize charity trips. Step by step, they prepared for the rebuilding.

The Sayadaw watched quietly, meditating on the Three Marks of Existence: anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (non-self).

"Just as monastery halls do not last forever, human life too is but a fleeting moment. But the true duty of a guardian of the Sasana is to preserve the light of the Dhamma in people's hearts."

One evening, in the small makeshift hut that survived the quake, the Sayadaw sat with his disciples. With only a small hearth and simple food, they continued their daily life.

A novice turned and asked: "Sayadaw, I was worried that without the monastery we could no longer hear your teachings. But seeing you meditate here, I feel peace again."

Smiling gently, the Sayadaw replied: "The Dhamma does not live only in buildings. It must be built within the heart. Even if the monastery falls, the Sasana does not fall. The Buddha's teaching must always find its place in the heart of each person."

Encouraged by these words, the novices regained their determination. They promised themselves to keep working for tomorrow, with courage and renewed energy.

And in that moment, a new clarity lit up in the venerable monk's heart: "This earthquake, though it destroyed our monastery, is not a defeat - it is a sign. A reminder that the Sasana must not crumble. Instead, it is an opportunity to rebuild with stronger faith, brighter courage, and deeper devotion."

“

In my heart, I felt immense sorrow. Still, one question kept arising again and again: "What must be done for the future?"

”

2.2 The One Who Continues His Journey with a Goal

Persona:
Religious Leader

Author:
Lin Yaung Chi Library

Region:
Mandalay



"Earthquake! Earthquake!" The shouts filled the air, and the entire surroundings dissolved into chaos. Sitting right where the dust and gravel rained down, the event that transpired is simply unforgettable.

That day was March 28, 2025 (the day of the new moon in the month of Tabaung, 1,386 ME). The State Dhammacariya (Buddhist Canonical Examinations) were being held on the top floor, in the outermost room of the U Hla Thein building. A total of 240 monks were taking the exam, with 120 monks per floor. I was among seven monks assigned to supervise and invigilate the examination room. One monk asked, "To stretch my legs and arms," and walked out. When I sat down due to the earthquake, the northern concrete slab of the floor sank. I was dragged along with the dust and gravel and momentarily lost consciousness. In that moment of agony, one of my hands was pinned down. There was a clamor of shouts from below and groans from beside me. A supervising monk next to me was pinned at the waist and had already passed away. The object pinning my hand was huge. Luckily, the phone that was rolled up in my robe acted as a buffer, preventing the object from hitting my collarbone; it slid off and pinned my left hand. This lasted for about four hours. Since a crane could not lift the debris, they gradually removed it piece by piece and used a jack to lift the heavy object and rescue me. I arrived at the hospital around 5 PM, where I was given an injection and had my wound bandaged. Patients with injuries arrived in a steady stream.

After a night and a morning, an odor started to emanate from my hand, and I realized I needed to be transferred to another hospital for treatment.

The encouraging words from the monks, male devotees (Dayika), and female devotees (Dayikama) gave me mental strength. While performing my duties for the Sasana (Buddhist Teachings), I lost one of my hands in an instant due to the natural disaster earthquake. Two monks who were on duty with me passed away, the other two suffered hand injuries, and one sustained a leg injury. Other examining monks were also injured or passed away. The impact was felt everywhere.

Having lost one hand and sustaining a back injury, it is difficult for me to wear my monk's robes. Therefore, I am practicing with a prosthetic robotic hand. Although I am not immediately used to it, I feel I must be a guide and an example for the new generation of the Sasana and face the challenges of life with calmness. The helping hands and encouraging words of mutual support give me mental strength. Since I still have to strive for the Sasana, I continue to practice and prepare for my new condition. However, the vivid images of the earthquake and that momentary event from the past still rise in my mind. It will take a long time to forget...

“

I feel I must be a guide and an example for the new generation of the Sasana and face the challenges of life with calmness.

