

CARE'S Cyclone Nargis relief picks up pace

CARE's Emergency Team Leader in the Irrawaddy Delta says biggest challenge now is accessing remote communities

Pyapon, Myanmar 29/05/08 – The pace of the aid effort in response to the devastating Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar is picking up, as international emergency experts and supplies arrive into the country in greater numbers to support the ongoing response. "One of the biggest challenges now is transporting aid through the maze of waterways that make up the Irrawaddy Delta", says Chris Northey, CARE's Emergency Team Leader speaking from one of CARE's operations hubs in the Irrawaddy Delta.

"It's treacherous getting into some of these areas," said Northey. "Many areas where CARE is working are reachable only by boat, and the rivers are filled with downed trees and sunken fishing boats. You really need local people to negotiate through these waterways to know the currents and the tides and even to know where these villages are."

Northey is among the first international aid workers permitted into the delta after the government announced on Friday that it would allow access to for foreign emergency teams to all cyclone-affected areas. Northey and CARE's team of international emergency experts are supporting CARE's emergency team of nearly 100 national staff, who have been reaching some of the most remote areas of the delta since the cyclone hit.

CARE has provided clean water, food and emergency supplies to nearly 120,000 people in 12 areas throughout the Irrawaddy Delta and around Yangon. CARE is using a system of small trucks, motorcycles and traditional wooden longboats to transfer supplies from Yangon into the delta across wooden bridges, mud-clogged roads and narrow waterways.

"The destruction in these areas is shocking, but you can see that people do have coping strategies," said Northey. "These local communities and the survivors are actually a part of the relief response. But many more still need to be reached."

About CARE in Myanmar: CARE is one of the world's largest international humanitarian and emergency relief organizations. CARE has been working in Myanmar (Burma) for 14 years—mostly on food security, health programs, HIV/AIDS prevention and on water and sanitation. CARE has 550 staff members in Myanmar working on projects in 120 villages and towns across the country.