

Localising the Humanitarian Toolkit:

Lessons from Recent Philippines Disasters

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This report was written by Rebecca Barber on behalf of Save the Children and the ASEAN Agreement for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Partnership Group (APG).

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About the AADMER Partnership Group

The APG is a consortium of international NGOs that have agreed to cooperate with ASEAN in the implementation of the AADMER. It comprises ChildFund, HelpAge, Mercy Malaysia, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision.

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Cover picture: Destruction from Tropical Storm Sendong in Cagayan de Oro, December 2011.

Photo credit: Save the Children

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Save the Children Australia
Level 6, 250 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne, VIC
Australia 3070

Save the Children Asia Regional Office
Strathmore Building 3rd Floor
352 Tanglin International Centre
Singapore 247671

Executive Summary

The Philippines is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. It experiences around 900 earthquakes and 20 typhoons annually, and almost three quarters of the population are vulnerable to natural hazards. This vulnerability is increasing, as changing weather patterns mean that lower-intensity storms are accompanied by heavier rainfall – a phenomenon illustrated by the particularly high casualty figures and enormous economic losses caused by relatively low-intensity storms in recent years. The typical path of typhoons across the Philippines is also shifting, meaning that increasingly, storms are hitting communities with very little experience of tropical storms. This poses enormous challenges to the efforts being made by the national government to improve disaster preparedness and response across the country, as well as for international actors seeking to assist them.

The Philippines has taken great strides in recent years in improving its disaster management capacity. It has one of the most robust legal frameworks in the world for disaster risk management, and strong capacity and commitment within government departments to address disaster risk. But with disaster risk expected to increase, enormous challenges remain. Despite a strong legal framework for disaster risk reduction and management, implementation at the local level remains challenged by a lack of resources and capacity; there remain gaps in the ability of both national and international actors to appropriately target the needs of vulnerable groups; and the positioning of the national coordinating body for disaster management within the Department of National Defence (DND), in a context in which populations are affected simultaneously by both conflict and natural disaster, poses challenges for agencies striving to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles.

The Philippines thus provides a case study of the challenges faced by national governments throughout the region in managing rapidly increasing disaster risk. But more than this, it provides an illustration of the shifting roles of national, regional and international actors in disaster management.

As in the Philippines, throughout the Asia Pacific region there has been a significant increase in national and regional disaster management capacities. Almost all countries throughout the region have legal and regulatory frameworks in place, as well as institutional structures, for managing disaster risk; and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) has established one of the most robust mechanisms in the world for coordinating disaster relief amongst its member states. With few exceptions, governments in the region no longer issue generalised, public appeals for assistance, preferring instead to accept specific offers, targeted to meet identified gaps in national capacities, on their own terms. Although this is no longer new, international humanitarian actors, accustomed to a particular set of tools designed primarily for contexts with minimal government capacity, have in some cases struggled to define a role for themselves in this context.

But while international actors elsewhere in the region have struggled to adapt to contexts in which international assistance is not explicitly requested, national and international actors in the Philippines appear to have found a way forward in this changed operating environment. International assistance has been provided on the basis of an offer made by the Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator, and the acceptance of that offer by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

Council (NDRRMC), with the absence of an ‘appeal’ for assistance simply not raised as an issue. The Philippines is also one of the only countries in the region to have issued policy directives endorsing and adopting the humanitarian cluster approach; and it hosted the first mission of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), posing the possibility for the AHA Centre to assume an increasingly prominent role in coordinating assistance from ASEAN member states. Thus, the Philippines provides an important case study for actors preparing for and responding to humanitarian emergencies throughout the region.

Recommendations to the Government of the Philippines

1. Expedite efforts to provide training and support to local governments on all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, including the requirements of the *Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act* (DRRM Act), establishment of early warning systems, interpretation and use of hazard maps, preparation of local DRRM plans, establishment of DRRM offices and use of local DRRM funds.
2. As part of its scheduled review of the DRRM Act in 2015:
 - a. Conduct an analysis of the positioning of the Office of Civil Defence within the DND.
 - b. Consider expanding section 18 of the DRRM Act (‘mechanism for international humanitarian assistance’), incorporating provisions from the *Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance*.
3. Ensure that disaster risk reduction and management efforts are well targeted so as to minimise the disproportionate impact of disasters on the poor and vulnerable groups.
4. In all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, continue to ensure that programs and policies target the needs of children.
5. Strengthen efforts to maximise the contribution of, and coordination with, the private sector.

To Government and International Cluster Leads

6. Enhance efforts to train government staff at regional, provincial and municipal level on the roles and responsibilities of cluster leads, as well as on technical standards and guidelines applicable to that cluster.
7. As part of disaster preparedness efforts, proactively engage with the private sector to identify opportunities for partnership in disaster response, and to map out ways of working.

To Donors and NGOs in the Philippines

8. Support training for local governments in disaster risk reduction and management, and provide the technical support necessary to assist local governments develop or revise their DRRM plans.

9. Support the Government of the Philippines to ensure that in all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, programs and policies target the needs of the most vulnerable, including children.

To the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Asia Pacific Regional Office and Country Office)

10. At the regional level: continue to create opportunities for Regional / Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams and Disaster Management Teams, ASEAN and national disaster management organisations to share experiences and lessons learned from recent disasters.
11. At both the regional and country level: enhance efforts to engage the private sector in humanitarian coordination systems and promote adherence to humanitarian standards.
12. At both the regional and country level: continue to monitor and advocate for adherence to humanitarian principles, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

To the AHA Centre

13. Continue outreach to all government actors engaged in disaster response, including those at sub-national level, so as to raise awareness regarding ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms.
14. Recognising that civil society actors will in many cases be the first responders, support efforts to strengthen the engagement of regional civil society actors with ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms.

To OCHA and the AHA Centre

15. Continue to pursue initiatives aimed at clarifying roles and responsibilities between the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC) and the AHA Centre, particularly where UNDAC and ERAT are deployed simultaneously.

1. Introduction

Around the world, economic and human exposure to disaster risk is increasing due to the combined effects of climate change, population growth, poorly planned development and urbanisation. The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the most disaster-prone region in the world. Some 75 disasters have been recorded since 2010, already more than half the number recorded in the previous decade.¹ Recent disasters have had particularly devastating effects, with relatively low-intensity storms having been accompanied by unusually heavy rainfall, and the changing path of typhoons meaning that communities with minimal experience with disasters have been taken by surprise. Disasters in the Philippines so far this decade have affected more than 30 million people and caused almost US\$3 billion in economic damages.²

Disaster management capacity in the Philippines has substantially increased. The Philippines has one of the most robust legal frameworks in the world for disaster risk management, and strong capacity and commitment within government departments to addressing disaster risk. The capacity and interest of civil society and the private sector to engage in disaster risk reduction and management has also increased. But there are significant gaps between policy and practice, and with disaster risk expected to rise, there remain enormous challenges for national authorities and the international and regional actors seeking to assist them.

The Philippines thus provides an illustration of the challenges faced by national governments in managing rapidly increasing disaster risk. But more than this, it illustrates the shifting roles of national, regional and international actors. In addition to strong national disaster management capacity, the Philippines has substantial experience in managing international humanitarian assistance. The practice followed in recent disasters for receiving international assistance has avoided some of the complications experienced elsewhere in the region, where international actors have struggled to adapt to contexts in which assistance is 'welcomed' but not 'requested'; and the Philippines is also one of the only countries in the region to have issued policy directives adopting the cluster approach. And finally, the Philippines has provided the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (the AHA Centre) with its first real 'test case', with Typhoon Bopha in December 2012 providing an opportunity for the AHA Centre to fulfil its intended role of coordinating assistance amongst ASEAN member states.

This paper explores some of the issues highlighted by recent disaster responses in the Philippines, with a focus primarily on Tropical Storm Washi in 2011 and Typhoon Bopha in 2012. It considers the actions taken by national and local government authorities to manage disaster risk, as well as the facilitation and coordination of regional and international assistance. It concludes with recommendations aimed both at improving disaster management in the Philippines, and encouraging the sharing of lessons learned amongst actors engaged in humanitarian response across the region.