”



2.3 Faith Amid the Earthquake

Persona:
Religious Leader

Author:
LADDER

Region:
Sagaing

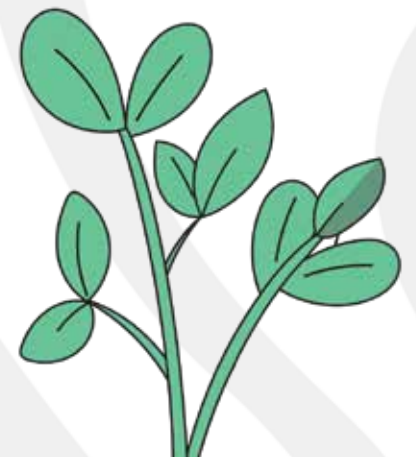


It was the beginning of summer, a late afternoon when heavy clouds gathered and the winds blew restless. Like every Friday, I was as busy as ever. To introduce myself - I am Kareen, and I am an Imam. Fridays are always my busiest days, as you might guess...heh...heh. As an Imam, my duty is to prepare the Khutbah - the Friday sermon - and today was no different. Inside the mosque, I could see people readying themselves for worship, a sight so serene and heartwarming that it touched my soul. It was one of those moments when even a blink of an eye felt too precious. Who could have imagined that in such a peaceful life, disaster would suddenly strike? That very moment changed everything for me.

It happened just a few months ago, on a Friday that was also an auspicious day of fasting - truly a sacred day. I sat on the pulpit, waiting for the moment to deliver the sermon, my mind clear and refreshed. But just as I stood to begin, the earth trembled. At first, I thought it was just one of those small quakes we had felt before. I remained calm, reciting silently, as the shaking paused for a moment. But before long, the second tremor struck - stronger, fiercer, like a storm breaking loose. In the blink of an eye, everything turned dark. The people inside the mosque didn't even have time to run. The world can be so merciless sometimes. The mosque collapsed around me. Dust filled my eyes, turning the holy place that had been full of blessings only that morning into nothing but a heap of bricks. The thunderous crash echoed in my ears, followed by the heart-wrenching cries of people trapped, mourning, and calling for help. In that chaos, I found myself crouching by the pulpit, reciting verses from the Qur'an, my head bowed. There was no time to escape, no chance to act. And yet, by Allah's will, when I regained consciousness, I realized I was safe - unharmed - able to crawl out from the rubble. Later, the truth of the tragedy emerged. Thirty-six lives were lost, and countless others injured. Some bodies we never found, buried beneath the ruins. I could not help but wonder: What if among them was a father whose wife and children were waiting at home after Friday prayers? What if two siblings, who only had each other in this world, were torn apart - one buried beneath the rubble while the other lived on? The thought alone pressed heavily on my heart.

Time passed quickly. It has been more than four months now, and yet in my mind, it still feels like yesterday. The memories remain vivid - the dust, the sound, the fear, and the grief. I am certain that many others who lived through it feel the same way. But by Allah's will, life has slowly returned to balance. The past is gone, and we must move forward. As an imam, I entrust everything to the One who created me. "For my own healing, I turned to my passions, small activities that soothed my heart. Because truly, the heart is the most important part of us. If the heart is well, everything else follows." But if the heart

suffers, then no outward appearance can hide it. There's a saying I often hear in my surroundings: "Healing the heart is like nurturing a plant that is on the brink of death. Forget to water it even for a single day, and it will wither away." In the same way, those who have suffered - whether from natural disasters like this earthquake or from personal pain in other forms - need care for their hearts. So, if I may share a humble message: leave the past where it belongs - in the past. Live today fully. Do good things as much as you can. Face each day with strength, so that when tomorrow comes - or if it never does - you have no regrets. After all, no one can guarantee us a tomorrow. So, to those reading this now, I ask you: Today, are you truly content? Are you truly happy? If not, let this very moment be the start of living your life with meaning and joy. That is my prayer for you. And with that, I bring this story to a close.



