





Crisis reports

The Philippines

The Philippines at a glance

The crisis and the response

- In 2009, typhoons in Luzon affected 8.2 million people.
- The impact of unresolved conflict in Mindanao left hundreds of thousands displaced.
- The Luzon response was rapid: resources arrived within days as the US Army helped reach isolated communities.
- Post-typhoon needs assessments were uncoordinated: lack of standardised formats complicated information exchange.
- The government has been both an ally and a hindrance in crisis response: while it rapidly called for international assistance in Luzon, it has continued to downplay the Mindanao humanitarian crisis and rejected the need for robust international engagement.

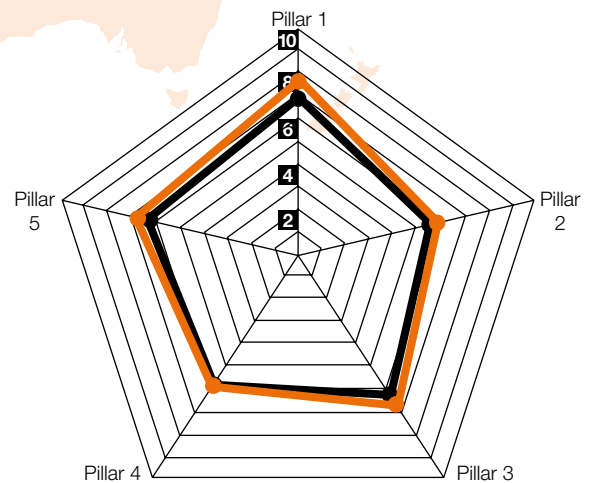
- The cluster system and national coordination systems were not well aligned.

Donor performance

- Humanitarian agencies generally praise the Luzon donor response as timely and flexible.
- However, initial support quickly peaked, leaving the Flash Appeal only 43 percent covered by October 2010. Coverage of shelter, education and is below ten per cent, with no response to livelihoods and early recovery needs.
- Donors over-relied on government declarations of post-typhoon needs and there was insufficient subsequent monitoring.
- CERF disbursement procedures were slow and bureaucratic: many would-be applicants could not meet deadlines and conditions.
- Donors have been insufficiently engaged in Mindanao.

Key challenges and areas for improvement

- Donors should diversify funding to support the work of local tiers of government and Philippine civil society.



— The Philippines
— All Crisis Average

HRI 2010 scores by pillar

Pillar 1 Responding to needs
Pillar 2 Prevention, risk reduction and recovery
Pillar 3 Working with humanitarian partners
Pillar 4 Protection and international law
Pillar 5 Learning and accountability

- Donors should advocate more strongly for government adherence to international humanitarian law in Mindanao.
- Partners must be encouraged to genuinely involve beneficiaries in needs assessment and evaluations.
- There is a need for additional funding for both emergency and reconstruction needs in Mindanao.
- Frequency of natural disasters is likely to increase due to climate change: more substantial DDR investment, especially at community level, is imperative.

The Philippines

Perils of politicisation of donor response to crises

The Philippines is considered a reliable and stable partner by the international community. A middle-income country, in mid-table in the Human Development Index, the government projects an image of a well-governed, liberal democracy. However, responses to two major crises in 2008–2009 – typhoons which devastated the island of Luzon and particularly the capital, Manila, and a renewed upsurge of mass displacement caused by the long-running armed conflict in the island of Mindanao – produced markedly different responses. The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) team found that while the international community mobilised in initial response to the Luzon storms – but then failed to effectively support recovery – it has done relatively little to alleviate the suffering of those who remain affected by conflict in Mindanao.

Operational environment

The Philippines archipelago is highly susceptible to floods, earthquakes, volcanoes and climate change. Over half of the population lives in areas prone to natural disasters and/or conflict (UNICEF 2010). In September 2009, tropical storm Ondoy (international name Ketsana) was quickly followed by cyclone Pepeng (international name Parma) inundating 80 percent of Manila, home to some 12 million people. This was followed by another typhoon, Santi (international name Mirinae) in late October. The impact was primarily felt in urban areas where preparedness capacity was woefully inadequate. As a result of the storms, almost a thousand people died and 220,000 houses were damaged or destroyed. Damage was estimated at US\$4.4 billion, or 2.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (World Bank 2009). 680,000 people were displaced and took shelter in evacuation centres. In a city where half the population lives in informal settlements, the disaster disproportionately affected already marginalised populations, including the indigenous and the urban poor, aggravating existing long-term vulnerabilities and inequalities. Several million people are still living within affected areas (flooded or affected by landslides) with irregular access to assistance. Exacerbating the Ondoy–Pepeng damage to agricultural production in Luzon, the El Niño phenomenon affected rice cultivation, the World Food Programme (WFP) warning of “a slow onset emergency” (WFP 2010).

