

Input for the HRC56 thematic report on climate change and internal displacement: Evidence-based contributions from Eastern Visayas, Philippines, after Typhoon Haiyan

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Project: “Surviving and managing compound risks toward the resilience of disaster-displaced communities in the Philippines”

Background

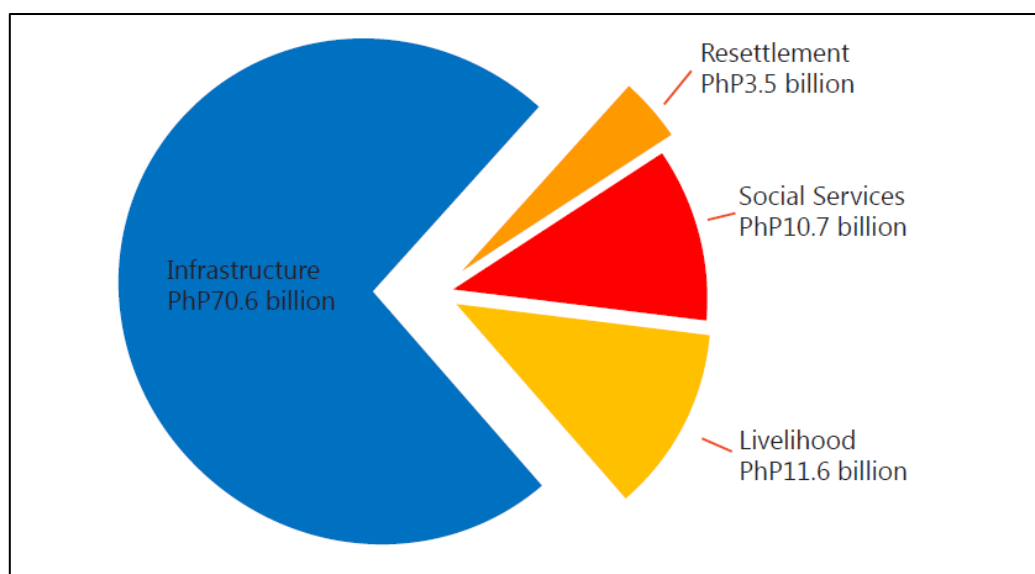
Typhoon Haiyan was a massive and destructive Category 5 super typhoon that originated in the North Pacific Ocean and devastated Palau, the Philippines, Vietnam, and China in November 2013. The Central Philippines suffered the most, with nearly US\$2 trillion in estimated damage and 6,300 recorded deaths (NDRRMC, 2014). Typhoon Haiyan brought about intense flooding, destructive winds, and fatal storm surges of 5-7 meters in height (Lagmay et al., 2015; Takagi et al., 2017), making it among the most destructive tropical cyclones in the country’s recent history. Typhoon Haiyan affected around 14.1 million people, of which 28% or an estimated 4.1 million individuals were displaced, resulting in severe disruptions to their lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing (Yonetani et al., 2014). Ultimately, the Philippine government resettled more than 20,000 informal settlers living in at-risk coastal communities (e.g. No Build or No Dwelling Zones) to elevated and mostly peri-urban areas of affected towns and cities as part of its long-term disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies.

This project examines the impact of COVID-19 on disaster-displaced communities’ resilience in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Data was collected from June 2022 to March 2023 in Tacloban City and Palo, Leyte, two town most affected by Typhoon Haiyan. The study used the Capability Approach to assess the pandemic’s effects on the well-being and resilience of 400 households. For this project, we conceptualized resilience as the ability to manage hazards and adversities. The study focused on five capabilities: Life, Health, Work, Support Networks, and Mobility. However, in this Input for the HRC56 thematic report on climate change and internal displacement, we will only present the political, economic, and social factors affecting disaster-displaced households in Tacloban and Palo in converting resources into valuable capabilities in resettlement villages. Ultimately, this evidence input aims to discuss the living conditions of IDPs during the pandemic and the long-term impacts of post-Haiyan policies.

Inadequacy of the Yolanda (Haiyan) Recovery and Reconstruction Plan

In Eastern Visayas, SULHOG is the primary blueprint for post-Haiyan recovery and rehabilitation. Under SULHOG, the Eastern Visayas Yolanda Investment Program (2014-2016) served as a complementary document which outlined the PHP 96 billion (~ USD 1.7 billion) worth of government interventions “to build back better the Eastern Visayas Region”. It contained ongoing and proposed programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) of 19 key regional line agencies and ten state universities that played crucial roles in restoring the socioeconomic conditions of the region, focusing on four clusters (infrastructure, resettlement, livelihoods, and social services) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Summary of SULHOG PPA Investments by Cluster



The largest part of the investment is for infrastructure recovery, with 73% of total public investment. Resettlement requires PHP4 billion, around 4% of the total. Most of the budget for Resettlement Cluster, 3.2 billion out of 3.5 billion, goes to NHA for permanent Housing Projects. NHA received PHP7.4 billion from Congress for more shelters in Eastern Visayas. Despite the EV Yolanda Investment Plan, no budget was allocated for permanent resettlement villages' infrastructure, livelihoods, or social services. Interviews with regional government agencies confirmed these findings, with most projects completed.