“

For my own healing, I turned to my passions, small activities that soothed my heart. Because truly, the heart is the most important part of us. If the heart is well, everything else follows.

”

2.4 Pann Pyoe Lat

Persona:
Educator

Author:
Thaw Wainn Yin Mar

Region:
Sagaing



This is the story of Ma Pont Pont, a volunteer teacher from Sar Linn Gyi Township, Sagaing Region, who dedicates her time to serving the children in the village where she is assigned from her home village. One day, the teacher, Ma Pont Pont, along with the rest of the country, experienced a severe earthquake that greatly affected multiple areas. While teaching in the village, she suddenly felt dizzy, and the ground shook for quite some time. The earthquake caused anxiety and worry for the teacher and her students, leading to an early school dismissal. Although there was no major damage or severe impact in her immediate vicinity, Ma Pont Pont's journey home was not peaceful. This was because she started hearing reports of collapsed houses, injuries, and destruction caused by the earthquake in the towns where her relatives lived. From that day onward, she was overwhelmed with the news of damage, destruction, and losses across the country, while simultaneously experiencing profound personal pain herself. Despite the difficulties and obstacles that arose, she bravely faced and overcame them. Driven by her sincere dedication, great compassion, and spirit of sacrifice, she returned to her students. She understood that only through her teaching and assistance would the children in those remote, less-accessible rural areas be able to learn, complete their classes, and achieve basic education. Thus, she resumed her teaching duties, taking responsibility for their education. No matter what she felt, she carried on. She embraces the joys, sorrows, successes, and failures that life offers. Looking at the faces of the children she is responsible

for nurturing, she swallows her difficulties and stands strong with courage. The teacher had to halt her businesses and other activities, since the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. She is exceptionally bright in education and is financially capable of maintaining a good standard of living. However, instead of staying in the city, she chose to live in the countryside due to the circumstances that arose after the COVID-19 period. She is dedicated to providing education as a charity, encouraging and teaching children who have lost their opportunities for learning. She is a person who wholeheartedly commits to and can perform her work to the fullest wherever she is assigned. Even after experiencing and suffering great destruction from the earthquake and other natural disasters, she does not give up. She continues to encourage and uplift her friends and associates who have suffered similarly, and diligently continues her work. It can be said that the teacher is a person who works with full courage and tremendous enthusiasm and dedication for the children. She is someone who tirelessly strives and achieves success for her students among all those whom one might encounter. She is truly "Pann Pyoe Lat", a blossom that will never fade.

“

She is a person who wholeheartedly commits to and can perform her work to the fullest wherever she is assigned. Even after experiencing and suffering great destruction from the earthquake and other natural disasters, she does not give up. She continues to encourage and uplift her friends and associates who have suffered similarly, and diligently continues her work.

”

2.5 A Person of Compassion and Courage

Persona:
Healthcare Worker

Author:
The Lady Bee

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



Throughout the long and difficult path of life, I have always walked forward with one belief in my heart: "If I keep doing good, bad things cannot happen to me."

After graduating with a B.A. in English, I returned to my hometown, Innpawhkon village, and began to settle down there. My heart's calling was clear – I wanted to become a nurse. Today, I am not only a mother of three children, but also serve my community as a volunteer nurse, caring for the people in my village.

In the beginning, I worked side by side with an experienced doctor, visiting homes and treating patients. But now, with the doctor growing old – already past seventy and no longer strong – I am the one who goes from house to house, giving injections and providing medicine on my own.

One day, while I was upstairs sewing clothes for my children, the earthquake struck. In all my years, I never felt anything so fierce. I had only heard people say the ground could shake left and right. But this quake was different – it was as if the earth was swirling like water, dragging houses back and forth.

As the ground trembled, the shelves in my home collapsed. While rushing outside, a wooden board fell and struck my leg. Yet, in the panic, I barely noticed the pain. My only thought was for my children.

When the quake ended, chaos filled the village. "Some lost their homes, some wept in fear, some were wounded..." People called out for me, needing help. I grabbed my small medical bag and ran, leaving my frightened children and my broken home behind to care for the injured.

