Rakhine State, Myanmar – Thein Shwe’s house in Taung Ywar Ward appears to be leaning. The roof is patched together with tarpaulin and bamboo and slopes precariously over the single-storey structure. It looks unlikely to withstand a strong storm, let alone the impending monsoon rains.

Reflecting on the torrential rains that struck the township of Buthidaung the summer before, Thein Shwe expresses her desire to maintain the house. “I don’t know what the future weather conditions will be like and so I want to improve the house,” Thein Shwe told FAO.

Taung Ywar Ward had the highest water levels in all of Buthidaung during the 2015 floods associated with Cyclone Komen, rising up to one metre and sweeping away precious food storage, mainly rice, potatoes and oil. Villagers report that some of their pigs and many of their chickens were lost.

Most houses were damaged in some way, with fences destroyed and roofs damaged by fallen trees. Many personal possessions were also lost.

Thein Shwe’s household of five relies on her husband’s income as a casual labourer, but at US$ 30 per week there hasn’t been enough money to carry out repairs.

Starting over
As part of an FAO-supported project to help conflict- and flood-affected communities in northern Rakhine state, villagers like Thein Shwe received small livestock which they could rear and breed for additional income.

“I am very happy to receive FAO’s assistance with this pig. I want to rear the pig for a long time and then be able to earn income to maintain my house,” she said.

“If sold at the right time, a pig can fetch a significant amount of money and that’s a boost for these poor, rural households,” said Andrea Berloffa, Emergency Coordinator for FAO Myanmar.
In addition to its vulnerability to natural disasters, Rakhine State suffers from inter-communal tensions and is still recovering from significant outbreaks of violence in 2012, with more than 100,000 people still displaced in camps across the state. Over one million people, most with unresolved citizenship status, have restricted access to services and freedom of movement curtailed.

FAO, with funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund, has provided support to boost the livelihoods of 3,300 conflict- and flood-affected households (around 18,000 individuals) in both Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist communities in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships.

Beneficiaries have received winter crop seeds to increase food availability and recover from losses felt after the floods, as well as small livestock which can increase income opportunities and provide animal protein. The latter is particularly urgent in Rakhine, where rates of Severe Acute Malnutrition are higher than the critical threshold identified by the World Health Organization.

While appealing for additional resources, FAO continues to work with government partners and others to provide assistance to more than 300,000 conflict and flood-affected people under the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan for Myanmar.

ACHIEVING FAO’S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises is one of FAO’s strategic objectives.