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COMMUNITY-LED HEAT MITIGATION

Raising awareness for heat
through people's process

Project overview

What is the problem?

Extreme heat in Yangon is directly affecting the health and living conditions of urban poor people, although awareness of this issue is low.

Where is it?

Shwepyithar, South Dagon and East Dagon townships in Yangon, Myanmar

Who does it affect?

Urban poor communities

What are the causes?

In townships with many informal settlements, heat levels are rising due to the lack of tree cover, barren open spaces, and increasing traffic, factory and pollution sources. Extreme heat directly affects poor families, who cannot rely on ACs and decent housing for protection. The impacts on urban poor people are not often addressed, since the damage from high heat is less visible than that from other disasters such as cyclones and flooding. Despite some policies regarding climate resilience, knowledge of and action on heat issues are low.

Approach

This heat mitigation project is a climate-related add-on to large, community-driven housing projects for the urban poor already underway by Women for the World. It will add awareness of heat mitigation as an important element of planning to encourage people to address this aspect during housing and settlement development.

Planning and implementation will proceed as follows:

1. Preparation - team meeting and consultation
2. Workshop - situation sharing and assessment
3. Presentation of the action plan
4. Implementation of the planned action
5. Evaluation and reflection workshop: Project processes will be documented and published as a guide to raise awareness on the impacts of extreme heat on poor people; share knowledge on local, practical solutions; and improve the situation on the ground.

Achievements so far

Preparation and planning for community engagement and to support new and existing practices related to heat mitigation consisted of the following:

- Conducted interviews, workshops and mobilisation sessions in three housing projects in Shwepyithar, South Dagon and East Dagon townships. These sessions were held at a smaller scale, in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions, but were supported by online-based communications.
- Through the sessions, identified the impact of heat on different aspects of people's lives, their coping mechanisms, and the challenges and limitations they face, as well as their ideas for interventions and budgets needed.
- In each community, initiated individual and collective planting and farming to help develop technical knowledge, management skills, enthusiasm and confidence, as well as to increase food security during the COVID-19 crisis.

Lessons learned

- The issue of heat was not expressed as a high priority initially, but emerged as people identified impacts on their health, livelihood, and ability to work.
- Interventions require a holistic approach, e.g., planting big shady trees often needs to be planned along with infrastructure.
- Intervention cost is a big concern and weighs in people's decision-making.
- People tend to lose their motivation when they cannot see tangible results, but only discussions and awareness training.
- Mixing collective and individual practices is important, as few are used to working collectively. Positive competitions often stimulate enthusiasm.
- Measuring temperatures in different places to see the uneven impacts attracted people's interest. This is an affordable way to highlight different heat impacts and could be used in other parts of the world as well.

Moving forward

The project team will support communities in implementing interventions identified in the first phase. Given the political circumstances, it is uncertain how processes can be implemented as initially planned. For example, activities could not proceed as planned under ongoing conflict, restriction of travel and communications. However, the team will strive to find opportunities to implement projects and share the process with different audiences, particularly local authorities; increase awareness; and initiate interactive conversations and actual engagement by other actors.

The processes and findings will be integrated into a guideline book and video by the end of the project in order to share the knowledge.

*All the processes will be carefully planned and conducted with the safest conditions possible, according to the health and political conditions.