The Philippines is also home to a conflict that caused the world’s greatest displacement in 2008–2009. As many as 750,000 people in Mindanao abandoned their homes, an event which went virtually unnoticed (Amnesty International 2009 and Norwegian Refugee Council 2009). At the heart of the conflict in the southern Philippines is the problematic integration of the Muslim minority and their resentment of decades of state-supported migration of Christians. In the impoverished Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) – which contains most of the country’s majority Muslim provinces – WFP reports that half of the population live below the national poverty line of 60 cents per person per day, 30 percent of under-fives are stunted and only a third complete primary education. Of those living in conflict areas in Mindanao, 30 percent are food insecure and an additional 40 percent are putting their livelihoods at risk by borrowing at prohibitive rates to meet household food needs (WFP 2010). Recurrent armed conflict over four decades has caused the deaths of 120,000 to 160,000 people and has displaced up to two million people at least temporarily (Lara et al. 2009). In the conflict-affected areas of southern Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, violence is frequent, unpredictable and often highly localised. Muslim separatist insurgencies dominate media attention, particularly the conflict between the government and the internationally-designated terrorist group, the Jama’ah Abu Sayyaf which, unlike the larger Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), is unrelenting in its jihadist commitment to armed struggle. Government attempts to depict the conflicts to the outside world as pitting Moro “rebels” and “terrorists” against state “security” forces simply do not reflect the facts on the ground (Hedman 2009). There are multiple insurgent movements. Substantial displacement has additionally resulted from conflict with the Maoist-inspired New People’s Army (NPA), political party rivalries, tensions between Christians and Muslims and between settlers and non-Islamised indigenous peoples and clan-based vendettas (*rido*). Currently the primary cause of ongoing displacement in Mindanao is *rido* (IRIN 2010a).

In August 2008, an MILF-government agreement to expand the boundaries of the ARMM was overruled by the Philippines Supreme Court, causing renegade MILF elements to attack Christian villages, thus provoking a major military offensive and extensive displacement. The intense fighting ended inconclusively and the MILF retains substantial military capacity. Talks in Malaysia brokered by the international community are set to resume in October 2010 and both President Benigno Aquino, who took office in June 2010, and the MILF have pledged to find a peaceful solution. However, relations on the ground remain tense and there seems little immediate prospect of resolution of the four decade-long conflict. Many regard the conflict as intractable, seeing the only solution as a referendum on the right to self-determination under United Nations (UN) supervision of the kind conducted in Timor-Leste. A survey undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which sampled opinion across the Philippines, found 56 percent of respondents in favour of deployment of international peacemakers (ICRC 2009). This will not happen given the government's robust opposition to internationalisation of the conflict and the support it receives for this stance from key Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) countries with which it has strategic partnerships.

Disparate government response

The key government body for disaster preparedness, planning and emergency response is the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC). The government is reportedly decentralised but in reality, central government agencies are relatively well-resourced while lower tiers of government – known as Local Government Units (LGUs) are not. The state gives the impression of being able to cope with disasters but in practice is often found wanting, especially in rural areas and informal urban settlements where there is little state presence. This greatly impeded the initial response to the Luzon typhoons, as those living in informal urban settlements were the most affected.

As soon as the scale of damage from Ondoy, the first typhoon, was apparent, the government appealed for international support. The first request came just two days after the first typhoon although disaster-affected areas were still mostly inaccessible and humanitarian technical teams had done no assessments. A number of nations immediately provided bilateral support to the government.

