

Solidarity Visit to Myanmar

It added a new page in the history of YWCA as for the first time such an ecumenical visit was made from 27th march 2011 to 1st April 2011. The World YWCA delegation of 10 members from Asia visited the various programmes of YWCA of Myanmar which gave an insight of the community work they have been doing for the grassroots.

The delegation of 10 members from YWCA's in Malaysia, India, Thailand, Switzerland, ICCO and the World YWCA was led by Ping Lee, World YWCA Vice President and General Secretary of the YWCA of Taiwan. The purpose of the visit was to understand the situation of young women and girls in Myanmar, experience the post cyclone Nargis community rebuilding and explore the possibilities for a young women's internship programme in Asia YWCA's for young women from Myanmar.

Meeting with the Staff and Board members of the YWCA of Myanmar

Ms Rebecca- the President of YWCA of Myanmar welcomed all the delegates and shared a video which showed different work of the National YWCA as well as some of the local YWCAs.

- The main objective of the YWCA is to provide skills, and empower women at all level, providing education to young women which would help in building self esteem for women.
- Encourage women to integrate gender perspective in their community.
- Investing young women leadership.
- In partnership with UNICEF has managed to build in a children project and teach them skills.
- Financial assistance by micro credit programmes for the disadvantaged families, empower them to develop skills. Around 6300 beneficiaries of the project.
- Home care for elderly- 25 volunteers.
- Mainly for the elderly by providing them nutritional food, for the elderly. Regular check ups, medicines, etc.
- Care to HIV AIDS patients as well as TB patients



Sharing by the World YWCA team

Ms Ping Lee- Vice President- World YWCA. She briefed about the World Council in 2011 at Geneva.

Ms Juli- Programme Coordinator-World YWCA – She highlighted the three main objectives of the project:-

- To learn more about the work of the YWCA of Myanmar,

- Follow up of the post Cyclone Nargis community rebuilding developments
- Explore possibilities of developing an internship programme for Myanmar young woman

She said that the funding from various international NGOs has been reduced to almost 60% because of the global financial crisis. Each and every YWCA should be very focussed, as then approaching the donors so that we can explain as to where the money is utilised. Young women in very early ages between to 10-19 year old are the largest in the world and they are compelled to work for the family. Targeting this particular group is important.

Key actions for the young women

- Mentorship
- Inter-generational dialogue
- More internships
- Safe inclusive and secure spaces
- Influence laws, policies with young women and girls
- Sexual and reproductive health



Young women should be the activist who would be the advocates who would fight against issues.

Ms Ping Lee- She talked about the World Council meeting.

- YM-YW together will host the meeting at the World Council and the theme for the year 'Women creating a safe world'
- Safe space is about personal, economic and political security of women and girls she explained about the logo.
- Council meets in every four years and it is the decision making body.
- Different sessions on sexual reproductive health
- Providing opportunities for all the National Associations to share amongst themselves
- Celebration of the women leaders

Brief about the programmes of Taiwan, Thailand, India and Malaysia and the World YWCA. Each delegate shared their programmes and how strongly they are addressing the current issues which are prevalent in our society. YWCA of Thailand explained about the next World Council in the year 2015 which will be hosted by the YWCA of Thailand and all the ongoing preparations for the same. Other YWCAs shared their vision and involving young women especially in policy making and other programmes of the YWCA.

Projects for Women Empowerment and skills building

Shwe Taung Dan , Nyaungnitpin- The Micro Finance Project

The women in the Shwe Taung Dan village depend a lot on farming and the women earn their living by selling hand weaved bamboo sheets in the markets in the city. Some women work in the paddy fields and now they are beneficiaries of the micro finance project initiated by the YWCA of Myanmar. The women are now able to get loans within three months upto 20,000 kyats which is payable in 5 months and they can extend the amount upto 40,000 kyats for 18 months. The project has made the women independent in the family as now she can support her family in a better way. They have been able to save much more which is helping the family in a huge way. The men of the family are also encouraging these women to join as well as suggest that it should be initiated in other countries as well as it uplifts the status of the women and a lot of empowerment is also seen.