2. Disasters and Development in the Asia Pacific Region

The Asia Pacific region is the most disaster prone region in the world, as well as the most seriously affected. Almost two million people across the region were killed in disasters between 1970 and 2011, representing 75 per cent of global disaster fatalities.³ The region also accounts for the greatest portion of global disaster-related economic loss, in 2011 suffering 80 per cent of the global total.⁴ It is particularly vulnerable to hydro-meteorological events – floods, tropical storms and landslides triggered by rain or floods – which occur more frequently, affect more people and cause greater economic loss than any other type of disaster in the region.⁵ Some 1.2 billion people throughout the region have been exposed to hydro-meteorological risks since 2000, and numbers are expected to increase due to the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.⁶ Vulnerability to floods in particular is expected to increase, with an estimated 410 million Asians in urban areas alone projected to be at risk of coastal flooding by 2025.⁷

The Asia Pacific region has seen unprecedented economic growth in the past four decades. Almost all countries in the region are now middle-income or richer, and regional GDP has increased from 23 per cent to 33 per cent of the global total.⁸ A 2011 report by the Asian Development Bank predicted that by 2050 the Asian region could ‘account for more than half of global GDP, trade and investment,’ and ‘thus holds the promise of making some three billion additional Asians ... affluent by today’s standards.’⁹

But alongside this unprecedented economic growth have been two less positive developments. The first is a significant increase in income inequality. The gains from economic development have been shared unequally, with the incomes of the rich having surged at a significantly faster pace than those of the poor.¹⁰ Second, attributable in part to the fact that much of the development has occurred in urban areas along coastlines and in floodplains which are highly exposed to natural hazards, there has been an increase in both economic and human exposure to disaster risk. Over the past four decades, economic exposure to floods has increased by almost 1000 per cent in east and northeast Asia, 800 per cent in southeast Asia and 600 per cent in south and southwest Asia, and the total increase in regional disaster-related economic loss has outpaced the increase in GDP.¹¹ Most of the region’s population growth has also occurred in urban areas along exposed coastlines and in floodplains. Between 1950 and 2010 the proportion of the Asian population living in urban areas increased from 17 per cent to 44 per cent, and the number of people living in areas prone to floods and cyclones increased by 12.5 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively.¹² In short, while the region has seen unprecedented economic growth, this development has not kept pace with, and in fact has been a cause of, increased exposure to disaster risk.

Corresponding with this increase in disaster risk has been an increase in national and regional disaster management capacities. Almost all countries throughout the region have legal and regulatory frameworks as well as institutional structures for managing disaster risk; and ASEAN has established one of the most robust mechanisms in the world – and one of only three legally binding ones – for coordinating disaster relief amongst its member states.¹³ With this increase in capacity has been a shift in national attitudes towards international assistance. With few exceptions, governments in the Asia Pacific region no longer issue generalised, public appeals for assistance, preferring instead to accept specific offers, targeted to meet identified

gaps in national capacities, and on their own terms. Some efforts have been made to tailor humanitarian response efforts to this changing context – the *Guide to International Tools and Services* developed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),¹⁴ which aims to make the various components of the international humanitarian system more accessible to national governments, and the increasing use of ‘informal clusters’, are example of this – but still international humanitarian actors, accustomed to a particular set of tools designed for contexts with minimal government capacity, are in some cases struggling to define a role for themselves in this context.

But there are some important qualifications to be made about this shift in dynamics between national and international actors. First, with the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters expected to increase, there will continue to be cases where national capacities are overwhelmed. In such situations, the task of national governments will be significantly easier where robust policies and procedures are in place for managing international assistance. Second, despite increased national disaster management capacities, in many cases vulnerable groups continue to be left behind. Occasionally this is due to deliberate discrimination, but more commonly it is because of structural inequalities or innate vulnerabilities that render these groups less able to access assistance, requiring a targeted response that, when resources are stretched, national authorities may not have the capacity to provide. And third but perhaps most importantly, a significant proportion of populations throughout the region are affected not only by natural disasters but also by conflict. Research by the International Peace Research Institute in 2009 found that almost half of the world’s ongoing intrastate armed conflicts were in the Asia Pacific region, and that while the rest of the world had experienced a decline in the number of civil conflicts since the early 1990s, there was no such trend in Asia Pacific.¹⁵ Despite this, mechanisms for conflict management and resolution in the Asia Pacific region are relatively under-developed, and most of the region’s national legal and institutional frameworks for managing disaster risk do not deal explicitly with the needs of populations affected by conflict. Moreover, national disaster management organisations (NDMOs) are in some cases closely aligned with (if not part of) the departments of defence, raising the question of whether these agencies are the best placed to provide assistance to conflict-affected populations in circumstances where the government is a party to the conflict. While national governments have the primary responsibility for the protection of their populations, the international community has a residual responsibility – the humanitarian imperative – to provide humanitarian assistance to populations affected by both conflict and disaster where needs are not being met by national governments.

Selected National Responses to Natural Disasters in the Asia Pacific Region			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Emergency</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Government Response</i>
2004	Indian Ocean Tsunami	Indonesia	The Government declared Aceh 'open' to international assistance and requested the UN to coordinate assistance
2005	Kashmir earthquake	Pakistan	The Government requested international assistance
2006	Java earthquake	Indonesia	No formal request for international assistance; but the Government welcomed international assistance and made specific requests for assistance to a number of partners
2007	Cyclone Sidr	Bangladesh	No formal request for international assistance
2008	Cyclone Nargis	Myanmar	No request for international assistance; the Government imposed significant restrictions on humanitarian access
2008	Sichuan earthquake	China	The Government welcomed international assistance (for the first time in a decade)
2009	Sumatra earthquake	Indonesia	The Government welcomed but did not request international assistance.
2009	Typhoon Ketsana	Philippines	The Government formally requested international assistance
2010	Monsoon floods	Pakistan	The Government formally requested international assistance
2010	Mount Merapi	Indonesia	The Government welcomed but did not request international assistance.
2010	Cyclone Giri	Myanmar	The Government accepted humanitarian assistance from the UN but requested that it be kept low profile
2011	Typhoon Nelgae and Nesat	Philippines	The Government did not request international assistance. A number of government ministries and departments made their own specific requests for assistance.
2011	Monsoon floods	Thailand	The Government welcomed but did not request international assistance. A number of government departments made their own specific requests for assistance.
2011	Monsoon floods	Cambodia	The Government welcomed but did not request international assistance. A number of government departments made their own specific requests for assistance.
2011	Tropical Storm Washi	Philippines	The Government formally accepted the offer of assistance made by the UN on behalf of the international community.
2012	Monsoon floods	Philippines	The Government did not request international assistance. A number of government departments made their own specific requests for assistance.
2012	Typhoon Bopha	Philippines	The Government formally accepted the offer of assistance made by the UN on behalf of the international community.

3. Recent Disasters in the Philippines

The Philippines is the third most disaster-prone country in the world.¹⁶ It lies between two major tectonic plates and experiences almost 900 earthquakes annually; and being in the middle of a typhoon belt, is also particularly susceptible to typhoons. It experiences around 20 typhoons each year, five of which are usually 'super typhoons' which have a devastating impact on people, infrastructure and the environment. Some 74 per cent of the population is vulnerable to natural hazards, and the World Bank has projected that a 'one in 200 year' disaster could cost the Philippines as much as 18 per cent of total annual public expenditure.¹⁷ The 2013 Climate Change Vulnerability Index assessed Manila as the second most at-risk city in the world.¹⁸ The vulnerability of the Filipino people has been further exacerbated by decades of violent conflict, which over the years have forced millions of people from their homes. 2012 saw the signing of a historic peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, but the agreement remains fragile, and efforts to find a peaceful solution to the decades-long communist insurgency involving the New People's Army (NPA) have thus far been unsuccessful.

Recent years have seen an increase in the frequency of disasters in the Philippines, as well as the number of people affected.¹⁹ Some 14 million people were affected and 2,811 killed by natural disasters in 2012 – the highest number of natural disaster fatalities anywhere in the world.²⁰ The most significant disasters of recent years are detailed below.

