Rain, land and livelihood in the Dry Zone of Myanmar

Increasingly erratic rains combined with periods of drought in the northern Dry Zone of Myanmar cause severe soil erosion, impacting people’s livelihood and food security. Small-scale farmers are most affected by this situation and lack the means to prevent or overcome these risks in a region where services and resources are already limited. Migration is a direct consequence and often the only viable alternative. We support GRET’s operations to strengthen the resilience of rural communities to climate-related hazards and to improve the adaptation strategies of poor villagers in 6 townships in the Sagaing Region.

**DURATION:** 2015-2012  
**CHALLENGE:** Natural Resources Management, Access to Basic Services  
**COUNTRY:** Myanmar  
**PARTNER:** GRET

**CONTEXT**

In the Dry Zone of Myanmar water is scarce, vegetation cover is thin and soil is increasingly degraded by severe erosion and destructive farming practices. The region is characterized by low annual rainfall with high variability and uneven distribution. Chronic poverty is directly linked to the effects of drought and dry spells, which are expected to become more frequent and severe in the future. Limited work opportunities, weak services and low farm productivity lead to food insecurity, driving migration to urban regions in the crop-growing season.

At present, Myanmar national policy mainly focuses on developing the production of high-yield crops using costly chemical inputs and irrigation schemes, while Dry Zone farmers have limited access to the knowledge that is required to establish and maintain resistant water and soil management systems in a changing climate.
ACTION

This 3-year programme has been designed to strengthen the resilience of rural communities to climate-related hazards in the Sagaing Region, in the northern part of the Dry Zone. GRET’s operations aim to support small and medium farmers as well as landless villagers through specific measures and agricultural techniques, as well as by training services at regional and national levels.

More specifically the activities include:

- The development, testing and dissemination of alternative water and soil conservation measures for small and medium farmers (from dams and trenches to plant covering, windbreaks and composting) that empower them to fight erosion and improve soil fertility.
- Farmers’ field schools, extension demonstrations and exchange visits will enable farmers to acquire the skills and knowledge to use environmentally-friendly inputs.
- The implementation of vocational training, poultry restocking and cash for conservation work for the most vulnerable groups and landless households.
- The involvement of state actors such as Yezin University - the only agricultural university in the country - and the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in studies, exchange visits and workshops to disseminate good practices in the field of soil restoration and climate adaptation.
- The establishment of water and soil conservation pilot sites in each of the targeted townships that become bases for studies, research and practical demonstrations, leading to extensive dissemination of the lessons learnt.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The programme targets 75 villages in 6 townships in the Northern part of the Dry Zone, amounting to a population of 13,250.

- 2,540 households, including small-to-medium farmers and poor or landless households, improve their living conditions and income thanks to an increased ability to fight erosion and improve soil fertility.
- 45 national and regional extension services workers and 40 teachers and students from Yezin are trained in climate adaptation techniques and start adapting studies, lectures and communication to the actual farming situation.
- The good practices learnt are disseminated to 20 townships in the Dry Zone through pilot sites visits, seminars and workshops.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Present in Myanmar since 1995, GRET has been involved in agricultural development, food security and value chain and natural resource management programmes. It has a proven track record of building the capacity of local stakeholders in the country and focuses on public development support structures to ensure operations are well integrated in their local context.
This programme is an extension of a previous project funded by Danida (2011- 2015). It is anchored in community ownership through participatory and sustainable interventions.