Lessons from TD Usman: supporting strong local capacity in typhoon response

Tropical depression (TD) Usman brought intense and torrential rains as it made landfall on 29 December in Borongan, Samar. Enhanced by the northeast monsoon winds, the rains lasted for several days, triggering multiple landslides and widespread flooding in the regions of Bicol, Calamba-Laguna-Batangas-Rizal-Quezon (CALABARZON), Eastern Visayas, and Mindoro-Marinduque-Romblon-Palawan (MIMAROPA).

Homes, schools and rice fields were buried by mud, with over 150 confirmed dead and 26 missing, mostly due to landslides. Over 1 million people were affected, and as of 20 January, agricultural losses are approaching PhP2 billion (US$37 million), with over 56,000 farmers and fisherfolk affected, according to the Department of Agriculture and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). More than 23,000 metric tons of rice, corn and high-value crops and over 54,000 ha of farmland are estimated to have been affected. Over 4,000 houses were destroyed and 32,000 damaged, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

Albay and Camarines Sur landslides

Landslides in the areas of Tiwi in the province of Albay, as well as in Buhi and Sagnay, in the province of Camarines Sur were particularly devastating. As of 1 February, both Bicol and MIMAROPA regions were still under the state of calamity.

The people of Albay are still recovering from the Mayon Volcano eruption in January 2018, where over 90,000 people were evacuated from their homes and agriculture, properties and livelihood destroyed. The prompt evacuation and response of local authorities led to zero casualties during the volcano's eruption, which lasted several months.

Local government response and humanitarian support

The province of Albay worked successfully to address the varied humanitarian needs of the affected communities. In coordination with the provincial disaster risk reduction management offices (DRRMOs) of Albay and Camarines Sur, OCHA deployed staff on 2 January to liaise with the local government and humanitarian field partners, particularly in Bicol, where the number of casualties and displaced communities were higher. The short-term deployment was on behalf of the Humanitarian Country Team-Inter Cluster Coordination Group (HCT-ICCG), composed of in-country UN agencies, international and
local NGOs, and the private sector. OCHA conducted a series of damage assessment consultations with the displaced communities and local authorities in the municipalities of Tiwi, Albay as well as Sagnay and Buhi in Camarines Sur.

A long-standing partnership with the DRRMOS of Albay and Camarines Sur including the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO) and the Environment Disaster Management and Emergency Response Office’s (EDMERO), aided coordination with the government and other humanitarian agencies in Bicol in the overall response and understanding the implications of possible prolonged displacement of the evacuees.

Local action leading response
Together with IOM and the local partners such as EDUCO, Red Cross local chapters, and social action centres of various church groups and parishes, OCHA’s deployment helped link up agencies based in Bicol to address various cluster-specific needs of the affected communities. With the influx of displaced communities and the urgency to provide support to the lifesaving needs, OCHA worked with local NGOs, faith-based groups and civic organizations to map existing capacities and resources available to support local government led humanitarian response.

The immediate field assessment and consultation underscored the role played by local government in the overall response. In the first 72 hours after massive flooding and multiple landslides occurred, the municipal DRRMOS of Tiwi, Buhi and Sagnay with support from regional and provincial government agencies as well as local NGOs were able to provide relief packs, water-sanitation-hygiene kits, non-food items such as dry clothes, mosquito nets and additional sleeping mats and conducted medical missions in evacuation centres. Search, rescue and retrieval of bodies were conducted within the first two days after the disaster and continued at least for one month with technical support including delivery of heavy equipment and K9 dogs provided by neighbouring towns of Tiwi, Sagnay, and Buhi. More than a week after the displacement, the MDRRMOS of Tiwi, Sagnay, and Buhi ordered the re-evacuation of more than 1,500 families within the landslide permanent danger zones. While the damage to homes, infrastructures and livelihood is serious, the rapid response of the local government is commendable.

High risk areas for landslides highlighted during storm
TD Usman highlights three important components in the overall preparedness of a community: existence of an early warning system, communication protocols, and an effective evacuation procedure.