- **Tropical Storm Ketsana** struck the Philippines in September 2009, bringing with it the heaviest rains the country had experienced in more than 40 years. Twenty-six provinces in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao were inundated, including 80 per cent of the capital city of Manila. Some 247,000 homes and 632,000 hectares of crops were damaged or destroyed, more than 700,000 people displaced, and nine million affected.²¹ Total damage and losses amounted to a colossal US\$4.38 billion.²²
- In October 2011, **Typhoons Nesat and Nalgae** struck 35 provinces in Northern and Central Luzon, leaving over 70,000 homes damaged or destroyed and four million people affected.²³
- In December 2011 **Tropical Storm Washi** lashed the island of Mindanao, sending flash floods cascading through several of the island's northern provinces and causing calamitous damage. The cities of Cagayan de Oro and Iligan were particularly affected, with entire villages washed away and many people killed in their homes as they slept. More than 1,200 people were killed, almost 40,000 homes damaged or destroyed, and 430,900 people displaced.²⁴ Total damage and losses surpassed US\$160 million.²⁵
- In July and August 2012, **heavy monsoonal rains** were exacerbated by a succession of tropical storms, the combined effect of which caused intense flooding in northern and central Luzon, including – as with Ketsana – 80 per cent of metro-Manila. At the peak of the floods in August, over a million people were displaced. Altogether over 4.4 million people were affected, and damage to agriculture and infrastructure was estimated at US\$72.4 million.²⁶

- In December 2012, **Typhoon Bopha** passed through the southern part of the Philippines from Mindanao to Palawan, devastating the provinces of Davao Oriental, Compostela Valley and Agasun del Sur. Over 1,000 people were killed, making the disaster the deadliest in the world in 2012. Six million people were affected, close to a million displaced, and over 210,000 houses damaged or destroyed.²⁷ The typhoon had a devastating impact on livelihoods, causing extensive damage in particular to banana, maize and rice plantations, coconut farms and the fishing industry. The cost of damage to the agricultural sector alone was estimated at US\$750 million.²⁸

Temperatures are rising in the Philippines as elsewhere in the world, and the frequency of extreme rainfall is increasing. While the frequency of typhoons is not expected to increase, changing weather patterns mean that lower-intensity storms are accompanied by heavier rainfall – accounting for the particularly high casualty figures and enormous economic losses seen in recent years.²⁹ The typical path of typhoons is also shifting, meaning that increasingly, storms are hitting communities with very little experience of tropical storms – a situation tragically highlighted by both Tropical Storm Washi and Typhoon Bopha. This poses enormous challenges to the efforts being made by the national government to improve disaster preparedness and response – but at the same time renders these efforts all the more critical.



Floods in Calumpit, Bulacan, Philippines, October 2011

Photo: Rosana Padua-Macachor, Save the Children

4. National Government Response

Disaster management in the Philippines is governed by the 2010 *Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act* (DRRM Act). The launch of the Act represented a paradigm shift in the legislative and policy framework for disaster management in the Philippines, from a narrow focus on disaster response to a much broader focus on preparedness, response, prevention and mitigation, and rehabilitation and recovery. It replaces the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), with wide-ranging responsibilities including:

- Advising the President on the status of disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response and rehabilitation operations being undertaken by the government, civil society organisations, private sector and volunteers;
- Making recommendations to the President regarding the declaration of a state of calamity, and submitting proposals to 'restore normalcy' in disaster-affected areas;
- Establishing early warning and emergency alert systems;
- Managing and mobilising resources for disaster risk reduction and management; and
- Developing coordination mechanisms for the implementation of disaster risk reduction and management by sectoral agencies and local government.³⁰

The DRRM Act appoints the Defence Secretary as Chair of the NDRRMC, and the Secretaries of the Departments of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Science and Technology, and the Director-General of the National Economic and Development Authority, as vice-chairs. Members of the NDRRMC include government departments and institutions, the Philippines Red Cross, civil society representatives, and a representative from the private sector.³¹ The Office of Civil Defence (OCD) is designated the 'lead agency to carry out the provisions of the Act,' tasked with 'administering a comprehensive national civil defence and disaster risk reduction and management program.'³² The NDRRMC is replicated at the regional, provincial and local (city/municipal) levels.³³

The DRRM Act is supported by a set of Implementing Rules and Regulations, and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRM Plan).³⁴

Subsequent to the launch of the Act, the Philippines has frequently been cited as an example of good practice in disaster risk reduction and management.³⁵ But while this is true of the legislative and policy framework, there remains a significant gap between policy and practice. The remainder of this section explores three issues which in recent disasters have either impacted, or have had the potential to impact, the quality of the response: lack of disaster preparedness at the local level; attention to the needs of vulnerable groups; and issues relating to the positioning of the OCD within the Department of National Defence (DND), in a context in which populations are often affected simultaneously by both conflict and natural disaster.

Disaster Preparedness at the Local Level: the Gap between Policy and Practice

'... despite changes in the law ... our research reveals that the perception by key informants is that the provisions of the law are yet to be matched by changes on the ground in terms of institutions, plans and actions. This is indicative of a system ... where national agencies tasked with implementing the changes are unable to operationalize them at the local level.'

Overseas Development Institute, 'Towards Policy-Relevant Science and Scientifically Informed Policy,' May 2013

The DRRM Act recognises the need to adopt a 'disaster risk reduction and management approach that is holistic, comprehensive, integrated, and proactive in lessening the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of disasters,³⁶ and it establishes a robust framework for doing so. The laws on disaster risk reduction in the Philippines have been described by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Disaster Risk Reduction as among the 'best in the world.'³⁷

Yet Filipino communities struck by disasters continue to be taken by surprise. An After-Action Review of the response to Tropical Storm Washi found that 'people lacked awareness of geo-hazard risks and did not readily comply with ... evacuation orders', that 'early warning signals often failed to trigger a response from local governments and the people,' and that 'evacuation plans were not fully in place or used.'³⁸ One survey found that just 57 per cent of people in Cagayan de Oro and 11 per cent in Illigan said they were warned of the disaster.³⁹ In Typhoon Bopha, although warnings were disseminated and some evacuations did take place, and while communities that had been struck by Washi the previous year responded well, many of the hardest hit communities were taken by surprise. Some were not reached by the warnings; others heard the warnings but – having never experienced a typhoon – either did not understand them or chose to ignore them.⁴⁰ An After-Action Review conducted after Bopha surmised that 'best practice was identified with the NDRRM Plan in place, guiding the response at regional and provincial level', but that 'challenges lie in translating the NDRRM Plan into an effective action plan for implementation, especially at municipal level.'⁴¹

What was highlighted by experience in both Washi and Bopha was that despite one of the most robust legal frameworks in the world for DRRM, implementation at the local level remains challenged by a lack of resources and capacity. As acknowledged during the recent National Summit on DRRM, 'the country has already produced a lot of legal documents highlighting LCE [Local Chief Executive] roles and responsibilities. ... The challenge, therefore, is for the LCEs to operationalize these laws by putting them into practice.'⁴²

The implementation of the DRRM Act at the local level is resourced by local DRRM funds, allocated by local governments and comprising at least five per cent of estimated annual revenue.⁴³ The Philippines is one of the few countries in the region to require the establishment of such funds, and one of even fewer to allow these funds to be utilised not only for response but also for disaster risk reduction. This is a particularly positive feature of the DRRM framework. But while five per cent may be an appropriate amount for high income municipalities with low disaster risk, for low-income municipalities in high risk areas, five per cent is a negligible sum with which to undertake adequate preparedness activities. A number of the consultations that took place as part of the Bopha After-Action Review noted that the local DRRM funds were insufficient to 'cover the needs of people affected by a disaster of this magnitude.'⁴⁴ The resource constraints are exacerbated by the fact that many local governments are unaware that up to 70 per cent of the fund may be used for disaster preparedness⁴⁵ – the former 'local calamity funds' having been accessible only for disaster response.

Critical to the roll-out of the DRRM Act at the local level is the establishment of local DRRM Councils, DRRM offices with dedicated staff, and DRRM Plans. While DRRM

'A comprehensive local DRRM plan entails critical analysis and it cannot be "copied and pasted" simply from one plan to another, which is, unfortunately, a mistake of some [local governments].'

NDRRMC, 'Synthesis of National Summit on DRRM for Local Chief Executives' (Manila, 12-15 and 20 March 2013) 25.

