

## **Myanmar: people hit worse by cyclone Nargis than during the 2004 tsunami Poor farming and fishing communities need urgent assistance**

**Bangkok, 08 May 2008** - The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is mounting this week the first damage and needs assessment mission into Myanmar's fishing sector, believed to be hit worse by cyclone Nargis than during the 2004 tsunami.

The five most affected states are considered the country's food basket, producing surpluses of fish, rice and pork for other parts of Myanmar, and overall food security situation in Myanmar is threatened, FAO said today

Cyclone Nargis has affected the same areas in the Ayeyarwady division that were hit by the 2004 tsunami. This time around, the impact is believed to be far more severe.

Two senior emergency operations coordinators will join FAO's resident team in Myanmar this week in response to an official government request for assistance to fishers in the Ayeyarwady division.

FAO will assist the government in assessing damage to rural livelihoods in the fishing, rice and livestock sectors and identifying the most urgent needs.

### **Fisheries**

Early satellite pictures show significant damage to fishing vessels in harbours. The fate of the vessels at sea when the cyclone hit is currently unknown.

The coastline of Myanmar is over 3 000 km long and the Ayeyarwady division occupies the delta region of the Ayeyarwady river. The area has numerous rivers and channels and much of the transport in and around the area is by boat.

The area struck by the cyclone has some major fishing ports and landing sites. It is clear that many vessels have been sunk in harbours and damage to infrastructure such as landing facilities and fish storage and preservation facilities is likely.

Myanmar does not have an early warning system for cyclones and bad weather. Although fishermen are generally aware of weather conditions and do not go out to sea if storms are expected, fishers on small vessels may not have received warning in time.

As transport and communications are extremely difficult, FAO expects to have a preliminary assessment within 10 days, and a fuller picture of the situation within one month.

Short- and medium-term recovery plans will be prepared by FAO, and assistance will be provided to the Government to implement these emergency and rehabilitation plans.

### **Rice production**

High resolution satellite maps will be analyzed to assess damage to rice crops. It is believed that the second crop of the 2007 rice season was largely harvested before the cyclone hit the region.

FAO expects, however, that rice already harvested for household consumption was damaged by the storm surge, adding to the precarious food security situation of poor coastal families.

"Time is running out to prepare for the main rice planting season, which starts in early June with the onset of the monsoon rains," said He Changchui, FAO's chief for Asia and the Pacific.

"It is crucially important to mobilize the right type and volume of rice seeds and other production inputs such as fertilizers quickly, in order to resume agricultural productivity in a timely manner."

Another FAO priority will be to analyze soil salinity and review damage to irrigation and capacity for draining agricultural lands.

In Myanmar, people consume on average 20 kg of rice per month compared with 16 kg in Viet Nam, 10 kg in Thailand and 7 kg in Asia.

### **Livestock**

The five affected states are important areas for livestock production - with roughly 50 percent of national poultry production and 40 percent of pig production.

Animal traction is used for plowing fields and for transport. High prices and unreliable availability of fuel for tractors and other mechanized farm machinery increase the importance buffalos for farming.

Small-scale livestock holders may need assistance to treat injured or sick animals and to feed surviving animals, FAO said.