Tacloban and Palo LGUs acknowledge recovery is costly, lengthy, and complex. Effective institutions and leaders in disaster governance are crucial. Lack of funds hinders PPAs implementation in YRRPs. National and regional YRRPs failed to consult LGUs on PPAs implementation, focusing on the wrong population segments. PPAs were not fairly implemented, especially in resettlement villages. Tacloban's City Administrator sees it as a missed chance to provide IDPs in resettlement villages with needed livelihoods and social services. The No-Build/Dwelling Zone policy led many resettled families to return to risky coastal areas for livelihoods.

Absence of a National Policy Recognizing, Protecting, and Providing Durable Solutions to Internally Displaced Population

A key informant from the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines' (CHRP) Center for Crisis and Conflict for Humanitarian Protection (CCCHP) highlighted the lack of a human rights-based national policy for IDPs in the country. The CHR implemented an IDP Protection Project post-Typhoon Haiyan, recommending a government body for humanitarian protection like the CCCHP. The Constitution of the Philippines mandates human rights protection for all, but this is not effectively implemented in policies for displaced families. For example, although the Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (R.A. No. 10121) legislation set up the government mechanisms and structures in responding to and managing disasters and other complex emergencies, the policy does not explicitly include a human rights approach for adequate and dignified living of IDPs into the government's humanitarian agenda. This oversight results in inadequate resources for IDPs, especially those displaced for long periods, as observed in case study communities.

To address this, our informants proposed a national policy focusing on human rights-based standards in managing hazard-induced disasters and civil-military conflicts. Various versions of the legislation have been developed since 2008, initially addressing conflict-induced displacement and ancestral domains in Mindanao. The policy evolved to include climate change and disaster impacts following Typhoon Haiyan, and almost became law in 2013. The main goal is to safeguard the rights of internally displaced persons throughout the displacement process. However, President Benigno Simeon Aquino III rejected the bill due to constitutional inconsistencies¹. Despite the initial setback, the CHRP persisted in pushing for the bill's approval, addressing concerns raised in the 2013 veto. They collaborated with NGOs, the UNHCR, and government agencies to garner support during policy discussions. Challenges arose in finding influential advocates with the necessary political clout to advance the IDP Bill. The momentum for the legislation waned as Typhoon Haiyan's impact faded from the national agenda and discourse.

Our findings also show that providing durable solutions to IDPs' long-term disaster recovery requires understanding its contextual development, including the role of power and politics in shaping and realising long-term humanitarian responses. Five months after conducting fieldwork in the Philippines, new policy developments emerged. In August 2023, the House of Representatives approved House Bill No. 8269 (H.B. 8269), or "An Act Protecting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and Penalizing the Acts of Arbitrary Displacement." Many of these policymakers are from provinces and regions that have suffered major hazard-induced disasters. In a press release published by the House of Representatives, Speaker (House Leader) Martin G. Romualdez of the 1st District of Leyte, who was also a Haiyan survivor, said that "[t]his proposed legislation seeks to guarantee the promotion and

¹ <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/05/24/veto-message-of-president-aquino-on-senate-bill-no-3317-and-house-bill-no-5627/>

protection of the rights of the victims of and non-combatants in armed conflict in accordance with international humanitarian law, international customary law, international human rights laws, and domestic laws” (Press and Public Affairs Bureau, 2023).

Under H.B. 8269, legal definitions were also refined. Moreover, the terms Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups were added and defined as “those that face higher exposure to disaster risk and poverty including, but not limited to, women, children, youth, elderly, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and ICCs/IPs [Indigenous Cultural Communities/ Indigenous Peoples].” The bill also covers at least four relevant domestic laws and addresses the risks involved in natural hazards, and the overall impact of climate change and global warming on the rights of those who are internally displaced. Currently, in April 2024, a comparable bill is pending in the Senate for examination, consolidation, modification, and finalization by both chambers of Congress prior to its submission to the President's office for approval or rejection.

Lack of Livelihood Support Services and Programs for Resettled Residents

Available data from the Department of Budget and Management indicate that the government released at least PHP140.07 billion from 2013-2016 to fund various recovery and rehabilitation programs in Haiyan-affected communities, which required a PHP150.03 billion fund (DBM, 2015). The CYRRP aims to improve the lives of survivors and to build resilient post-Haiyan communities. However, despite these recovery and rehabilitation projects, the lack of livelihood support services and programs for disaster-displaced households in resettlement villages continues to be a huge dilemma not only during the pandemic but also in relation to their long-term disaster recovery from Typhoon Haiyan.

Our findings reveal that the majority (70%) of households in resettlement villages had only one member with work and income at the time of data gathering. The data further reveal that even before the pandemic, most of them earned less than PHP 15,000.00 (~USD 260.00) per month, and many others did not have stable income sources, which were lost or severely decreased due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic, most households in both Tacloban and Palo derived their income from informal employment considered precarious jobs (e.g., pedicab/motorcab driving, construction works, etc.), or micro-businesses (e.g., sari-sari stores, online selling, fruit, and fish vending) with a daily income between PHP200-350.00 (~USD3.50-6.00).

