



Mercy Relief team in Bangladesh (Photo credits: Mercy Relief)

We are pleased to bring you the fifth issue of Beyond Relief!.

In our **Feature Article**, Alistair Cook writes about recent developments that have challenged the humanitarian system in several ways. These challenges highlight the need for deeper thinking on the way the sector operates and how it connects with the wider community to provide for those most in need.

This issue's **On the Ground** features some of the relief and fundraising efforts that Singaporean humanitarian organisations - Mercy Relief, Singapore Red Cross, World Vision Singapore - have undertaken.

Our members from the academic community have also been keeping themselves busy. This issue includes several commentaries, journal articles, and reports, covering a diverse range of topics including humanitarian technology,

converging humanitarian risks, and blood supply management in times of disasters.

**In the Spotlight** features upcoming events and opportunities for collaboration. Highlights include Mercy Relief's Ground Zero Bike+Run Race, RSIS World Humanitarian Day webinar, as well as Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre exploring the use of innovative ideas to future proof HADR responses.

Finally, we welcome your ideas, feedback and input and look forward to supporting joint efforts in research, networking and knowledge sharing. Do get in touch with either Christopher ([christopherchen@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:christopherchen@ntu.edu.sg)) or Al ([iscook@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:iscook@ntu.edu.sg)).

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# BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

By **Alistair D.B. Cook**, Senior Fellow, Coordinator of HADR Programme  
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During the first half of 2022 in the Asia-Pacific, we have witnessed concurrent and converging disaster events that once again illustrate the need for systemic change. Before the recovery to Super Typhoon Rai (Odette) was complete, Tropical Storm Megi created additional challenges on the ground in the Philippines.

The Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga saw a diverse international response to provide contactless humanitarian assistance with a 72-hour quarantine yet Tonga still recorded its first COVID-19 case during the response period.

The heavy flooding experienced in China and Indonesia displaced tens of thousands of people and again highlighted the need to pay greater attention to slow onset disasters and provide adaptive solutions.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine saw international community support for United Nations General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 for a full withdrawal of Russian Armed Forces. The subsequent sanctions on Russia saw significant price rises globally and affected the supply and availability of goods.

In Myanmar, the opposition to the military's attempts to control the country continues with many people displaced by the conflict. The military's recent execution of

opposition politicians has underlined the lack of influence on the situation by the international community and the devastating consequences for people in Myanmar.

Within this same period, more countries relaxed or ended international travel and domestic pandemic restrictions, which saw demand outstrip supply of travel options. This posed new barriers to the movement of people as the global community seeks to move into a new phase where COVID-19 is endemic and physical events and face-to-face meetings resume after over a two-year hiatus.

These dominant developments have challenged the humanitarian system in several ways highlighting the need for deeper thinking on the way it operates and how it connects with the wider community to provide for those most in need.

The humanitarian challenges faced in the first half of 2022 occurs during a time when global humanitarian funds are decreasing, localisation commitments have largely stalled, and political leadership to overcome these challenges is left wanting.

Over the past six months, humanitarian researchers continued to monitor these developments and provided several takeaways. These have included the need for

more holistic needs assessments accounting for intersecting events and impacts, developing stronger ties between sectors and collective arrangements through early structured engagement, and taking stock of how people and communities adapted to these impacts.

The increasing prevalence of anticipatory action offers a technical solution to release money in advance of humanitarian situations and shows innovative thinking within the humanitarian sector. Its overall impact remains limited to increased efficiencies rather than addressing structural impediments. There is a need to build off the momentum to change the humanitarian system with a stronger focus on empowerment and the larger shifts needed for people and communities to thrive in the months and years ahead.

In an effort to encourage strategic thinking in humanitarian affairs, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre will co-host a Humanitarian Futures Forum in Singapore on Friday, 14th October 2022. To express interest, please email Dr Lina Gong ([islinagong@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:islinagong@ntu.edu.sg)).

# ON THE GROUND

## Mercy Relief Responds to the South Asia Floods



Photo credits: Mercy Relief

In early May, continuous heavy rainfall consumed the north-eastern districts in Bangladesh and India in a blanket of darkness. Flash floods with landslides following suit, affecting more than 7 million people in the two countries combined.

According to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) in Bangladesh, within a month, 94% of Sylhet and 84% of Sunamganj were submerged. With major regional highways and access roads underwater, connectivity and transport to the affected areas were blocked, resulting in a massive delay in assistance. To make matters worse, communities are bracing themselves for the potential spread of water-borne diseases.