Highlights of the project

- 75 dedicated staff members who are working tirelessly for the project by reaching out to the interiors of Myanmar.
- 99% re- payment of the loans by the women
- Women are seen as the decision makers as they feel empowered and motivated being in the project

Challenges faced by the villagers

- They need support from the donors in terms of providing them food and other facilities to the children need by providing them uniforms and educational materials.

Nyaungnitpin Village

In this village the women depend solely on agriculture and they sell vegetables in the city market to earn their livelihood. A major portion of their income is goes as rent to the land owners and thus they ask support from YWCA of Myanmar for financial assistance. They can apply for loan after 3 months from the YWCA when they show enough saving upto 200 kyats.

Challenges:-

- As they are dependent on agriculture, a lot of money goes into the payment of the rent of the land to the owners



- They have limited health facilities in the village and they need atleast 400 kyats to get a complete check up done.
- Lack of nutrition
- The need to travel atleast 2 hours to travel to the city for selling the vegetables

Visit to the Street Children's Project

Around 60 children from the age of 5-18yrs drop in at the centre. These kids collect the rubbish and then sell it in the market to earn money for their family. The centre provides educational material for the kids and they also are provided with good nutritious diet. A lot of re-creation like yoga, life building skills is taught to these kids. These kids know their rights and they are also provided education on drug abuse.

The second centre was near the colony where there are maximum rag pickers and the children come in to the centre directly.

8 dedicated staff for the children's centre and around 9 centres for children is around this area.



Meeting with the YWCA of Yangon

The delegation met with the staff and members of the YWCA of Yangon and shared:-

- Their programmes and vision for the movement
- Reaching out to the youth and addressing their issues
- Continuously working for the rural and community projects

The members and staff interacted with the delegates and everyone shared about their programmes and advocacy actions in their respective association. This helped in sharing and improving their current programmes and also getting into the new areas of work.



Orientation with the Women's Organisation Network

The network of women has informal meetings to get a clear picture of all the issues on which they are working individually. This women's network was formed post cyclone in the Nargis area in the year 2008. Around 22 organisations focus on the mission to engage and advocate for the promotion of culture of peace, reconciliation and equality for men and women as a part of the civil society contribution and to build and strengthen the solidarity among women's organisations and stakeholders for holistic development of the country.

Issues addressed:-

- HIV
- Trafficking
- Gender based issues
- Sexual reproductive health of women
- Education and life skills



- Rehabilitation for the victims of the Nargis cyclone

Certain women and children issues are addressed by contacting and lobbying continuously with the Myanmar Council of Churches who are advocating these issues closely.

Highlights:-

- Many faith based organisations are involved in the network.
- UNFPA, UNHRC representatives are a part of this network and thus this will help in increasing the scope of work and visibility

Major challenges for the organisation

- Difficult to register as an organisation because of the pressure of the government
- Providing continuous support to the people in Nargis
- Struggling for the Government to hear their demands
- Need to have more exposure visits to learn about peace building and conflict management
- The network is still in embryo stage and at this stage they can just spread awareness on certain issues till their voices are heard by the government.

Meeting with the people living positive with HIV/AIDS

The people who were HIV positive met with the delegates and their problems faced in the society. One of the major problems faced by the retired patients was that they were deprived of their pension and faced many problems in the society. Women are still earning their living by selling betelnut and leaves and they are not able to learn any other skills to earn their living, everyone shared their experiences about their problems they face within the society.

The whole experience of knowing the activities and programmes helped in understanding the issues affecting them more closely and all the initiatives they are taking for the community and the grassroots. Going into the interiors of the country has helped all the delegates to implement these programmes which would help in reaching out to the masses. It was truly an empowering visit for all of us.