Councils are for the most part in place (the Bopha After-Action Review noted that DRRM Councils were 'organised and functional' at all levels of local government⁴⁶), the establishment of the DRRM offices and recruitment of staff has been slow. The DILG estimates that around a quarter of all local governments have had 'great difficulty in organising independent offices.'⁴⁷ One of the impediments is that under the *Local Government Code*, local governments are not permitted to use more than 55 per cent of their budget on salaries and other 'personal services'.⁴⁸ Many local governments have already reached their 55 per cent cap, and as such are unable to appoint the staff required by the DRRM Act. Thus many resort to designating existing staff to take on the roles required by the Act on top of their existing responsibilities – with obvious implications for the effectiveness of the DRRM office.

Regarding the local DRRM plans, DILG Under-Secretary Austere Panadero admits that 'by and large this is a work in progress.'⁴⁹ The NDRRM Plan recognises that 'risk-related information coming from the prevention and mitigation aspect [of the NDRRM Plan] is necessary in order for the preparedness activities to be responsive to ... the situation on the ground'⁵⁰ – but at the time the DRRM Act was passed, most local governments either lacked access to this sort of information, or had it but didn't know how to interpret it. Thus, in many cases the local DRRM plans that are in place do not reflect known hazards. Under-Secretary Panadero explains that 'the issue is not having a plan, the issue is the quality'; and that 'where we are now is revisiting the plans.'⁵¹ At the recent National DRRM Summit, the NDRRMC instructed all local governments to have their DRRM plans submitted by October 2013⁵² – an instruction that if adhered to, and if the additional guidance provided at the Summit is also followed, will mark a significant step forward. But with 42,000 *barangays* (villages) with varying resources and capacities, this will require substantial support.

Lack of capacity at the local level poses an impediment not only to planning, but to the fulfilment of the complete set of responsibilities under the DRRM Act. Under the Act, DRRM offices are responsible for facilitating risk assessments, consolidating local disaster risk information, organising trainings on disaster risk reduction, operating early warning systems, formulating local DRRM plans, and a range of other tasks.⁵³ These cannot feasibly be achieved utilising only existing expertise available at the local level. Support is thus required from the national government, but this is also limited. As described by Under-Secretary Panadero, 'there are less than 100 geologists in the whole country. Let's say it takes a geologist four days to train a local government to properly interpret a hazard map, and there are 42,000 *barangays*, well, do the maths.'⁵⁴ The Washi and Bopha After-Action Reviews both stressed the need for enhanced capacity building for local disaster management authorities, and specifically support for the development of contextualised disaster preparedness plans.⁵⁵

Responding to the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

One of the things consistently highlighted by recent disasters in the Philippines is the extent to which the poor as well as vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected.

In the case of the flash floods in Cagayan de Oro and Illigan following Tropical Storm Washi, it was the inhabitants of informal settlements in urban areas that bore the brunt of the crisis. An estimated 85 per cent of households affected by the storm lived in informal settlements, and most of the houses damaged or destroyed were made of 'wood and/or ... light materials.'⁵⁶ The Washi Post-Disaster Needs

Assessment found that the location of people and settlements in hazard-prone areas ‘played a big role in aggravating the impacts of the flash floods’, and that ‘the vulnerability of the residential areas along Cagayan River and Illigan River ... was heightened even further by the unsafe housing and living conditions given the substandard materials and construction of the informal settlements that consisted much of the housing stock in the affected areas.’⁵⁷

In the aftermath of both Washi and Bopha, the Government announced compensation for those whose property had been damaged or destroyed. But in both cases applicants had to show either title to their land or a tenancy agreement, and that their homes had not been in ‘no build zones’, thus rendering the assistance inaccessible to most of the affected population. A survey conducted in Washi-affected areas in late 2012 found that just 7.5 per cent of those displaced in Illigan and 5.9 per cent in Cagayan de Oro had been able to access a process whereby they could receive compensation or reclaim lost property or occupancy rights.⁵⁸ Following Bopha, even non-government actors were in some cases reluctant to provide transitional shelter unless they were able to confirm that the intended recipients had permission to remain on their land.⁵⁹ In the meantime the displaced lived in makeshift homes and under tarpaulins, a situation the shelter cluster in early 2013 predicted would last for around two years.⁶⁰

Those in informal settlements are not the only vulnerable groups whose needs have not always been adequately targeted. The Washi Post-Disaster Needs Assessment estimated that 80 per cent of vulnerable groups – women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and female-headed households, among others – were not given special attention; and a number of the communities consulted as part of the Bopha After-Action Review indicated similarly that vulnerable groups were not prioritised.⁶¹

Children were particularly affected by both Washi and Bopha, in part because of their vulnerability to psychological distress, but also because of the extent to which schooling was disrupted. One survey following Washi found that 23 per cent of families in Illigan said their children had to change schools as a result of their displacement, while five per cent said their children stopped attending school altogether.⁶² The disruption to schooling was compounded by the fact that many schools were used as evacuation centres, with the result that classes were not able to resume for several weeks, and in some cases months, following the disaster.⁶³ Typhoon Bopha also caused a disruption to schooling, this time not because schools were used as evacuation centres, but because so many were destroyed. Classes were shifted to temporary learning spaces and in most cases resumed following the Christmas break, but still children went a full month without classes. Children who

The Disproportionate Impact of Disasters on the Poor

“The poor often stand to lose the most in disaster contexts because they often have to settle on fragile and exposed land that is highly susceptible to the effects of disasters. When a disaster strikes, their pre-existing vulnerabilities are exacerbated, with women, children and marginalised groups bearing the brunt of the impact. After the disaster, the poor often also find their attempts to return to their homes officially denied on the grounds that return would be unsafe, and/or not permissible as they did not have official proof of a right to live there in the first place.”

Raquel Rolnik, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, and on the Right to Non-Discrimination in this Context’, A/HRC/16/42.

are out of school, particularly when their families have lost their primary means of income, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In an assessment conducted by the Child Protection Sub-Cluster in areas affected by Typhoon Bopha, 19 per cent of respondents said that children were being exploited, while 40 per cent of boys were found to be involved in 'harsh and difficult work' to support themselves or their families.⁶⁴

A particularly concerning issue facing women and children following both Washi and Bopha was increased vulnerability to human trafficking. Trafficking is an endemic problem at all times in the Philippines and particularly in Mindanao, but vulnerability significantly increases in times of disaster due to loss of assets and livelihoods. Following Tropical Storm Washi, trafficking in the affected areas increased by an estimated 10 per cent.⁶⁵ In a public statement just days after Bopha, DSWD Secretary Corazon Soliman described the affected areas as 'ripe for human traffickers,' and called upon the international community to support in minimising the risk.⁶⁶ But anecdotal evidence suggests that the disaster may have again given rise to an increase in trafficking. The Child Protection Assessment referred to above said that 'while not captured in the rapid assessment data, ... the illegal recruitment of at least 20 mothers in Davao Oriental to work abroad as helpers in Lebanon; the transporting of three girls to Compostella Valley to work in videoke bars located in mining areas; and the increasing number of prostituted women and girls ... in Agusan del Sur are all indications of the vulnerability of affected women and children to human trafficking during emergency.'⁶⁷

Vulnerability exacerbates disasters, and disasters exacerbate vulnerability. The vulnerable are most likely to be affected when disaster strikes – whether because they are in poorly constructed homes in high-risk areas, lack legal claim to their land, are vulnerable to exploitation, or have particular psychosocial needs. And it is the vulnerable who find it the most difficult to access assistance, and who – without targeted assistance – are the least likely to recover. The Philippines has taken great strides in improving its disaster management capacity, but still in some cases the vulnerable are left behind. In preparing for and responding to future disasters, it is incumbent upon both national and international actors to ensure that programs and policies are targeted to meet the needs of these most vulnerable groups.

The Role of the Military: Implications for Humanitarian Principles

As described above, the NDRRMC is headed by the Secretary of Defence. The OCD – the executive arm of the NDRRMC – is one of five bureaus within the DND, and disaster risk management is one of the DND's nine 'major final outputs' alongside land, air and naval force capability, joint operations management, and others.⁶⁸ This positioning of the OCD within the DND has a number of implications for disaster management.