In India, there is a similar story. The Brahmaputra River has been flowing above the danger levels for more than a month and approximately 1.1 million people across 35 districts in the affected state of Assam have been gravely affected. About 145,700 individuals have been evacuated to relief camps, while more than 121,200 houses have been damaged or destroyed completely.

Mercy Relief sent a team to Bangladesh in early July to work alongside its partner in the ground, Human Aid Bangladesh Foundation (HABF), to provide and distribute emergency relief assistance in the form of food packs and hygiene kits to 650 households in the worst affected and most vulnerable areas in the Sunamganj, Sylhet, Sirajganj and Kurigram districts. In India, Mercy Relief will be working with the North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) to distribute non-food items and hygiene kits to 700 households to the affected areas in the Nagaon district in Assam state in early August.

Mercy Relief remains in close contact with its ground partners in both countries and as relief efforts are on-going, the organisation continues to raise funds for those whose lives have been overturned by these devastating floods.

## Singapore Red Cross Pledges S\$100,000 for Vulnerable Communities in Sri Lanka and Launches Fundraising Appeal



Photo credits: Singapore Red Cross

In response to Sri Lanka's economic and humanitarian crisis which has led to widespread resource shortages across the country, the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) has committed SGD100,000 for urgently-needed medical supplies and other basic necessities in aid of vulnerable communities in the country. In addition, it has launched a

public fundraising appeal to rally donations to support these communities with medical drugs and equipment.

According to The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA), all hospitals in Sri Lanka lack access to imported emergency drugs and medical equipment. Shortage of medical drug supplies led to the cessation of surgeries at several hospitals. The situation has compelled health authorities to curtail the operations in hospitals and also limit the issuance of medications to patients, which could result in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country.

"The escalating humanitarian crisis, brought about by the economic collapse and the growing civil unrest, endangers the well-being of all communities in Sri Lanka, particularly those already vulnerable. It has become a major challenge for them to have access to even basic essentials such as food,

medicine, fuel and electricity. Even at leading medical facilities, patients have had to put up with the pain due to the unavailability of basic drugs like morphine and anesthetic. Sadly, the situation is likely to worsen in the coming days. We appeal to the people of Singapore to support our fundraising appeal, with the aim to bring much-needed relief aid to individuals and families in Sri Lanka," said Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General and CEO of Singapore Red Cross.

Sri Lanka's currency shortage foreign debt economic crisis escalated in early 2021, and is now compounded by recent crop failures. Prices of basic goods have skyrocketed while life-saving medicine and basic food staples have become increasingly scarce. Communities are experiencing frequent power outages, which are hampering livelihoods and disrupting lives.

## Singapore Red Cross Provides Psychosocial Support, Delivers Targeted Aid to Vulnerable Communities in Ukraine

As the armed conflict in Ukraine crossed the 100-day mark on 6th June 2022, the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) continues to deliver targeted assistance in its relief efforts for Ukrainian communities: vulnerable children, persons living with rare diseases and refugees.

## Psychosocial Support to Mothers, Children

SRC deployed two psychosocial support responders to Poland's largest assistance centre, PTAK Humanitarian Aid Centre, to support the Child Safe Space. The two Singaporeans engaged mothers and children in psychosocial support activities such as sports, art therapy, and more. The team also distributed children's shoes and 350 child care packs consisting of notebooks, crayons,

children's toothbrush and toothpaste, and stress balls. Additionally, they distributed 100 walking aids and 340 trolley bags to the other refugees staying at the Humanitarian Aid Centre, to support them in their continuing journey.

## Medical Equipment for Ukraine's Largest Children's Hospital

SRC funded diagnostic equipment, including two ultrasound machines and an

intraoperative neuromonitoring system for spinal surgery, for Ukraine's largest children's multidisciplinary hospital Okhmatdyt.

### Support for displaced persons from Ukraine living with rare diseases

SRC and EURORDIS (Rare Diseases Europe and the Razem z Ukrainą coalition) will collaborate to support 500 Ukrainian families living with rare diseases with appropriate emergency housing, specialised equipment (e.g. wheelchairs, medical supplies) and psychological support. SRC and DEBRA (Dystrophic Epidermolysis Bullosa Research Association) International, with the support of DEBRA Singapore, are collaborating to procure and supply the most critical medical needs such as specialised dressings, medical

equipment, medicines, specialised nutritional products, and other urgent needs for 120 families living with congenital epidermolysis bullosa.