Our village relies heavily on weaving, but many of the looms crumbled in the quake. Leaving families who rely on them suddenly without work. Families who depended on that livelihood suddenly had nothing. Without jobs and with houses destroyed, everyone fell into hardship. Yet, we leaned on each other – sharing, supporting, and slowly moving forward together.

I realised then that inner strength was most important. With courage and determination, each small step would eventually show the way forward.

Now, even the smallest sound makes people uneasy. At night, when the wind blows or rain begins to fall, we wake at the slightest sound, ready to run, fearing another quake. Fear has rooted itself deeply in our hearts.

"I, too, worry constantly – What if another earthquake strikes? How can I protect my family? How can I still help others? These questions fill my mornings as I wake up to begin each day. But I hold onto my guiding belief: "If I keep doing good, bad things will not happen to me." With this strength, I rise each day, ready to serve my community in every way I can."

At this time, when fear and worry weigh heavily on the village, it is really important to provide emotional support, especially for mothers. Encouraging each other and caring for one another is what keeps our community moving forward. Together, we will walk this rough journey with resilience and hope.

“

But I hold onto my guiding belief: "If I keep doing good, bad things will not happen to me." With this strength, I rise each day, ready to serve my community in every way I can.

”

2.6 Unforgettable

Persona:
CSO Member

Author:
Freedom Organization

Region:
Mandalay



I am a 55-year-old and a mother of three. How have I lived my life? Driven by a strong desire to help people, I've been involved in community service work for nearly two decades now. I deeply cherish and value this work, which I have always been very proud of. I always approached my beloved work with enthusiasm, both physically and mentally, until that major disaster struck. March 28th was the day the earthquake violently shook everything, mercilessly destroying the families in the community I looked after and my ability to work.

That day was a regular, ordinary day. I was preparing the necessary materials to teach Excel to children from basic family backgrounds, hoping to help them secure good job opportunities and change their lives. As I was leaving the house around 11:50 AM, I was suddenly hit by a violent shaking and screams that sounded like the end of the world. I couldn't understand what was happening. While I was in a panic, not knowing what to do, I ran and hid under a nearby table. The first thought that came to mind was that even though I had taught the children in the community what to do, how to stay safe, what to prepare, and what to take during a sudden natural disaster, when I faced it myself, I was completely flustered and realized I couldn't react immediately. During that time, my two-story wooden house was creaking and leaning backward. I was terrified and worried about my son who was upstairs. He couldn't use the stairs at that moment, so he had to jump off the staircase. A little while after that, I called my family members and ran towards the street, where there was an open field. Just as we were about to reach the street, the second strong jolt hit. I lost my balance and fell onto the street with the full force of the impact, kneeling on both knees. I was in immense pain and couldn't walk. The world around me was shattering with the sounds of crying, screaming, and collapsing buildings. At the same time, I was incredibly worried about my married children and my elderly mother, who is over 80.

When things calmed down a bit, I tried to contact my family, but the phone lines were down. In my heart, I had to keep a brave face, thinking to myself, "They must be fine." Since I was in a rush, I temporarily forgot my pain and tried to help those around me who needed it. I went around encouraging people nearby, telling them to stay in safe areas, not to go back inside their homes, and to stay away from buildings, as aftershocks could still happen. Furthermore, because natural disasters are unpredictable, we had to clear and prepare open spaces in the community for people to live in. We then collaborated with community leaders to collect information about the residents and work to connect them with the necessary aid. Currently, we are connecting the injured with mobile clinics for medical treatment, distributing basic wound care supplies, and necessary medications for blood pressure and diabetes. For my knee injury, I was referred to a Japanese hospital that had set up a temporary clinic. After necessary check-ups and treatment at the hospital, I still had to visit external hospitals and clinics due to ongoing

needs. Because the ligaments in my knees were severely damaged, I had to continue treatment, including taking nutritional supplements for the ligaments. Our family's total income is only around 300,000 Kyats, making this extremely difficult for me. I still cannot walk properly and must continue taking medication. Those who, like me, suffered severe injuries are facing difficulties in getting follow-up treatment.