Typhoon Bopha's Impact on Education

- **561** schools damaged
- **2,438** classrooms destroyed
- **104,066** children displaced from their regular learning spaces.
- **177** early childhood care and development centres damaged or destroyed, affecting **43,056** pre-school children.
- **All 39** day care centres in the town of Baganga, Davao Oriental battered to the ground.
- **1,900** classrooms in need of repair as of June 2013.

Save the Children, 'Education Response After Typhoon Bopha' (June 2013). Figures from Davao Oriental, Compostella Valley and Agusan del Sur.

The first issue relates to the budget. The OCD receives its annual budget allocation under the *General Appropriations Act* as part of the appropriation to the DND, thus competing for funds against the DND's other strategic priorities. In 2012, disaster risk management received just 1.24 per cent of the DND's total budget allocation.⁶⁹ The DRRM Act provided the OCD with an initial allocation of US\$23.3m, however this is a revolving fund, thus not intended to meet ongoing resourcing needs.⁷⁰ The OCD also receives a portion of the NDRRM Fund – established by the DRRM Act and appropriated annually on the recommendation of the NDRRMC⁷¹ – but much of this is disbursed to local government units as well as to the implementing government departments, and there is little remaining for the OCD to fulfil the wide-ranging responsibilities assigned to it.

A related issue is the reliance by the OCD and other departments, when responding to disasters, on military assets. In the case of large-scale disasters, the government departments tasked with disaster response generally do not have sufficient equipment or logistical capacity to carry out the necessary activities on their own. This means that they must draw upon the resources of the OCD, which – because the OCD does not have its own civilian resources – means military assets. While disaster relief activities are accorded priority in the aftermath of disaster, this reliance on military assets is problematic in responding to the needs of affected populations in time of conflict, when military assets may be otherwise prioritised.

Moreover, while the use of military personnel and assets in disaster response is standard practice throughout the world and is often appropriate due to the military's superior resources and capacity, in the Philippines this poses challenges in areas with a strong presence of anti-government groups. This was highlighted in the Bopha response, during which the military assumed a particularly prominent role. In Davao Oriental, including in conflict-affected areas, military-led Incident Command Posts were established as hubs for the coordination of humanitarian assistance, and for about a month following the disaster, military assets were used by some government departments and UN agencies for the transportation of relief items. The *Asia Pacific Military Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response Operations* recognise that emergency operations centres established by national governments may be 'part of an existing military command centre structure, entirely separate, or civilian led with military representation.'⁷² But for the military to play such a prominent role, in areas where there is an active conflict to which the government is a party, has the potential to blur the lines between humanitarian and military objectives and undermine the security of humanitarian staff and beneficiaries. Although the NPA and the Government of the Philippines did agree a ceasefire in December so as to allow relief activities to take place, by late January the NPA had warned that the presence of the military in their areas would be considered a hostile action.⁷³ As it was, the prominent role assumed by the military was not reported to have affected the security of humanitarian personnel nor resulted in restricted access to affected populations. But this significant blurring of military and humanitarian action, in a conflict environment, has the potential in future disasters to significantly undermine the effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

During the drafting of the DRRM Act, a number of proposals were put forward with regards the positioning of the OCD. One such proposal was that the OCD be positioned within the DILG or the DSWD; another was that the OCD be a standalone agency reporting directly to the President. One of the reasons these proposals were unsuccessful was the question of resourcing – an acknowledgement that if removed

from the DND, the OCD would require significant resources of its own. But removing the OCD from the DND need not mean that military assets can no longer be utilised in disaster relief – rather, that their utilisation would depend upon the request and fall under the management of a body not connected with the DND. The DRRM Act is scheduled for review in 2015, and this review should be seen as an opportunity for these proposals to be reconsidered.



Destruction caused by Typhoon Bopha in Compostela Valley, Philippines

Photo: Save the Children

5. The Facilitation and Coordination of Non-Government Assistance

International Humanitarian Assistance

The DRRM Act and the Implementing Rules and Regulations are relatively silent on the issue of international humanitarian assistance. The DRRM Act says only that a declaration by the President of a state of calamity ‘may warrant international humanitarian assistance’;⁷⁴ and the Implementing Rules and Regulations add that a call for international assistance by the President will be made on the basis of a recommendation by the NDRRMC. There is a section in the DRRM Act titled ‘mechanism for international humanitarian assistance’, but it deals only with the importation of relief items by or to the NDRRMC.⁷⁵ There is no reference to international assistance in the NDRRM Plan.

Generally speaking the Philippines is an example of positive cooperation between national and international actors, and in recent disasters the gaps in the legislation have not impeded the provision of international assistance. The *Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance*, developed by the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) states that ‘the absence of a specific domestic regulatory legal framework can make it very difficult for an affected state to properly oversee, regulate and facilitate the entry of life-saving relief.’⁷⁶ The Philippines is not a case in point; to the contrary, it demonstrates that positive cooperation *can* occur in the absence of a sound legislative framework for international humanitarian assistance. But the silence of the legislation on this issue means that the provision of international assistance relies upon positive relationships and good will, and is vulnerable to changes in senior leadership within Government and the international community – with potentially significant implications for disaster-affected populations. Ahead of the 2015 review of the DRRM Act, the Government of the Philippines would do well to consider incorporating key provisions from the IFRC’s *Model Act*, and possibly also adopting a new Act dealing solely with international assistance, so as to ensure a more robust system for the facilitation and regulation of international humanitarian assistance.⁷⁷

Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance

Article 7: Offers and Acceptance of International Assistance

- (a) Assisting International Actors may provide International Disaster Assistance in [country name] only if they have made an offer that has been accepted pursuant to this Article.
- (b) Assisting States and intergovernmental organisations [including the UN] interested in providing International Disaster Assistance shall direct offers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ... [who] shall then consult with the [disaster management authority] about such offers. Upon the direction of the [disaster management authority] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may accept such offers, in whole or in part. ...
- (e) In the absence of a general request for International Disaster Assistance, Assisting International Actors may make unsolicited offers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ... [who] shall consult with [disaster management authority] and, upon its direction, may accept such offers, in whole or in part.

Offers and Acceptance of International Assistance

In recent years, practice adopted by the Government of the Philippines has ranged from formally requesting international assistance, to declining offers of assistance on the grounds that the Government has the resources it needs, to the in-between position of not *requesting* international assistance but formally *accepting* offers made by the UN Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC).

Following Tropical Storm Ketsana in 2009, the Chairman of the NDCC made a formal request for international assistance.⁷⁸ This then provided the grounds for the provision of such assistance, including the launch of an appeal.

By way of contrast, in the aftermath of Typhoons Nesat and Nalgae in 2011, and in response to the monsoon floods in Luzon in 2012, the Government did not accept the UN HC/RC's offer of assistance. But in both cases, as in many smaller disasters, government departments made targeted requests to international agencies based on identified needs. Following Typhoons Nesat and Nalgae, the Department of Health asked the UN Population Fund for reproductive health kits, the OCD asked the World Food Program for a generator, satellite phones, life jackets and rubber boats, and local government units asked education cluster members for text books and other learning materials.⁷⁹ Similarly following the 2012 floods in Luzon, the UN reported that 'at the cluster level, the Government has asked HCT [Humanitarian Country Team] members for local support in camp management, water, sanitation and hygiene, health, food, livelihoods, logistics and information management.'⁸⁰ These requests, often conveyed by text message from senior government officials to UN agency heads, served as the basis for UN agencies and international NGOs to respond so far as they were able by diverting existing resources or drawing on internal emergency response funds.

Following Tropical Storm Washi and Typhoon Bopha, the Government again received offers of assistance from the UN RC/HC, and on these occasions gave written acceptance. In both cases the written acceptance was shared by OCHA with the HCT, and this then provided the grounds for the provision of humanitarian assistance by donors, the UN and international NGOs, as well as for the launch by the UN of a flash appeal.

The decision on the part of a national government to request, accept or decline international assistance has significant implications for humanitarian leadership, coordination and financing. Importantly, it determines the ability of the UN to launch an international appeal, which in turn affects funding volumes. Appeals following recent disasters in the Philippines where international assistance was either requested or accepted – Ketsana, Washi and Bopha – raised between \$17.5 million and \$106 million from international donors. None of the other disasters, where international assistance was not formally accepted, raised more than \$7.8 million, despite significant numbers affected.⁸¹ The Luzon floods in mid-2012 affected over 4.4 million people and attracted just \$3.8 million in international funds – less than \$1 per beneficiary. In contrast, Typhoon Bopha affected six million people and attracted \$42 million – or \$7 per beneficiary.⁸²

The formal acceptance of international assistance following Washi and Bopha, and the way in which this was understood by both national and international actors as providing a legitimate basis for such assistance to be provided, stands in contrast to experience elsewhere in Southeast Asia where the reluctance of governments to

request – while being willing to *welcome* – assistance has in some contexts given rise to considerable confusion amongst international (and sometimes national) actors.