In 2017, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) shared its technical findings to various local governments of Bicol on the status of potentially high risk areas vulnerable to rain-induced landslides. These include the municipalities of Tiwi and Sagnay among other at-risk areas. The recommendation from the MGB report stressed the urgent need to relocate local residents.

Most at-risk municipalities face the challenging task of securing funding to permanently relocate local residents. While Sagnay and Tiwi managed to secure private land to be developed into a permanent relocation sites prior to TD Usman, both municipalities lack financial capacity to start building houses. The municipality of Sagnay currently faces the challenge of relocating at least 1,000 families after the big landslide.
Bicol has not experienced such a high number of casualties since 2006, when Super Typhoon Durian devastated the region.

Early warning systems for storms
In the aftermath of the storm the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) was criticized for allegedly providing a wrong forecast, late warning and poor coordination with both national agencies and local governments. PAGASA clarified how it technically coordinates with local authorities. As an early warning agency, PAGASA countered saying that for TD Usman, it provided localized rainfall and thunderstorm warnings through its Regional Services Division (PRSD). The Southern Luzon PRSD based in Legazpi City issued a colour-coded heavy rainfall warnings as supplemental advisories to the regular forecast issued by the Manila office. The local weather updates mentioned that there was an immediate threat of floods and landslides indicative of a need for emergency action.

Pre-emptive evacuation in the Bicol Region
Bicol has not experienced such a high number of casualties since 2006, when Super Typhoon Durian devastated the region. Some local government officials speculate that perhaps newly elected barangay officials, being unfamiliar with the protocols were slow in responding to the memo to pre-emptively evacuate at-risk residents. MDRRMO-Sagnay officials also observed that some people were reluctant to leave even during forced evacuation.

For affected communities, it was observed that a colour-coded early warning scheme in flood monitoring seems problematic and confusing. It was easier to understand the level of threat through the use of numbers similar to the tropical cyclone warning system and volcanic eruption alerts. In a consultation with displaced communities in Tiwi and Sagnay, local residents needed assurance that they will have a decent home and alternative livelihood once they are permanently relocated.

New ways of working with the local government authorities
As of 24 January, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) issued a memo circular prohibiting travel or leaves of absence for local officials during typhoons and other disasters. According to the DILG, the new memo seeks to ensure that local officials, especially mayors and vice-mayors from cities and municipalities will be present to make swift decisions for the safety and protection of the at-risk residents. Two months earlier, the DILG filed five administrative cases against mayors from Northern Luzon who were not around at the height of Typhoon Mangkhut in September 2018.

The issuance is timely considering the new norms expected for both government and humanitarian community, especially during the typhoon season to work together and as much as possible, complement each other’s work to ensure maximum support to affected communities during response to life threatening hazards.

The Humanitarian Country Team’s positive relationship with the local government of Bicol can be attributed to the engagement of UN agencies and INGOs in previous humanitarian responses, with the conduct of joint inter-agency rapid needs assessment for Mayon Volcano eruption in January 2018 and the response to typhoon Nock-Ten in 2016 as recent examples.
The experience of TD Usman will further inform the minimum operations protocol of the Humanitarian Country Team’s inter-cluster coordination group, especially in the deployment and conduct of assessment, to ensure it is sensitive to the priorities and overall resources and capacity of local government.

Marawi rebuilds as humanitarian needs remain

Nearly two years after the conflict in Marawi City in May 2017, over 68,000 people remain displaced, staying with host families, in evacuation centres or temporary shelters, according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). The Government continues to lead humanitarian response and recovery efforts in Marawi City, building permanent shelters for displaced families with support from private and development organizations.

Debris clearing and building shelters in Marawi City

Debris clearing of sector 1 of the most affected areas in Marawi City was temporarily put on hold by the National Housing Authority (NHA) since December 2018, citing non-compliance with environmental and demolition permits issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Marawi City authorities. For the second phase, three companies will handle the clearing of the other sectors, following an evaluation of housing and consent from homeowners.