Even though I can't walk, I couldn't stop the community work I've always done. I try my best to go, help, and work. I worry that if I stop the work I usually do, the children will suffer, so I continue with the help of another person. Back then, my body always followed my will, but now, I feel frustrated with myself that I need someone's help to do things. My greatest wish is to be able to walk properly again. Though it hasn't happened yet, I am living with the hope that one day I will recover.

The community leaders truly rely on people like us who are committed to community service and help us when donors come to give aid. I often feel sad thinking that if my legs were fine, I could do so much more. Because of my habit of being unable to sit still if I'm not helping, I connected with as many donors and organizations as possible via phone and helped secure support for the community. After the earthquake, we faced issues like job scarcity and a poor economic situation. When people started making poor choices in solving these problems, I tried my best to guide them away from the wrong path and connect them with support. However, I haven't been able to make a significant, widespread impact yet. The distress stems from the economic hardship, which leads people to rely on gambling for easy money. I see some families in the community losing everything they have, even the means to run their kitchens, and the thought that I still have so much work to do for the community dominates my mind.

That's why I want to recover and be able to walk properly so I can work. For us, that earthquake is not just difficult to forget, it is impossible to forget.

“My greatest wish is to be able to walk properly again. Though it hasn't happened yet, I am living with the hope that one day I will recover.”

2.7 My Earthquake Experience in Mandalay

Persona:
Community Leader

Author:
The Way Station

Region:
Mandalay

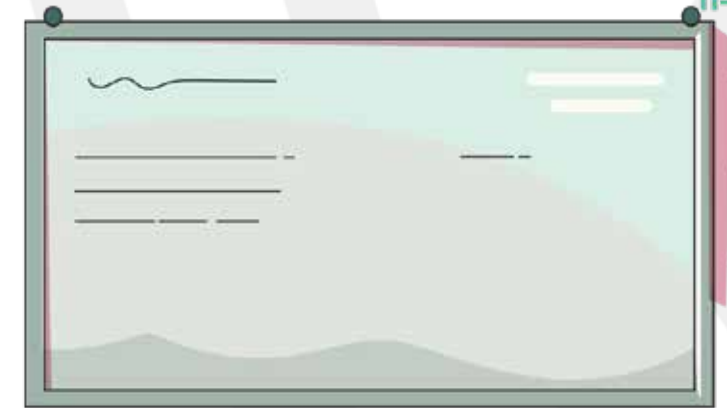


March 28, 2025, began as just another ordinary day. In the morning, I had plans to meet some friends. I even took half-day leave from work because, by noon, I needed to return to the Center where our youth group was hosting a cooking class. I didn't want to miss meeting youths there. So I went to meet my friends. We were chatting, eating snacks, and spending time at their house. Everything felt normal - until suddenly, the entire house began to shake. The whole three-story building trembled violently. Things fell, pieces of the roof broke, and in that instant, we realized - it was an earthquake. Without thinking, we all rushed outside. But even outside, the earth kept shaking for what felt like endless seconds. When it finally calmed down, we looked at one another - faces pale, filled with fear, some of us almost in tears. Just as we tried to steady ourselves, talking on the phone and trying to contact loved ones, the ground shook again. Stronger this time. We screamed. Some of us fell to the ground, holding on as tightly as we could. Around us, buildings cracked, shops collapsed, neighbors' houses were damaged, and even my friend's home suffered heavy cracks as parts of the roof fell. When the shaking stopped again, I tried calling the person who was supposed to pick me up. The call didn't go through. I began to panic. I thought of youths and staff at the Center, of my family at home - I couldn't reach anyone. My heart sank, tears welled up, and I silently prayed for everyone's safety. Soon, the person who was to pick me up finally arrived. We tried to make our way home. On the way, I saw collapsed buildings, walls that had fallen, people being carried out of houses - some covered in blood. The sight broke me. I cried openly, and my worry for my family grew unbearable. The road was blocked in places, but I forced myself through until I finally reached home. There, I found my family gathered outside in the yard. Our apartment was completely crushed - the rooftop water tank had fallen through, destroying our entire living space. But my family was alive. Safe. At that moment, all my fear turned into deep relief. I told them I had to go check the Center. Rushing back, I found the gate closed but thankfully, the building was not destroyed. The hotel next to it, however, had partially collapsed. My heart was still racing, but after some time, I was reunited with youths and staff. That day, we arranged transportation - rickshaws and motorbikes - to send youths from the cooking class back safely to their families. Only then did I return home. That night, with no way to cook and nowhere to buy food, we shared a simple dinner together: half a boiled egg each. It sounds small, but it became unforgettable. We were alive, we were together, and that alone was something to be deeply grateful for.