The response to the 2011 floods in Thailand provides an example. Immediately following the floods, the UN RC sent a letter to the Prime Minister offering international assistance, and the Prime Minister indicated that assistance was welcome. This was not regarded by the international community as a sufficient basis on which to formally activate the humanitarian response system – including among other things the activation of the HCT and the cluster system, and the launch of an appeal. Reflecting on the response to the floods, the UN RC explained that it was ‘difficult to operate without any clear procedures related to requests for international assistance’, while one international NGO staff reflected that ‘at every [coordination] meeting, there was a sense that our hands were tied, that we could only do so much.’⁸³ The absence of a formal request for international assistance also caused difficulties in the response to the 2011 floods in

Cambodia, although for slightly different reasons. While there was consensus among international actors that there was no need to formally activate humanitarian leadership and coordination structures, the absence of a formal request undermined the national leadership of the response, because there was a sense amongst some members of the National Council for Disaster Management that it was not authorised to coordinate the activities of international actors in the absence of a Prime Ministerial request for international assistance.⁸⁴

The Philippines can be distinguished from the Thailand and Cambodia examples in part because it is a context in which the international humanitarian infrastructure – the HCT, clusters, etc – are already there. They were activated in 2007 in response to Typhoon Dorian, and have remained in place to coordinate disaster preparedness and response as required. This obviates the need for a discussion – which took up considerable energy in Thailand following the 2011 floods – regarding the trigger for the activation of these systems in the absence of a government request for assistance.

But there are also differences in the approach taken by international actors that set the Philippines aside from the Thailand and Cambodia examples. In Thailand in 2011, much was made of General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, which provides that ‘humanitarian assistance should be provided ... in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.’⁸⁵ The absence of such an appeal was seen by many as a sticking point. As explained by one

Requests for international assistance elsewhere in Southeast Asia: 2011 Floods

“Not one of the affected governments made a formal, public appeal for international assistance. But they nonetheless recognised that the scale of need outstripped national response capacities, and indicated that international assistance was welcome. This ‘welcome but not request’ approach ... should have been sufficient to enable international actors to step in and provide targeted support to complement national capacities so as to ensure a fast, effective humanitarian response. Instead, it gave rise to considerable uncertainty amongst international actors, and in some cases also amongst national disaster management authorities, regarding roles and responsibilities. This had implications for the leadership and coordination of the response.”

Save the Children, ‘Responding to Emergencies in Southeast Asia: Can we do better? A Review of the Humanitarian Response to the 2011 Thailand and Cambodia Floods’ (2012).

participant in a 'lessons learned' workshop, 'the Thai Government said that they welcome assistance but many agencies do not work that way.'⁸⁶ In the response to Washi and Bopha in the Philippines, the fact that the government merely accepted international assistance, rather than making an 'appeal', was not raised as an issue. One UN agency staff explained: 'the moment the government accepts, it's as if they've made the request. Everyone understands the dynamics.'⁸⁷

An additional factor setting the Philippines aside is the level of government familiarity and comfort with the international humanitarian architecture. Humanitarian coordination structures have for the most part been embraced by the government, to the extent that they are now described by government authorities as part of the government's own coordination system. This is discussed further below, but suffice to note that the question of whether a disaster is sufficiently serious to warrant the imposition of international humanitarian systems is a non-issue, because in the understanding of the government, with the exception of the UN HCT there are no internationally-led humanitarian systems.

The Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance

Neither the DRRM Act nor the Implementing Rules and Regulations say anything about the coordination of international humanitarian assistance. There is a reference in the NDRRM Plan to the 'activation of ... the cluster approach at the national and local levels' as a component of disaster response and relief operations, but no detail as to what this should look like.⁸⁸

The cluster approach is described in a Circular issued by the NDCC in 2007, titled 'Institutionalisation of the Cluster Approach in the Philippine Disaster Management System, Designation of Cluster Leads and their Terms of Reference at the National, Regional and Provincial Level.' The Circular recognises the 'benefits in institutionalising the cluster approach,' defines 11 clusters, designates government cluster leads and 'Inter-Agency Standing Committee Country Team Counterparts', and sets out the roles and responsibilities of cluster leads.⁸⁹ The roles and responsibilities largely mirror those described in the 2006 Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster Guidance Note (for country-level cluster leads).⁹⁰

The 2007 Circular was amended in 2008, reducing the number of clusters to eight.⁹¹ This revised list does not match the list of clusters that are actually operational in the Philippines, as described in the 2013 Humanitarian Action Plan.⁹² No memorandum on the cluster approach has been issued since the NDCC was replaced by the NDRRMC in 2010; although as of June 2013, the NDRRMC reported that an updated memorandum was being prepared.⁹³

The fact that structures for coordinating international assistance (specifically the cluster approach) are not described in the DRRM Act or the NDRRM Plan has not significantly impeded coordination on the ground. The cluster system is described by national and international actors alike as 'institutionalised' within the government's own coordination structures, and the DSWD has included the clusters in its own DRRM guidelines and disaster response plan.⁹⁴ OCHA's After-Action Review of the Washi response found that 'coordination between ... national/regional authorities and the international community was very good', that 'key clusters were quickly established in the affected areas or scaled up, with good intra-cluster coordination that resulted in sharing of resources and good team spirit', and that 'Government

cluster leads took strong leadership roles with the support of the HCT cluster co-leads'.⁹⁵ The Bopha After-Action Review found similarly that 'the clusters were rolled out quickly at regional, provincial and municipal level' and that 'regular information exchanges allowed clusters to identify priorities and coordinate effective responses.'⁹⁶

"In the new law, somehow they forgot to mention the cluster system. This created a little confusion at the start [of the Bopha response], because [local governments] were looking at the law and seeing that the clusters were not there. It would have been easier if they'd been there ... so if a local official says who are you, you can show them the law."

UN agency staff, Manila, June 2013.

But the fact that the clusters are not enshrined in the legal or policy framework for disaster management means that the currently well-functioning system is vulnerable to changes in interpretation as well as leadership. It also doesn't help with knowledge sharing, particularly in regions new to disaster response. One of the significant challenges in both the Washi and Bopha responses was that while coordination structures functioned well at the national and regional levels, this was much more challenging at the provincial and (in the case of Bopha) municipal levels because of a lack of prior awareness amongst local governments of the cluster system. The Washi After-Action Review found that 'the cluster system ... was a new concept for the majority of the local and regional humanitarian actors' and would benefit from 'clarification of the division of labour among key clusters and better definition of roles and responsibilities of the cluster leads',⁹⁷ while the Bopha After-Action Review noted similarly that 'there was a lack of awareness of cluster system ... at regional, provincial and municipal level.'⁹⁸ The Bopha After-Action Review recommended 'inclusion of the cluster approach into DRRM Act and institutionalising it into the DRRM Plan at municipal and local levels.'⁹⁹ As noted above the NDRRMC is reportedly in the process of updating the 2007 Circular on the 'institutionalisation of the cluster approach', but ideally the cluster system should be reflected in the DRRM Act and the NDRRM Plan so as to maximise understanding and utilisation by all actors.