More temporary shelters are being constructed by local authorities and humanitarian partners to accommodate displaced communities in various Marawi City locations. Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), through the National Housing Authority (NHA) is building 1,500 units in Boganga Transition Site. With more units completed at the site, 206 IDP families were transferred on 16 January from remaining evacuation centres in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur. All evacuation centres in Lanao del Norte are officially closing with the latest transfer of families from the municipalities of Balo-i and Pantar.

In Rorogagus 1 and 2 in Marawi, more than 1,000 temporary shelters are planned to be built, while 1,000 units are being planned in the Dulay area. In Angat Buhay there are 100 units with 60 units so far occupied, while 300 units are occupied at Bakwit Village in Matungao, Lanao del Norte. The Sagonsongan Transitional Site is fully occupied with 1,052 units. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is constructing 400 temporary shelters in Marawi and Saguiaran, Lanao del Sur as well as other areas where beneficiaries have their own land. CRS is also supporting livelihood, protection, and WASH interventions.

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao-Bangsamoro Regional Inclusive Development for Growth and Empowerment (ARMM-BRIDGE) is overseeing the construction of 250 units, while the Provincial Government of Lanao del Sur will provide 100 shelters in Marawi City.

UN-Habitat in partnership with the Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC) and TFBM, with funding from the Government of Japan, will construct 1,500 permanent shelter units and will benefit families who used to live within the 3.6 metre easement of All evacuation centres in Lanao del Norte are officially closing with the latest transfer of families from the municipalities of Balo-i and Pantar.
Lake Lanao and Agus river of Marawi, and families with professional and special skills from the most affected areas. UN Habitat is organizing home partners into a home owners’ association, and has scheduled groundbreaking of the shelter construction on 26 February. In addition, SM Foundation has committed to constructing 2,000 permanent housing units, while 100 units will be constructed by Cagay-an Evangelical Disaster Response Network. Pamayandig Ranao, a local NGO is providing one unit in Dansalan, Marawi.

Business and livelihood interventions

Task Force Bangon Marawi’s sub-committee on business and livelihood led by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Region 10 continues to coordinate the livelihood interventions of Government agencies and humanitarian organizations. Members of the sub-committee such as the Department of Agriculture, DSWD, DTI, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority have received funding under the PPA (the national government’s allocation for programs, projects and activities). They lead monthly business and livelihood convergence activities in partnership with humanitarian organizations. DTI has distributed sewing kits, food stalls and carts, ‘sari-sari’ store supplies, and kits for Maranao delicacy-making.

On 9 January, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST)-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) concluded its project Nutrition Intervention Model in Time of Calamities: A Quick Response to Emergencies at Sagonsongan Transitory Site. Over 370 people benefitted from programmes on gardening, nutrition education, and supplementary feeding.

The Department of Finance (DoF) estimates PhP72.5 billion (US$1.4 billion) is needed for the rehabilitation of Marawi over a five-year period. Of this amount, P47.2 billion goes towards the Bangon Marawi Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Program (BMCRRP), while P17.2 billion is needed to rehabilitate the most affected areas, P1.2 billion for livelihood assistance, while P6.9 billion is required for continuing humanitarian assistance at the initial recovery phase. Pledges amounting to P35 billion were received from multiple partners to support the BMCRRP.

Supporting Marawi humanitarian response

Members of Mindanao Humanitarian Team (MHT) support the Government-led response in various sectors. Action Against Hunger (AAH) and the Red Cross continue to provide water to IDP sites. With limited resources, humanitarian agencies are also supporting the rehabilitation of the Marawi City pumping station and digging hand pump wells to ensure continued access to water in case water delivery support ends.