Two days later, local groups, friends, relatives, and donors came together to provide emergency support. With my own youth group, about 30 of us started volunteering for earthquake relief. We distributed food, essential supplies, and medicines to camps, neighborhoods, and villages. At some camps, we provided daily lunch for up to 2,000 households - every single day, for nearly two months. We also supported around 7,000 families still living in

damaged homes with food assistance, cash support, and repeat distributions to rural areas that received little or no help. "By May, I attended a Psychological First Aid training. It changed me. I realized that healing is not only about food and shelter, but also about mental strength. "Only when the mind feels joy, the body can truly heal - and only then can we share kindness with others." With that understanding, I began helping people in my community with mental support sessions, while also continuing to care for my own heart. Even now - five months after the earthquake - I keep telling myself: heal yourself, stay strong, and then pass that love forward to others."

Today, some families have begun to recover their lives. But many others are still struggling - because of great loss, financial hardship, or circumstances beyond their control. For them, I remain ready to help - whether through mental health support, or by sharing whatever assistance I can. The earthquake shook not only our homes, but also our spirits. Yet it also reminded me of this truth: life is fragile, but love and resilience can hold us together. And as long as we have each other, we will find the strength to stand again.



“Only when the mind feels joy, the body can truly heal - and only then can we share kindness with others.”
With that understanding, I began helping people in my community with mental support sessions, while also continuing to care for my own heart.

2.8

From Deep Scars to
a New Beginning**Persona:**
Youth Volunteer**Author:**
For The Future - Myanmar**Region:**
Mandalay**- The day the earthquake struck...**

My name is Espresso. That day, I had just come back from school. After lunch, I was resting at home, and all of a sudden, - the ground beneath us began to shake violently.

Never in my life had I experienced such a strong earthquake. At first, I thought, "It'll stop in a few seconds." But it didn't. Instead, the whole house rattled, furniture toppled, and everything inside came crashing down.

Luckily, no one in my family was seriously injured. But the shock was overwhelming. Soon after, the internet went down. And when the connection finally returned, news poured in: the Sagaing Bridge had collapsed, and countless buildings had crumbled. My fear only deepened.

The hardest challenge after the quake was living without electricity and water. For almost two weeks, we endured this hardship. Thankfully, the nearby hospital provided water and even allowed us to charge our phones. That kindness made survival a little easier.

- Healing from the invisible wounds was the hardest part...

After the earthquake, I couldn't bring myself to go up tall buildings. I avoided taking elevators, and I couldn't even step into underground parking lots without fear.

At night, I couldn't fall asleep easily. My mind kept whispering: "What if another quake strikes while I'm asleep?" That thought haunted me.

But I refused to surrender to fear. I joined psychosocial support training and volunteered as a youth worker in the earthquake-affected areas. Being there with the survivors, offering comfort, and standing with them gave me strength too.

I also found healing through creativity - painting, crafting clay dolls, and engaging in art therapy. These activities helped me release my pain, even for a short while, and kept my mind from replaying the earthquake again and again.