The challenges in rolling out the cluster system at the sub-national level were not attributable just to their absence from the legal/policy framework, but also (and more importantly) to the lack of prior capacity for concerned local governments regarding the coordination of international humanitarian assistance. In short, neither the governors of the affected provinces, nor the mayors of the affected municipalities, had heard of the clusters prior to the emergency. In addition to inclusion in the DRRM Act and the NDRRM Plan, both the Washi and Bopha After-Action Reviews thus called for greater capacity building for local governments on humanitarian coordination, and to 'institutionalise [the cluster approach] in local government units.'¹⁰⁰

The Private Sector

The Philippines has experienced strong economic growth in recent years, driven in part by sustained growth in private consumption, and improved industry performance.¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly, as elsewhere throughout the region, the private sector is playing an increasingly prominent role in disaster response. This was highlighted following Typhoon Bopha, with a number of actors reflecting that the rapid response capacity of the private sector was particularly critical in the disaster's immediate aftermath, when traditional funding sources had not yet become available. The DSWD noted that its annual allocation from the NDRRM Fund was exhausted almost immediately, that the 'clearing time' for international donor funds was around 45 days and that its application for an additional amount from the NDRRM Fund did not come through for six months; and that as such the contribution of the private sector was critical in the initial stage.¹⁰² The Department of Education

noted similarly that its annual allocation from the NDRRM fund had been almost exhausted when the typhoon hit and that its application for an additional allocation was not approved for three months, and that the contribution of the private sector was thus critical in providing immediate support for temporary learning spaces. Communities also acknowledged the rapid response capacity of the private sector, with one community consulted as part of the Bopha After-Action Review saying ‘it took three days for assistance to reach remote areas due to damaged roads and fallen trees; the private sector reached these areas first and provided relief.’¹⁰³

But no one was coordinating the private sector. Some government departments encouraged private sector actors to attend cluster meetings, and some did so; but not being an established part of the system, they did not report their activities to the clusters. Nor were they subject to the technical standards with which other cluster members were expected to comply; nor was there an expectation that they would be coordinated *by* the clusters. As such, while the contribution of the private sector was key, it was not always appropriate. One international NGO staff recalled visiting one municipality nearly three months after Bopha and seeing ‘a warehouse full of dried noodle packets’ provided by the private sector, that no one had been able to use.¹⁰⁴ Similar issues were seen following Typhoon Washi – the After-Action Review noting that ‘assistance from the private sector ..., although generous and overwhelming, was not well coordinated, leading to duplicate and inequitable direct distribution.’¹⁰⁵

Amongst these efforts, however, were some examples of good practice. The shelter cluster, for example, hosted the secondment of an engineer from the Disaster Resource Partnership (DRP) – a network of international engineering and construction companies with a standing agreement with the IFRC regarding the deployment of personnel and assets to shelter cluster members in disaster response. The deployment provided the shelter cluster with much-needed surge capacity, while ensuring that the firm’s contribution to the response was aligned with the objectives of the shelter cluster.¹⁰⁶

The role of the private sector is acknowledged in the DRRM Act. The Act allocates a seat on the NDRRMC to a private sector representative, and tasks the OCD to ‘create an enabling environment’ for the participation of private groups.¹⁰⁷ But actors involved in both the Bopha and the Washi responses almost universally cite coordination of the private sector as an area for improvement.¹⁰⁸ The same has been acknowledged elsewhere in the region: the report from a recent policy dialogue organised by the OCHA Asia-Pacific Regional Office recognised the private sector ‘as an increasingly central player in all stages of humanitarian action’, and that ‘there was a need for the international humanitarian community to help set standards ..., provide training and generally foster greater professionalisation.’¹⁰⁹ With the role of the private sector already acknowledged in the national legal and policy framework, the Philippines is well placed to set an example for the region in this regard – as it has done already with the humanitarian cluster system.

6. The Regional Response: The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance

Typhoon Bopha provided a test case for the newly established ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms, and specifically for the AHA Centre. The AHA Centre was established in November 2011 with a mandate to, among other things, receive and consolidate risk data from NDMOs, disseminate information to member states, and facilitate joint emergency response.¹¹⁰ Bopha was the largest disaster to affect an ASEAN member since the Centre's establishment and its second 'test case' – the first having been being a smaller response to the Myanmar earthquake in November 2012.

By and large, it was a test that saw the AHA Centre meet expectations. The Centre deployed its Senior Emergency Response Officer to Manila even before the typhoon hit, and immediately following the disaster, sent its Executive Director and logistics officer, two national members of ASEAN's Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) and three generators to the affected areas. The AHA/ERAT staff participated in a rapid assessment alongside members of the UN's Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC), and over the following days were joined by additional AHA Centre staff and organised the provision of various relief items in response to identified needs. The AHA Centre was simultaneously compiling situation reports and sharing these with member states, and these reports triggered offers of assistance from Malaysia and Indonesia. The disaster also provided a timely opportunity for the AHA Centre to launch its Disaster Emergency Logistics System in Malaysia – which had been awaiting inauguration when the typhoon hit. The Disaster Emergency Logistics System was rapidly inaugurated, and relief items immediately dispatched from the warehouse to the affected areas.¹¹¹

One of the things worth noting about the AHA Centre's response to Bopha is that, in contrast to the international humanitarian response system – and in contrast to what is described in ASEAN's own operating procedures – there was a marked absence of bureaucracy. The procedures for the provision of emergency assistance amongst ASEAN member states are described in *The Standard Operating Procedures for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP)*. These provide that:

- a member state affected by a disaster shall provide an initial report to the AHA Centre within three hours using Form 1;
- the AHA Centre shall analyse the report and notify other member states using Form 2;
- the affected state shall continue to use Form 1 to update the AHA Centre, and the AHA Centre shall keep other states informed using Form 2;
- the affected state, if it needs assistance, shall request such assistance either directly from member states or through the AHA Centre using Form 3; and
- assisting states may initiate offers of assistance by submitting 'Form 4'.¹¹²

In fact the AHA Centre's first staff deployment (prior to the disaster) took place on the basis of a telephone conversation between the AHA Centre's Executive Director and the Administrator of the OCD. The subsequent movement of AHA and ERAT staff to the affected areas was also based on conversations between the AHA Centre and the OCD, while the provision of material support was based on written

correspondence. Forms 1 and 3 were not used, and in fact have never been used. One member of the OCD explained, 'you're in the middle of a disaster, you're in no situation to think about what form to use.'¹¹³ The fact that some of the steps were skipped did not pose an impediment, and in fact facilitated a rapid response. But AHA Centre staff stress that the procedures enable the Centre to provide 'a solid control system to tell assisting states exactly what assistance will be accepted'; and that this is the 'value-add' that the AHA Centre can provide.¹¹⁴ The AHA centre acknowledges that adherence to the procedures is a work in process, and similarly that the operating procedures will be revised if they are found no longer to serve their objectives.¹¹⁵

One of the critical factors underlying the success of the AHA Centre in the Bopha response was the extent to which AHA Centre assistance was placed under host government leadership. As described by the AHA Centre's Senior Emergency Response Officer, 'what we want to establish is that the AHA Centre belongs to the ASEAN NDMOs.'¹¹⁶ A second and equally critical factor was the greater acceptability, for affected states, of assistance provided from within the region. The importance of this aspect of regional *vis-à-vis* international institutions in facilitating positive cooperation with national authorities cannot be overstated. One AHA Centre staff deployed to the Bopha response explained, 'once [the national authorities] hear we're from ASEAN ... the reception is a lot easier because they know their country's been involved.'¹¹⁷ Another said 'you say you're from ASEAN and it opens doors because they know they're part of the community.'¹¹⁸

While the AHA Centre is regarded by both ASEAN and the NDRRMC as having played an important role in the Bopha response, primarily as a surge capacity for the NDRRMC, there are nevertheless some acknowledged areas for development. The first is a need for greater awareness regarding ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms amongst NDMOs and other parts of government involved in disaster response. While most senior NDMO staff are aware of ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms, this awareness generally does not extend to the sub-national level, nor to other government departments and agencies who, in the event of a disaster, are expected to coordinate with the AHA Centre. As explained by one AHA Centre staff, 'they're aware of ASEAN, but not the AHA Centre. Most don't know that ASEAN has a role in disaster response.'¹¹⁹ Until AHA Centre activities are known across the whole of government, there remains the potential for relief efforts to be impeded at various stages of the response – from clearance through customs upon arrival, to the coordination of relief in the field.

Second, if the AHA Centre is to assume an increasingly prominent role as a coordinating body, its relationship with existing international coordination systems, specifically OCHA, UNDAC and the UN's On-Site Operations Coordination Centres (set up and managed by UNDAC), will need to be defined. There are no standard operating procedures for situations in which UNDAC and ERAT are deployed simultaneously, and while this did not pose an impediment in the Bopha response, both the AHA Centre and OCHA acknowledge that this needs to be further clarified so as to maximise the value of each.¹²⁰ Following the Bopha response, the AHA Centre is considering the establishment of 'ASEAN coordination centres' to coordinate assistance provided bilaterally by ASEAN member states. This has the potential to take some of the load off UNDAC, which defines its role as coordinating incoming international relief more broadly. This is potentially a very positive

development, but in taking this forward the AHA Centre will need to carefully consider how it defines its role in relation to these existing mechanisms.