At the regional level, my findings reveal that the lack of livelihood support services and programs for disaster-displaced households in resettlement villages could be attributed to the absence of explicit livelihood funding allocation for resettled households in the SULHOG or the Eastern Visayas Yolanda Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan. Key informants from the local government units of Tacloban and Palo have emphasised that the SULHOG is problematic in that the bulk of the budget intended for livelihoods and social services clusters

has been allocated to and implemented by national government agencies with little foresight of how displaced populations forcibly relocated to permanent resettlement villages will be able to benefit from these livelihood programs and social services. Of the 123 identified Programs/Projects/Activities for the Livelihood Cluster valued at PHP11.5 billion in SULHOG implemented from 2014-2016, none mentioned any resettlement villages or relocation sites.

Fragile social capital ties of disaster-displaced households

We also found that households at resettlement villages exhibit weak or fragile social capital ties within and beyond their villages.

Disaster-displaced households have weak bonding social ties in resettlement villages.

Our findings indicate that challenges associated with support networks go beyond financial assistance, including difficulties in accessing various forms of aid (e.g. emotional support, food supplies, and other non-monetary assistance) in times of adversity, especially impacting households displaced by disasters, even before the onset of the pandemic. The lack of organised resettlement processes was identified as the primary factor contributing to their disconnection from close social ties, including immediate family, relatives, friends, and neighbours in coastal regions, whom they perceived as vital support networks.

The relocation of disaster-displaced households to permanent resettlement communities had a significant negative impact on their social interactions, severing important social ties traditionally relied upon for coping with challenges such as extreme weather conditions and daily household needs. The arbitrary and politically influenced allocation of housing units through a "random lottery-like raffle" to the majority of permanent housing recipients resulted in a chaotic distribution of neighbours and family members across different resettlement sites, disregarding the repercussions of social connections, community dynamics, and the overall recovery process. Previously, they could easily access support for food, financial aid, or unpaid care services (e.g. childcare) from their close networks, enabling them to sustain their livelihood activities. Additionally, fishermen expressed concerns about food insecurity, noting that access to food was more convenient near the coast, despite existing livelihood challenges.

Disaster-displaced households have weak bridging ties among locales of the host villages

Our findings further suggest a distinct gap between the local/original residents of the host barangays and the relocated households. Despite the fact that they have been residing in the relocation sites for nearly ten years following the catastrophe, there is an ongoing social inequality between the displaced households and the residents of their host villages. In the words of a resident from Habitat village, their new settlement could be viewed as a "community within a community," as they view themselves as inadequately assimilated into the broader community life, imaginary, and identity of the larger village. Even though they have acknowledged progress in their interaction with the local residents of their host barangays, a few individuals still view themselves as "foreigners" and sense a detachment

from these barangays, yearning to return to their coastal homes where they feel a deeper connection. Others have highlighted that their relocation site is often unfairly blamed by host barangay residents whenever a criminal incident occurs.

While the FGD findings from Tacloban case study sites did not mirror these observations, key figures from the Tacloban LGU noted that resettlement areas in Tacloban North, overall, are gaining notoriety for criminal activities, such as drug-related offences, gang conflicts, and cases of social welfare and protection issues like sexual assault, harassment, and incest. They have also received numerous grievances from residents of host barangays due to these problems. The Planning and Development Coordinator of Tacloban delineates a context to explain the possible "social conflicts" or "mild hostility" between relocated households and host barangay inhabitants.

Disaster-displaced households have weak linking ties with local and national government agencies

The Homeowners Associations of all the four resettlement villages exhibit fragile or weak connections with the local government units of Tacloban and Palo, thereby restricting their capacity to consistently access necessary social support services for village sustainability. A recurring theme identified in the FGDs was the residents' aspiration to participate in consultations, planning, and implementation initiatives related to their respective resettlement villages. While Tacloban has a community coordinator for Tacloban North and Palo has a housing focal person within the municipal social welfare and development office, their primary responsibilities largely pertain to community monitoring and housing unit evaluations (i.e., issues on repair, illegal occupancy, and unpermitted housing extensions/modifications). Furthermore, despite the existence of local housing boards in both LGUs, none of the case study sites are integrated into these institutional planning and coordination bodies.

For example, according to the HOA officials of Habitat Village, it is uncommon for an LGU representative to visit and inquire about the well-being and living conditions of residents in the resettlement village. During my fieldwork, they mentioned that my visit marked the first instance of a comprehensive dialogue focusing on their challenges and living conditions at the resettlement sites, predating the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, residents themselves initiate meetings with the municipal Mayor, visiting her office at the town center to address concerns such as access to electricity and water. Furthermore, while some resettlement village residents benefit from government initiatives like the Conditional Cash Transfer and Sustainable Livelihoods programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, none of the case study communities at the village level engage directly and continuously with national government programs on livelihood and capacity development.

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