By contrast, the government sought to avert attention from the conflict in Mindanao and the pivotal role played by its security forces in expanding the impact on civilians. Many humanitarian actors confirmed to the HRI team the consistent government attempts to downplay talk of humanitarian crisis in Mindanao. International agencies continue to operate under severe security and political constraints. In June 2009, the Philippine government discouraged aid agencies from providing large quantities of food to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in an effort to prevent its alleged diversion to the MILF WFP distributions have been hampered by similar tension, and access to IDP locations remains problematic. There are reports that aid workers and local journalists visiting IDP settlements have been monitored by security personnel (Amnesty International 2009). The government has often unilaterally closed evacuation centres without consulting IDPs or international agencies, often resulting in IDPs being further displaced to remote areas out of reach of assistance (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2009).

The government has, since the July 2009 ceasefire, started doing more to assist IDPs but not enough to ensure that they are offered sustainable livelihood opportunities and recovery assistance upon return, or to support alternative settlement options. The response has been hampered by the absence of a clear and coherent return and rehabilitation strategy, and insufficient resources. Seeking to minimise IDP numbers, the government refuses to recognise many displaced people in informal settlements as IDPs and prematurely declares people to be no longer displaced. Entire municipalities affected by the conflict are simply ignored (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010). IDP statistics produced by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) – the government's IDP focal point – usually contradict those provided by other agencies. Announcing an ambitious plan to end displacement and rehabilitate all conflict-affected communities the government reported in September 2010 that there were only 60,000 IDPs remaining. Analysts point out that the number of “invisible” unregistered and untracked IDPs is undoubtedly greater (IRIN 2010b).

Rapid, but unsustainable international response to typhoons

On October 6th 2009, the United Nations (UN) launched a Flash Appeal for the Luzon typhoons which was subsequently revised upwards to US\$144 million. There was a rapid initial response, but after a few weeks this quickly tailed off, leaving the appeal only 43 percent funded. However, some reported that inaccurate needs assessments led to an exaggeration of the needs. The main donors were the United States (US) (21.3 percent, the European Commission (EC) (19.9 percent), Japan and Australia (7.3 percent each). Eleven percent came from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Response to coordination, logistics and food needs was good but only eight percent of protection needs were covered and there was zero response to funding requests for livelihoods and early recovery interventions.

Operational agencies responded promptly. Over 60 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) deployed teams to help with the three back-to-back emergencies. Because it was logistically easier, many focused on the needs of those in evacuation centres. By the time of the HRI field mission in January 2010, many organisations had already left, even though needs remained, particularly for shelter, water and sanitation. The HRI team found a general lack of disaster preparedness and post-disaster coordination. The government's inaccurate needs assessments were accepted uncritically by donors and UN agencies. Many organisations shared with the HRI team their frustration over the mismatch between needs expressed in the Flash Appeal and those their teams encountered in the field. They criticised the UN and donors for relying on government declarations of needs and trusting the NDCC to respond without sufficient monitoring and follow-up. There is also general regret that needs assessment were done sectorally with little effort to integrate sectors and obtain a realistic overall picture of basic needs.

Muted international response to Mindanao crisis

When it comes to the little-known Mindanao conflicts, the international response to the 2008–2009 displacement was limited. The government prevented any Flash or Consolidated Appeal, preferring contributions to be channeled discreetly through CERF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – long operational in Mindanao – and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The European Union (EU) has been by far the largest humanitarian donor in Mindanao, contributing some US\$30 million between August 2008 and November 2009 to assist those affected by conflict (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010).

Considering that the southern Philippines has some of the worst social, educational and economic indicators in the country and that a substantial number of people are made vulnerable by recurrent ongoing displacement, it is surprising there are so few operational international agencies. The response to the 2008–2009 displacement has “at times appeared to lack leadership, coordination and an overall coherent strategy” (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2009). International staff are often unable, for security reasons, to travel extensively in conflict zones. The overall impact of international interventions is palliative and fails to address the structural causes of the conflict.

Most donors channeled their resources through the ICRC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and IOM. The ICRC especially enjoys stable financial support from a diverse range of donors, which allows the organisation to operate consistently in most parts of Central Mindanao. Also, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) benefit from regular funding from donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). The open grants or multiple-year conventions provided by these donors give the INGOs enough stability to maintain a permanent operational presence. The constant presence of these humanitarian partners means that they are generally accepted by the key players in the crisis, except for some of the more violent groups

WFP returned to the Philippines in response to the Mindanao displacement and has been providing aid to 1.5 million people, yet a relatively small number of international actors have provided services to IDPs or promoted peace and reconciliation projects. There are instances in which the community-based organisations INGOs have sponsored (or formed) have averted potential crises from spilling over into bloodshed and displacement. At the same time, there often appears to be an element of exaggeration of success, perhaps driven by funding imperatives? Christian NGOs hold many seminars in Cotabato City – where urban IDPs are concentrated – but cannot operate and have little credibility in Muslim majority rural areas.