### Distribution of Relief Goods and Care Packs to Refugees Arriving in Poland

The Singapore Red Cross deployed disaster response volunteers to the Medyka Border Crossing. The team was active in both the Medyka border crossing and the Przemyśl train station. They conducted activities such as the procurement and distribution of hot meals, hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, sanitary pads, diapers, and more), 250 blankets, trolley bags, and food items to be sent across the border into Ukraine. The team

has also procured educare packs for children, containing crayons, soft balls/ toys, small towel, toothbrush, and toothpaste.



Photo credits: Singapore Red Cross

### Protecting Children in Sri Lanka's Spiralling Humanitarian Crisis

Mounting economic woes in Sri Lanka are resulting in many children not being able to have all three meals a day and the required nutrients to support their growth as families cut back on the quantity and quality of meals.

"The poor are resorting to cutting the number of meals or how much they eat each meal," shared Dr. Dhanan Senathirajah, World Vision Sri Lanka National Director.

School has also been disrupted as transport services have come to a standstill due to fuel shortages. With headline inflation hitting 54.5%, and food inflation at 80.1%, basic essentials and education have been put out of reach of the most vulnerable families.

Facing the worst economic crisis since its independence in 1948, Sri Lankans have

endured many months of medicine, fuel, food, and power shortages. Nearly 5.7 million people in the country are in need of support. With an estimate of over 72,000 birth deliveries in the next few months, there is a need to provide lifesaving aid to continue maternal and neonatal health services.

"There has been an alarming increase of high-risk child protection incidents. As adults spend hours in long queues to buy essential items, children are left unattended, exposing them to risks of neglect. The mental stress on families are also increasing the risks of domestic violence and abuse," said Dr. Senathirajah.

World Vision is focusing on the most vulnerable individuals to provide immediate lifesaving relief like food aid, cash vouchers, and cash for work programmes to support food security and nutrition requirements of children. World Vision will also support

activities that aim to help children continue their education, strengthen child protection systems, and development of alternative income generation activities to help families weather the economic crisis.



Scan QR Code to learn more about World Vision's Sri Lanka economic response



Photo Credits: World Vision

### Tackling Food Insecurity in the Aftermath of Myanmar's Military Coup



Photo Credits: World Vision

Rakhine, known for the armed conflicts which led to the forced displacement of over 740,000 Rohingya, is one of the poorest states in Myanmar. 69% of the population live in poverty, with limited access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. After the coup, the junta restricted travel, as well as the import and export of commodities. Tensions also rose between the junta and the Arakan army. Many already impoverished people lost their source of livelihoods and faced food shortages with soaring prices.

Daw Hla Hnin Yaing, a 35-year-old mother of three children from Mrauk-U Township

in Rakhine, shares, "We are struggling with food and education expenses. My husband works as a casual labour at the farm and supplements our income by fishing. However, he could not continue fishing because of the armed conflict."

"Rakhine people used to buy all the vegetables they eat. Before the coup, about 40 trucks of vegetables were transported daily into Rakhine. After the coup, only 24 trucks of vegetables arrived in Rakhine. The people did not grow their own vegetables as they were unskilled in cultivation," shared Moe Thu, World Vision Myanmar Humanitarian and

Emergency Affairs (HEA) Director.

World Vision has been helping marginalised families in Rakhine address livelihood, water, sanitation, and hygiene needs. To help fight risks of hunger and malnutrition, World Vision has equipped families to set up home vegetable gardens.

Now, Yaing has a garden in her backyard that produces vegetables all year round. She can also sell the surplus to supplement the family income. Over 1,200 families in Rakhine have benefitted from this intervention.



Scan QR code to learn more about World Vision's response in Rakhine, Myanmar

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### News Articles and Commentaries

#### Humanitarian Technology: No Excuse for Complacency

Christopher Chen  
IDSS Paper  
23 March 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### The Logistical Challenge of Responding to Disaster

Lina Gong  
The Interpreter  
25 March 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Two Years On: The Need for Gender-Sensitivity in Humanitarian Protection

S. Nanthini  
IDSS Paper  
29 March 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Collective HADR Responses in the Indo-Pacific: Additional Mechanisms in the Making?

