

ASEAN Hub Officers: Frontrunners of Humanitarian Coordination in the Delta-Affected Townships of Myanmar

Myanmar has always been a fascinating country that Sok Phoeuk had wanted to visit. However, it was not the fascination that brought him to Myanmar. With over 25 years of experience in training and disaster risk management, it was a noble calling for Sok when Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in May 2008 and he became an ASEAN Hub Officer there, hoping to share his skills and knowledge as well as to learn more about ASEAN.

Joseph and Anggiet, coming from Indonesia, however, saw the ASEAN Hub Officer position as a new challenge that they would like to take up because, according to Joseph, “Indonesia is a “supermarket” for natural disasters but it has never been struck by a cyclone”.

For Philipp Danao from the Philippines, it was a challenging yet unique opportunity for ASEAN to initiate and lead the world’s first Tripartite Core Group (TCG). He said, “With my field and regional experience in project management, disaster response and community-managed risk reduction, I wanted to be part of this history-making endeavour and contribute to strengthening the mechanism at the township level.”

Philipp (middle) during a ground-breaking ceremony in Tha Leik Gyi village



Despite different reasons for joining the ASEAN Hub Offices, the four ASEAN Hub Officers, together with their staff, share a common goal, which is to cooperate with the hub offices of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to strengthen coordination in terms of humanitarian assistance at the township level.

Based in Labutta Township, one of the initial challenges for Sok and his staff was to build trust and relations between humanitarian agencies and the local authorities. However, the team has been able to turn the challenge into one of the key successes for ASEAN at the township level. Sok said, “There had been no general coordination meeting at the township level between the Township Coordination Committee (representative of the Government of Myanmar) and the international community before ASEAN came to Labutta. ASEAN’s presence in the hub has changed the situation.” Anggiet, a Yangon Hub Officer, also shared the same sentiment, “ASEAN has been really successful in encouraging Myanmar to open the gate for international agencies and this is something to be proud of.”

Meanwhile, according to Philipp, ASEAN Hub Officer in Pyapone Township, the presence of ASEAN goes beyond strengthening hub coordination. He said, “ASEAN’s presence at the hub level reinforces ASEAN’s people-centred approach. It brings the people to ASEAN and ASEAN to the people. It has made the villagers realise that they are part of one community. They no longer feel that they are neglected or isolated from the rest of the region.”

In addition to strengthening hub coordination, the four Hub Officers are also the frontrunners of the ASEAN Volunteer programme and the implementation of the Periodic Review which monitors humanitarian needs at the household level.



With experience and interest in social science research, Anggiet enjoys the process of the Periodic Review, saying that “there are so many things to do and everyday is a different challenge and I enjoy it.”

Anggiet (middle) distributing non-food items to the local people in Kungyangon Township

Despite basic living conditions in Bogale and the difficulty of being away from his wife and two young children, Joseph feels proud of what he is doing in the Delta. “It is an honour for me to have a chance to serve the Myanmar people. Although we Hub Officers do not provide humanitarian aid directly, our work contribute to the whole relief and recovery effort. For example, the Periodic Review serves as an important tool for strategic decision making amongst stakeholders to continue providing support to the affected population,” he said.

For Thet Win Naing, being an ASEAN Hub Assistant is a rewarding experience. He said “Being a Hub Assistant helps me learn how to coordinate with the local government and the local and international NGOs. I also have learned how to work closely with the people and how to identify their needs in order to help them.”

With their extensive experiences and successes accumulated on the ground, ASEAN Hub Officers and Hub Assistants will continue to strengthen ASEAN’s leading role in humanitarian assistance in Myanmar.

About the ASEAN Hub Officers:



Sok Phoeuk, 50, from Cambodia, used to work for Oxfam GB for more than 24 years with extensive experience in community development and disaster risk management and training. He enjoys being in the Delta where he does not only fulfill his duty as a Hub Officer but also transfers his knowledge to his national staff. He said, “Before I started, I anticipated a lot of hardship. However, it has been an enjoyable process. I like working with national colleagues and helping them to build their capacity.”

Joseph Viandrito, 43, left Indonesia for Myanmar when his wife was expecting their third child. Despite living in Bogale with basic living conditions and being far away from his family, Joseph never regretted his decision. He said, “I am happy to be a part of the team bringing changes to the people of Myanmar. I am grateful for the experience and would like to contribute more in whatever way I can.” Joseph went home during Christmas in 2008 to welcome a new addition to his family, daughter Manuella Christa.



Anggiet Ariefianto, 34, from Indonesia, suspended his Graduate Certificate for Family Issues and Drug Counselling in Canada to join the ASEAN Hub Offices. Anggiet thinks his value-add to the hub is to provide information and give support to the humanitarian agencies so that they can communicate with the local authorities. Based in Yangon, Anggiet enjoys the frequent travel to townships to organise coordination meetings and conduct field visits. He said, “The visit to Sek Gyi village really opened my eyes and it was touching to see how close ASEAN volunteers are to the villagers.”

Philipp Danao, 30, from the Philippines, was deployed by a regional technical organisation based in Thailand to be an ASEAN Hub Officer. He is grateful to have this opportunity to contribute and hopefully make a difference in the communities. Sharing dreams with ASEAN Volunteers and farmers in the communities are some of the things he will miss when he leaves Myanmar. He said, “Everytime I am involved in building the capacities of communities, the people are also teaching us; their local knowledge and lessons on resilience are invaluable treasures of this region. It is our duty to be accountable, be transparent and ensure their participation especially when access maybe limited.”



Thet Naing Win, 40, was a former staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Union of Myanmar. Win said, “The reason I decided to become an ASEAN Hub Assistant is that as a citizen of Myanmar, I would like to contribute my knowledge and experiences in providing humanitarian assistances to Cyclone Nargis affected areas in my country.”

Thet Naing Win after a trip to the field

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