

Rural Development in Myanmar



On the occasion of World Rural Development Day 2025, it is my great privilege to extend warm greetings and sincere best wishes to the international community and fellow member countries of the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP). Myanmar is proud to be an active and committed member of CIRDAP and is pleased to join in this meaningful global observance by reflecting on our national efforts and highlighting the tangible impacts of our rural development initiatives.

Rural development continues to be a central pillar of Myanmar's national agenda. With over 70 percent of our population residing in rural areas, promoting inclusive and sustainable rural progress is essential not only for improving individual livelihoods, but also for achieving balanced, equitable national development. Despite years of progress, rural poverty remains nearly three times higher than in urban areas, compounded by limited access to infrastructure, essential services, and livelihood opportunities.

In response to these enduring challenges, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar through the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development and the Department of Rural Development (DRD) has adopted a comprehensive, integrated approach guided by national frameworks such as the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (MSDP) and the Rural Development Strategic Framework.

A cornerstone of this strategy is infrastructure development. Under the Rural Roads and Bridges activities, the DRD has successfully constructed and rehabilitated more than 35,000 kilometers of rural roads and over 3,000 bridges, significantly improving connectivity

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in remote and hard-to-reach areas. These infrastructure upgrades have been transformative, reducing travel times, enhancing market access, and linking rural communities with schools, health facilities, and administrative services—thereby narrowing the rural-urban divide and unlocking new opportunities for social and economic inclusion.

Equally important has been the expansion of access to clean water and sanitation. Through the Community Water Supply and Sanitation activities, safe drinking water systems such as tube wells, rainwater harvesting facilities, and gravity-fed pipelines have been installed in thousands of villages. These efforts are complemented by improved sanitation infrastructure and hygiene education campaigns, leading to substantial gains in public health, particularly in disaster-prone and water-scarce regions. Collectively, these initiatives have improved daily life and bolstered community resilience.

An innovative dimension of our rural strategy is represented by the SMART Village Project, a model that integrates infrastructure, energy, education, agriculture, water supply, and climate adaptation within a locally tailored, multi-sectoral framework. By encouraging the adoption of green technologies, digital tools, and disaster-resilient infrastructure, the SMART Village Project seeks to future-proof rural communities. These villages serve as pilot sites intended for broader replication, reinforcing Myanmar's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to building climate-resilient rural systems.

Another vital component is participatory governance through the Village Development Planning (VDP) Programme. This initiative empowers communities to identify and prioritize their own development needs, fostering a bottom-up approach that enhances local ownership, transparency, and trust. Thousands of micro-projects—ranging from infrastructure improvements to livelihood training—have been implemented through this process, reaching hundreds of townships and strengthening the relationship between rural communities and local administrations.

A cornerstone of economic empowerment in rural Myanmar is the Mya Sein Yaung Project, also known as the Evergreen Village Development Project. Through the provision of revolving funds, this initiative enables communities to initiate and expand income-generating activities tailored to local contexts. Since its launch, the project has reached more than 13,000 villages and over 3 million people. Its success is rooted in a strong model of community ownership, where elected village committees manage the funds, ensuring transparency, sustainability,

and meaningful impact. The project continues to enhance household incomes, promote entrepreneurship, and foster economic resilience at the grassroots level.

Supporting this economic empowerment agenda is the Rural Business Fund, which broadens access to credit for smallholder farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and self-help groups. Combined with financial literacy training and business planning support, this initiative has enabled families to diversify their livelihoods and reduce dependence on subsistence farming. Special attention is given to women-headed households and marginalized groups, further advancing the goal of inclusive, gender-responsive development.

Human capital development is equally critical to sustaining rural transformation. The DRD has implemented wide-ranging vocational and skills training programmes focused on youth, women, and vulnerable populations. Training areas include agriculture, food processing, tailoring, construction, and mobile phone repair, among others. These programmes often provide graduates with starter kits or linkages to local markets, enabling them to convert newly acquired skills into productive livelihoods. In doing so, they reduce rural-urban migration and help anchor economic opportunity within communities.

At the heart of all these efforts lies a shared commitment to community ownership, transparency, inclusivity, and resilience. The results are not just visible in statistical progress, but in the lives of rural people—women leading savings groups, young people launching businesses, children accessing education through improved infrastructure, and families enjoying clean, safe drinking water for the first time.

Nonetheless, challenges persist. Geographic remoteness, seasonal flooding, the impacts of climate change, and limited fiscal resources continue to test the resilience of rural communities. Yet, the Government of Myanmar remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing rural development through innovative, adaptive, and collaborative solutions. Continued engagement with regional partners, particularly through platforms such as CIRDAP, remains essential to overcoming these obstacles and sharing successful practices.

As we commemorate World Rural Development Day 2025, Myanmar reaffirms its dedication to inclusive, people-centered rural development. We strongly believe that rural transformation is not only a path to poverty reduction, but also a vital foundation for peace, stability, and shared prosperity. It is our sincere hope that our experience contributes to the regional dialogue and that together, we can build a future where no rural community is left behind.