Lina Gong  
IDSS Paper  
30 March 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Defence Diplomacy as a Tool to Cope With the Climate Crisis

S. Nanthini  
East Asia Forum  
31 March 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Climate Complacency is No Option for Defence and National Security

Alistair D.B. Cook  
IDSS Paper  
12 August 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

### Journal Articles / Chapters

#### 'Covid-19 Engagement in Southeast Asia' in Christian Echler and Jan Kliem (eds.) European Strategic Approaches to the Indo-Pacific

S. Nanthini  
Singapore: Konrad-Adenaur-Stiftung,  
February, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Military Humanitarian and Disaster Governance Networks in Southeast Asia: Framework and Analysis

Angelo Paolo L. Trias and Alistair D.B. Cook  
Disasters, online,  
April 2022

Click [here](#) to read more  
(contact authors for free copy).

#### Seeing Citizenship: Singularity, Multiplicity, Complexity in Times of Crisis

Marina Kaneti  
Citizenship Studies, 26(4-5),  
April, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more (open access).

#### Learning From Success, Not Catastrophe: Using Counterfactual Analysis to Highlight Successful Disaster Risk Reduction Interventions

Maricar L. Rabonza, Yolanda C. Lin, and David Lallemand  
Frontiers in Earth Science, 10(847196),  
May, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more (open access).

#### Non-Traditional Security Concerns in the New Normal

Mely Caballero-Anthony and Jose Ma. Luis P. Montesclaros  
RSIS Monograph, 36, June, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Humanitarian Action in the Asia-Pacific During COVID-19: New Challenges, Modalities, and Cooperation

Alistair D.B. Cook and Christopher Chen  
Journal of Asian Public Policy, July, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more  
(contact authors for free copy).

#### Blood Supply Interventions During Disasters: Efficiency Measures and Strategies to Mitigate Volatility

Geoffrey A. Chua and Juan Ramon L. Senga  
Socio-Economic Planning Sciences, July, 2022

Click [here](#) to read more  
(contact authors for free copy).

### Reports

#### Converging Humanitarian Risks in the Indo-Pacific

Alistair D.B. Cook and Christopher Chen  
RSIS Policy Report  
May 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

#### Collective Response to Disasters in the Indo-Pacific: Opportunities and Challenges

Lina Gong and S. Nanthini  
RSIS Policy Report  
July 2022

Click [here](#) to read more.

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Photo credits: Mercy Relief

## Upcoming Mercy Relief Event: Ground Zero Race

The Ground Zero Bike+Run 2022 is happening from 4 August to 18 September 2022, so strap on your shoes and get ready to run, ride or walk for a good cause. Organised by Mercy Relief, the Ground Zero race is in its sixth instalment this year. Accumulate rewards and badges as you forge ahead towards your distance and fundraising goals.

For more details, click [here](#).

## Innovative Ideas to Future Proof HADR Responses at Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC)

Aggravated by climate change, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) landscape continues to evolve in complexity. Natural disasters will also increase in severity and possibly intensity. Changi RHCC continues to adapt to these changes and forge ahead with the spirit of innovation through several initiatives. A visit to ST Engineering Training and Simulation Systems was arranged for the International Liaison Officers to gain insight into the innovative

products developed by local defence industry and their potential use in support of HADR activities. Changi RHCC is studying the potential use of artificial intelligence, machine learning and space technology to model the impact of natural disasters. This will provide key information on the predicted disaster zone and severity of impact, enabling HADR responders to plan and prioritise humanitarian relief efforts to critical areas more quickly. To improve HADR training pedagogies, Changi RHCC is also exploring the utilisation of augmented reality and virtual reality to enhance disaster training realism and effectiveness.

For more details, click [here](#).

## Upcoming Event: RSIS World Humanitarian Day Webinar 2022

The Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Programme, Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is organising the RSIS World Humanitarian Day Webinar 2022. It will be held online on 18th August 2022, 11am – 12.30pm (GMT+8). The RSIS World Humanitarian Day webinar aims to raise public awareness of the humanitarian

crises we face, and the work undertaken by local humanitarian actors. It provides a platform for the sharing of experiences from the field and facilitates the exchange of ideas and insights. This event will be held in celebration of the World Humanitarian Day, which commemorates all people who have offered their lives in humanitarian service and celebrates the spirit that inspires humanitarian work. The title of this year's webinar is 'Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Responses: Local Perspectives'. With this theme, the webinar will discuss: (i) Reflections from COVID-19, (ii) How organisations have incorporated anticipatory action into their operations and responses, (iii) Ways to scale up anticipatory action efforts in the future.

For more details, contact Christopher ([christopherchen@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:christopherchen@ntu.edu.sg)).

To register for event, click [here](#).