



Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS) – Burma

Our goal is to support the strengthening of health systems that are responsive to the growing needs for rehabilitation across the lifespan.

The unmet need for rehabilitation and assistive technology (AT) services is urgent and growing, particularly for persons in vulnerable situations in low- and middle-income countries and countries affected by conflict. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS) is a five-year global activity that supports the strengthening of health systems that are responsive to the growing needs for rehabilitation within populations. Burma was one of four countries where ReLAB-HS worked to implement context-appropriate, innovative, comprehensive, and cost-effective interventions that strengthen health systems for the provision of rehabilitation and AT. In Burma, ReLAB-HS focused on integrating rehabilitation and AT services across all levels of care within the informal health system.

Context

According to available data,¹ two in seven people in Burma (approximately 28 percent of the country's population) could benefit from rehabilitation. There is an increasing prevalence of both noncommunicable

¹ Institute for Health and Metrics Evaluation. "Uganda key findings, 2019." WHO Rehabilitation Need Estimator. Available from <http://ihmeuw.org/6779>



ReLAB-HS worked in Southeast Burma in Kaw Kareik Township of Kayin State.

Rehabilitation is an essential health service along with prevention, promotion, treatment, and palliation. Rehabilitation focuses on the functioning of an individual and not the condition.

diseases and injuries related to armed violence, which has led to growing rehabilitation needs within the population. Rehabilitation is an established component of Burma's health system, and services expanded greatly in the last decade. However, according to the Systematic Assessment of Rehabilitation Situation (STARS) conducted in 2018, there are still significant unmet needs for rehabilitation and AT. Political instability and increased violence since 2021 have resulted in a higher incidence of injuries and the disruption of health care services, exacerbating rehabilitation needs in Burma. While rehabilitation is being integrated into secondary- and tertiary-level health care facilities, many gaps remain in the availability of services within primary care.

AT services are rarely accessible in Burma. Assistive products, when available, are very expensive, limited in variety, and often provided without accompanying services, including appropriate fitting, training in use, repair, and maintenance. Many people who require these products receive them through assistance from international development organizations, or they purchase them from private sector retailers.

There is no referral system in place to connect clients to services at different levels of health care to ensure the continuum of care that is vital to rehabilitation and AT. People rely on what is locally available and on informal communication channels that may guide them to the services they need. The provision of rehabilitation and AT services for people with injuries and different forms of impairments are among the priorities of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Humanitarian Response Plan for vulnerable communities, such as internally displaced persons. However, there is a lack of coordination among key actors and limited allocation of resources to increase access.

Approach

ReLAB-HS worked with local actors to implement context-appropriate, innovative, cost-effective services by supporting local stakeholders and



Photo courtesy of Humanity & Inclusion

existing local structures to expand access to quality rehabilitation and AT services within Burma's informal health system, focusing on the community level. ReLAB-HS strengthened synergies among non-government health providers, service users, rehabilitation professionals, and humanitarian actors to improve demand and delivery of services, develop health and rehabilitation workforce capacity, and strengthen local governance.

Geographic Focus and Achievements

In Burma, ReLAB-HS concentrated efforts in Kawkaireik Township in Kayin State, a remote area in Southeast Burma with a high population of internally displaced persons and other groups in vulnerable situations. In partnership with ethnic health organizations, local nongovernmental health entities that serve conflict-affected populations in Burma, ReLAB-HS supported efforts to integrate rehabilitation and AT services at the primary care level. At the national level, ReLAB-HS worked closely with the WHO and humanitarian actors to support the development of plans inclusive of rehabilitation and AT.

Since its inception, ReLAB-HS has consciously engaged with relevant stakeholders at local, state, and national levels to introduce the activity, develop the foundation for collaboration, and strengthen Burma's informal health system to support the integration of rehabilitation and AT.

In close partnership with local stakeholders, ReLAB-HS worked to achieve the following:

- In collaboration with the WHO and humanitarian actors, successfully advocated for the inclusion of rehabilitation and AT (and related indicators) in Burma's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2023,² supporting organizations to include rehabilitation activities as part of essential health care services provided to populations in vulnerable situations
- Supported the translation of the WHO's Training in Assistive Products (TAP) modules into the Burmese language, giving service providers access to resources that will improve their knowledge of the provision of assistive products
- Facilitated interprofessional collaboration and learning among rehabilitation and AT professionals by establishing an online community of practice to support knowledge exchanges and capacity-building activities
- Improved the knowledge and skills of rehabilitation professionals by delivering an interprofessional clinical skills training program on priority topics identified, including stroke and early intervention, through a hybrid learning approach of online courses and mentoring and in-person training
- Strengthened rehabilitation professionals' commitment to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) practices in service provision by conducting a series of webinars for the community of practice on inclusive rehabilitation services
- In collaboration with AT users, service providers,

and suppliers, identified the main challenges to access and provision of AT services in Kayin State and proposed recommended actions to strengthen service delivery

- Identified good practices for improving access to rehabilitation and AT services by evaluating interventions by international and local nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations in Kayin State that can inform the design of future interventions
- Supported stakeholders in Kawkaik Township to establish a technical working group to improve coordination between member organizations, enabling the effective allocation of resources, development of referral pathways, and effective service delivery
- Strengthened the capacity of doctors, nurses and physiotherapists; community health workers; and volunteers on early rehabilitation interventions for injuries, including identifying needs and early referral, working to bridge the gap between communities and services
- Expanded the skill sets of primary health care workers and volunteers to identify and refer adults with neurological conditions and children with developmental disabilities and conditions and to provide basic AT services using the TAP, improving access to more specialized services
- In collaboration with ethnic health organizations, co-developed a guidance note with recommendations for how to incorporate rehabilitation and AT services into their strategies, which aims to strengthen integration and improve service access

² ReliefWeb. "Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 (January 2023)." ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-january-2023>.

In Numbers

As a result of ReLAB-HS's contributions to date:

- Over **3,250** more people have improved access to rehabilitation and AT services.
- Over **750*** trainings on rehabilitation and AT have been completed.
- **Seven** rehabilitation and AT quality and integration processes have been strengthened.
- **Twenty-three** organizations and institutions were strengthened.

*Reflects the number of course completions, as trainees may have completed one or more courses

Implementing Partners

ReLAB-HS is led by the Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Other global partners include Humanity & Inclusion, Momentum Wheels for Humanity, the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne, and Physiopedia. The consortium is working in close partnership with national, regional, and district actors to catalyze and strengthen the national agenda for rehabilitation in the health system.

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Our partners