Eight projects received grants in 2018 from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund–Underfunded Emergencies totaling $5 million, implemented in five municipalities of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, and culminating in December 2018. UNICEF, WFP, WHO, FAO, UNFPA, UNHCR, in partnership with local NGOs and Government partners implemented projects on health, reproduction health, nutrition, protection, gender-based violence, food security and agriculture and livelihood through...
financial inclusion initiatives. The agencies converged geographically and sectorally to maximize resources and impact and to maximise the sustainability of the activities.

**IDP Profiling initiatives**

A major initiative of TFBM to consolidate and improve the tracking of displacement is the conduct of a comprehensive IDP profiling exercise. With technical support from WFP, the project aims to deliver a comprehensive and unified master list of displaced people to be used by government agencies and others in providing continued support, such as cash assistance from the DSWD. Targeted to be completed in April 2019, profiling was concluded in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, while Lanao del Sur including Marawi City is ongoing.

**UNHCR IDP Profiling findings**

Between June to August 2018, UNHCR profiled IDPs in evacuation centres, transitory sites, and home-based communities in the provinces of Lanao Del Norte, Lanao Del Sur, Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon. The project was implemented by UNHCR in close coordination with national, regional and local representatives from the Philippine government. More than 34,700 heads of households were interviewed with 51 per cent men and 49 per cent women, representing 97,126 people in 56 municipalities and three cities. The report reflects an in-depth analysis of Marawi IDP population with regards to protection risks, socio-demographic characteristics, humanitarian assistance, education, shelter needs and property issues.

UNHCR findings show that the biggest segment of the IDP population is at the 20-24 age bracket. There are 126 child-headed households between the 13 to 17 age group, while 4,301 or 12 per cent are elderly headed households. Over 4,400 are single-headed households, of which 3,019 are females.

Over 50 per cent of women and 46 per cent of men have attended school. More than 50 per cent of households profiled said that they have access to sustainable livelihood, with more men affirming livelihood access than women. Farming, transportation and trading of non-agricultural products are the top sources of income among IDP household heads, while nearly 2,000 people are engaged in professional work.

It was found that more than 14,700 or 42 per cent do not possess any form of photo identification, out of which 7,135 are women. Forty-four percent did not have birth certificates at the time of the profiling. The main reasons are either the birth is not yet registered, or the birth certificate was burned or lost while fleeing from the Marawi conflict. About 31 per cent say that IDPs continue to experience protection risks due to lack of civil documentation.

Discussions with communities revealed the need to give more attention to nutrition and education to counter the spread of violent extremism among the youth. While 75 per cent indicated they had access to information, a significant number of IDPs continue to experience gaps in assistance related to health, education, shelter and long-term livelihood support. A targeted approach that will address specific protection needs of IDPs is recommended.

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IOM rapid needs assessment

Meanwhile, IOM completed a rapid needs assessment in the municipalities of Pantar, Bubong, Buadiposo Bontong, Mulondo, Ditsaan Romain and Saguiaran, Lanao del Sur areas in December 2018 covering over 2,600 IDP families (an estimated 11,400 people). More than 1,700 families are from evacuation centres while 749 families are staying with host families.

Assessment results suggest that the top three identified needs are livelihood, shelter/relocation, and food. Food and WASH concerns remain persistent in assessed areas. Lighting was considered inadequate in some evacuation sites exposing IDPs to protection risks particularly in latrine and bathing areas. Vulnerable groups included over 430 breastfeeding mothers, more than 300 persons with chronic disease, 254 single female-headed household, 247 pregnant women, 123 single male headed household, 120 persons with physical disabilities, 73 unaccompanied elderly persons, 65 child headed households, 52 orphaned children, 45 unaccompanied children, 27 persons with mental disabilities and 24 children separated with parents. Prevalent health issues were reported as upper respiratory tract infections and diarrhea.

Protection at the centre of humanitarian action in Mindanao

The Philippines Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in the Philippines, composed of in-country UN agencies, international and national NGOs and the private sector has formally endorsed a Protection strategy for Mindanao to guide the overall scope of protection work undertaken by HCT member organizations in response to displacement and other protection risks arising from conflict, violence, and natural disasters throughout all regions of Mindanao, Philippines.