Finally, as the AHA Centre assumes a more prominent role, there is scope to further define not just the relationships between regional and international *actors*, but between regional and international *responses*, and specifically the triggers for the activation of each. As discussed above, the practice followed in recent Philippines disasters regarding international humanitarian assistance has been that the UN RC/HC makes an offer of assistance on behalf of the international community, which is then either accepted or declined by the NDRRMC. Discussions between the NDRRMC and the AHA Centre take place simultaneously (albeit with less formality), without one set of discussions being contingent upon, or even necessarily cognisant of, the other. While the current practice is appropriate with the AHA Centre being in the early stages of its development, moving forward there is certainly scope for these two negotiation processes to be more closely linked so as to allow a more graduated approach.



Children in the evacuation centre at Nereo R Joaquin National High School, Binan City, Laguna, following the Luzon floods of August 2012.

Photo: Olivia Zinzan, Save the Children

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Philippines provides a case study of a government that in recent years has significantly increased its capacity to respond to disaster risk. It has a robust legislative and policy framework in place, backed by strong government commitment. It has significantly increased its capacity to facilitate and coordinate international humanitarian assistance, in a manner that maximises collective capacities while retaining government leadership. And it has hosted the first mission of the AHA Centre, posing the possibility for the AHA Centre – as it develops its own capacity – to assume an increasingly prominent role in coordinating assistance from ASEAN member states. All of these areas present an opportunity for actors throughout the region to learn from experience in the Philippines.

But as has been shown above, there is also a critical need for further development if the Philippines is to keep pace with its dramatically increasing human and economic exposure to disaster risk. Recent disasters have seen communities taken by surprise, many local governments lack functioning DRRM offices, and local DRRM plans are often either not in place or in place but not reflective of actual hazards – something bound to become all the more challenging as the known patterns of tropical storms shift with climate change. Evaluations following both Tropical Storm Washi and Typhoon Bopha found that the needs of vulnerable groups often went unmet; the prominent role of the military poses a threat (albeit not realised in recent disaster responses) to humanitarian principles; and the positive facilitation of international humanitarian assistance is yet to be enshrined in national legislation. All of these issues pose significant challenges for national, regional and international actors striving to ensure that disaster management systems in the Philippines are equipped to meet the needs of the Filipino people in the face of increasing disaster risk.

To the Government of the Philippines

1. **Expedite efforts to provide training and support to local governments on all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, including the requirements of the DRRM Act, establishment of early warning systems, interpretation and use of hazard maps, preparation of local DRRM plans, establishment of DRRM offices and use of local DRRM funds.**
2. **As part of its scheduled review of the DRRM Act in 2015:**
 - a. **Conduct an analysis of the positioning of the OCD within the DND.** Such a review should consider the implications for humanitarian principles in situations where disasters strike populations in conflict-affected areas, and consider alternative options that would allow a clearer distinction between humanitarian and military operations.
 - b. **Consider expanding section 18 of the DRRM Act ('mechanism for international humanitarian assistance'), incorporating provisions from the *Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance*.** The Government could also consider adopting a new Act dealing solely with international humanitarian assistance, based on the *Model Act*. In either case, legislation should stipulate the process and authority for: determining whether international assistance is required; issuing requests for or

welcoming international assistance; and facilitating and coordinating the relief work of international actors. Provisions relating to international humanitarian assistance should also be reflected in the Implementing Rules and Regulations and the NDRRM Plan.

- 3. Ensure that disaster risk reduction and management efforts are well targeted so as to minimise the disproportionate impact of disasters on the poor and vulnerable groups.** This should include: supporting local governments to ensure that early warning systems reach remote areas, and that evacuation plans are socialised amongst vulnerable groups and make explicit provision for their needs; supporting local governments to ensure that DRRM plans recognise and respond to the needs of vulnerable groups; providing for those in informal settlements who may be excluded from government compensation schemes because of lacking legal claim to their land; and allocating government funds to infrastructure projects in poor communities in hazard prone areas to mitigate disaster risk.
- 4. In all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, continue to ensure that programs and policies target the needs of children.** This should include: support for emergency education so as to minimise disruption to children's schooling and guard against decreases in student retention and learning outcomes; and awareness raising amongst parents, communities, local authorities and service providers regarding the risks of child exploitation, and specifically trafficking and violence, in the aftermath of disasters, and capacity building for local authorities and service providers regarding the management of this risk.
- 5. Strengthen efforts to maximise the contribution of, and coordination with, the private sector.** This could include: workshops for private sector actors on the legislative and policy framework for DRRM; the issuance by the NDRRMC of a Memorandum outlining the responsibilities of the private sector when providing disaster relief, including coordinating with, reporting to and adhering to guidelines set by cluster lead agencies; and/or the inclusion of the responsibilities of private sector actors in the DRRM Act and the NDRRM Plan.

To Government and International Cluster Leads

- 6. Enhance efforts to train government staff at regional, provincial and municipal level on the roles and responsibilities of cluster leads, as well as on technical standards and guidelines applicable to that cluster.** Government departments could also consider including an explanation of the cluster system in departmental DRRM plans and guidelines – as has been done by the DSWD.
- 7. As part of disaster preparedness efforts, proactively engage with the private sector to identify opportunities for partnership in disaster response, and to map out ways of working.** The agreement between the DRP and the IRFC regarding the deployment of personnel and assets to shelter cluster members serves as a positive example in this regard.

To Donors and NGOs in the Philippines

8. **Support training for local governments in disaster risk reduction and management, and provide the technical support necessary to assist local governments develop or revise their DRRM plans.**
9. **Support the Government of the Philippines to ensure that in all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management, programs and policies target the needs of the most vulnerable, including children.**

To UN OCHA (Asia Pacific Regional Office and Country Office)

10. **At the regional level: continue to create opportunities for RC/HCs, HCTs and Disaster Management Teams, ASEAN and NDMOs to share experiences and lessons learned from recent disasters.** Learning events should include a focus on the facilitation and coordination of international humanitarian assistance in situations where governments welcome or accept, but do not request, such assistance, and (learning from the Philippines) the 'institutionalisation' of the cluster approach in national government systems.
11. **At both the regional and country level: enhance efforts to engage the private sector in humanitarian coordination systems and promote adherence to humanitarian standards.** This could include trainings for the private sector in humanitarian coordination, standards, principles and guidelines, and the development of systems for tracking the contribution of the private sector.
12. **At both the regional and country level: continue to monitor and advocate for adherence to humanitarian principles, particularly in conflict-affected areas.** In the Philippines, OCHA could consider supporting the NDRRMC to ensure that the 'sunset review' of the DRRM Act includes an analysis of the positioning of the OCD within the DND, and possible implications for humanitarian principles.

To the AHA Centre

13. **Continue outreach to all government actors engaged in disaster response, including those at sub-national level, so as to raise awareness regarding ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms.** Member states should also be encouraged to assume responsibility for ensuring that their own ministries, agencies and departments, at national and subnational level, are aware of ASEAN emergency response mechanisms.
14. **Recognising that civil society actors will in many cases be the first responders, support efforts to strengthen the engagement of regional civil society actors with ASEAN humanitarian response mechanisms.** This should include support for implementation of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management Civil Society Partnership Framework and related work, in keeping with the vision of a people-centred ASEAN.

To OCHA and the AHA Centre

15. **Continue to pursue initiatives aimed at clarifying roles and responsibilities between UNDAC and the AHA Centre, particularly where UNDAC and ERAT are deployed simultaneously.** As the AHA Centre assumes a more prominent role in

coordinating humanitarian assistance, also consider dialogue regarding linkages between the activation of regional and international humanitarian response systems, so as to open the possibility for a more graduated response.



A family take shelter in an evacuation centre in Cagayan de Oro, one month after Tropical Storm Washi
Photo: Kooi Canarias Photography for Save the Children

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