Seeing other young volunteers working tirelessly for their communities gave me hope and courage. Slowly, I began to recover.

Currently, I feel that there may be only around 50% of the earthquake-affected families that have been able to fully rebuild their lives.. Many are still struggling with unmet needs. That reality reminds me that our recovery work is not over yet.

- This earthquake taught us to be more compassionate...

If there was one light in the darkness, it was this: people became kinder. After the disaster, I saw neighbors helping one another, young people stepping up selflessly, and communities growing stronger together.

That is the change I cherish most - the earthquake made us more human, more compassionate.

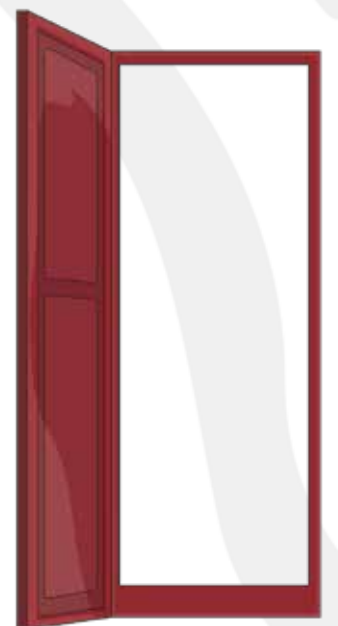
To everyone who has faced hardship, I want to say: keep moving forward. Don't live in the shadows of the past. Life is still ahead of us.

I deeply admire the organizations and youth groups that are now organizing psychosocial support and community well-being programs. These efforts prove something important: "if each of us takes care of our own emotional healing, then together, we can heal the scars of the past. And when those wounds are healed, the road ahead will not only be bearable - it will be beautiful."

“

If each of us takes care of our own emotional healing, then together, we can heal the scars of the past. And when those wounds are healed, the road ahead will not only be bearable - it will be beautiful.

”



2.9 Ko Mi-Gyaung (Mr. Crocodile) from the Lake

Persona:
Youth Volunteer

Author:
NYI MO DU

Region:
Inle / Nyaung Shwe



My name is Ko Mi-Gyaung. I am an Inn Thar born and raised in the lake. I only attended school up to the primary level. Currently, I am doing my best to work for my community, which has suffered from the earthquake. We are now experiencing additional flooding as well.

When the earthquake struck, my family of five and I were preparing our lunch. The earthquake caused our pots, pans, rice, and dishes to spill. This was the first time I had ever experienced such a violent earthquake; we were all terrified. After the earthquake, some of the village houses collapsed. We also experienced a lot of destruction. We helped each other by sharing what we had and then held a meeting to discuss seeking assistance. We consulted and connected with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide aid to ask for help. Now, the rehabilitation work is almost complete. Since the water is still covering some areas, some homes have not yet been repaired. No matter what, I believe that there is a way if you have your will and set aside your worries to continue to do what needs to be done.

We were truly delighted and grateful that the mutual assistance and the aid organizations did not abandon us. Because the losses were different, the depth of suffering varies from person to person. Some are able to cope, but others are yet to move on. As for me, I want everyone who was affected by the earthquake to receive equal assistance, without exception. I want to encourage people in other areas facing similar disasters not to despair and to try to rebuild. I want to tell them, "You are not the only one facing this, we are all going through this together."

“Because the losses were different, the depth of suffering varies from person to person. Some are able to cope, but others are yet to move on.”

In our rehabilitation efforts, building homes, providing for food, clothing, and shelter, as well as addressing health and education, are all important. I also see that our mental health is equally important. I want to emphasize that providing this mental well-being support is a crucial and essential action that must be taken. Thank you all.



“

As you turn this final page, we invite you to **hear the stories of those affected by the earthquake**, and to carry forward the understanding that recovery is not only about rebuilding buildings, but also about **listening, supporting, and nurturing the resilience of communities**.

- Doh Eain

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This storybook is published by Doh Eain and distributed free of charge.

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