The initial draft of the Strategy was developed through contributions from key HCT member agencies with an operational presence in Mindanao and who play vital roles in IDP protection. At the initiative of the Protection Cluster co-lead, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), two Technical Working Groups were convened in Manila and Cotabato City starting in 2017. These were tasked with formulating a background analysis of the overall protection situation in Mindanao, focusing on the needs, risks, and gaps. This analysis consolidated the partner agencies’ insights and observations from the field, laying the groundwork for identification of strategic priorities in consultation with duty-bearers and other relevant actors.

With the Marawi crisis intervening – and in the process validating many of the identified gaps in existing response capacities – the next step was taken through a Writeshop activity bringing together not only representatives from HCT member organizations, but also key Government offices with protection mandates from all over Mindanao: Regional Offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Office of Civil Defense (OCD), and Commission on Human Rights (CHR), as well as the Regional Human Rights Commission (RHRC) of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Through their inputs during this activity, a set of eight strategic objectives were
identified, which define the priority actions to be undertaken in order to address the outstanding protection needs and risks in all areas of Mindanao, and to fill the current gaps in duty-bearers’ and humanitarian actors’ capacities.

Priority strategic objectives defined in the HCT’s Protection Strategy for Mindanao

- A national legal framework protecting the rights of IDPs is enacted.
- Rights of IDPs are protected during emergencies, in all phases of response and rehabilitation.
- Ensure IDPs’ access to humanitarian assistance, basic services and decent sustainable livelihood, including for at-risk groups.
- Strengthen peace-promoting, conflict-sensitive, and community-based protection mechanisms and responses that are reflective of the needs of all sectors and aligned with national and local development objectives.
- Strengthen capacity of duty bearers to respond to emergencies.
- Improve coordination among government agencies, and between duty-bearers and other humanitarian and development actors.
- Support IDPs in attaining durable solutions through sustainable recovery and rehabilitation programmes, and 8) Ensure that grave child rights violations (GCRVs), gender-based violence (GBV), and other specific protection concerns affecting vulnerable groups are effectively addressed through specialized services and programs at all stages of emergencies.

Implementation of the Protection strategy

In 2019, the HCT will move forward with implementing the Strategy by convening Technical Working Groups at Manila and Mindanao level to spearhead an action plan in accordance with these objectives. Lead organizations for each Strategic Objective are being identified among HCT members with established protection capacities and expertise who have expressed clear interest and commitment in ensuring the achievement of specific protection deliverables.
In brief: Bangsamoro Organic Law plebiscite

A second round of voting for the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law took place on 6 February in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and North Cotabato: the plebiscite involved all barangays, municipalities and provinces that had expressed a wish to join the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) under the Bangsamoro Organic Law. The plebiscite covered the province of Lanao del Norte which is composed of 22 municipalities and North Cotabato with 17 municipalities and was held in 67 barangays in North Cotabato province and 6 municipalities-Balo-i, Munai, Nunungan, Pantar, Tagoloan, and Tanggcal of Lanao del Norte Province. The first round of voting occurred on 21 January, where a majority of voters chose to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) or Republic Act 11054.

In Lanao del Norte, precincts opened early despite three explosions that occurred a day prior the plebiscite in the municipalities of Lala, Kauswagan and Sultan Naga Dimaporo. In Lanao del Norte, precincts opened early despite three explosions that occurred a day prior the plebiscite in the municipalities of Lala, Kauswagan and Sultan Naga Dimaporo. Despite the initial feedback of a low turn-out due to fear of hostilities, more than 700,000 voters flocked the polling precincts in the province to vote. Results indicate that a majority of residents in the province voted against the inclusion of the six municipalities in the new BARMM.

In North Cotabato, the ‘yes’ vote was a landslide win in the majority of the 67 Barangays of the North Cotabato province where the poll took place. It is expected that the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) will be formed once the members are endorsed by the President.

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