Consequences of aid politicisation

Politicisation of aid clearly affected responses to both crises. The Luzon flooding reinforced the position of presidential election candidates in Manila slums where political clientelism is rife. At the LGU level, there were similar reports of aid politicisation as many politicians saw to it that only their supporters received aid. In Mindanao, the operational methods of some donors are distorted by political or security agendas. For example, USAID deploys field teams to isolated areas in a “hit and run” strategy, accompanied by US military escorts because they lack regular access and are not necessarily accepted by the local communities. In Manila, however, US army logistical support was effective in evacuating, assessing needs and distributing relief to isolated slum communities.

A consequence of the political decision to accept Philippine government needs assessments at face value was subsequent difficulty in changing tactics. An Oxfam evaluation of the typhoon response noted that it proved very “hard to revisit very early decisions in terms of staffing, programme direction and size, partnership models and assessment findings... There was a perceived lack of flexibility to adapt programme plans as scenarios, needs and operating realities changed,” (Tinnemans et al. 2010).

Protection: national and international silence

The humanitarian community did not report major protection shortcomings in response to the Luzon storms. However, some INGOs highlighted the lack of consideration of the needs of women, people with disabilities and older people. A real time evaluation echoed this concern, stressing the “urgent need to enhance camp committee structures, including IDP participation, (particularly women), incorporate protection measures for vulnerable groups in the displaced population, and facilitate the development of adequate exit strategies,” (Polastro et al. 2009).

In Mindanao, human rights groups have long drawn attention to evidence of death squad killings and state complicity in Mindanao. Powerful clans have deployed militias with full knowledge of the government who value their ancillary role in conflict with insurgents. Almost all cases of extra-judicial killings and other human rights violations remain unreported and uninvestigated (Amnesty International 2009). It was hoped that national and international outrage over the November 2009 Maguindanao massacre of civilians and journalists – the single deadliest event for journalists in history – would lead to exemplary prosecution of its elite perpetrators. However, impunity has continued as before. Implicated security personnel have not been investigated and witnesses are being intimidated and murdered as the government ignores recommendations from the UN Special Envoy on Extrajudicial Executions to establish witness protection programmes (Human Rights Watch 2010).

The International Crisis Group (2009) notes that Mindanao is a place for the military to “let off steam”, a place to win promotion, even if intimidatory acts further alienate local populations and prevent IDPs from returning. International agencies operating in Mindanao “have shown little eagerness to engage the government on sensitive human rights issues,” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2009). Most donors remain silent, expressing whatever concerns they have informally to agencies such as the ICRC. Humanitarian organisations interviewed by the HRI team reported that Norway is the sole donor directly engaging in advocacy towards all parties in the Mindanao conflict.

Clusters and coordination

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid(OCHA) established a country office and sub-office in Mindanao in response to the escalation of conflict in Mindanao in 2008 and the 2009 storms. Both offices were understaffed and OCHA largely managed coordination of the Luzon response remotely from its regional office in Bangkok.

The concept of clusters is nothing new in the Philippines and the term was being used within government circles prior to its adoption by the UN as part of the humanitarian reform process. In response to the natural disasters, the government established cluster systems in both Luzon and Mindanao, coordinated by the NDCC and the UN set up a parallel international cluster system. Many considered that the clusters have mainly been involved in information-sharing, with no emphasis on priority-setting and collective decision-making. This confirmed other reports that the cluster system in the Philippines is not working as intended (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010).

Coordination in Mindanao is plagued by political interference from the government. Whereas donors used to regularly hold meetings with partners to discuss issues around access, protection and coordination, frankly, they are now forced to sit through meetings attended by the government, a protagonist to the conflict with political interests in shaping the response. To achieve real results, humanitarian agencies have had to hold parallel coordination meetings without government representatives.

Root causes of crises unaddressed

Land rights and housing issues pose significant constraints to early recovery and durable solutions for both typhoon- and conflict-affected IDPs. In urban areas, land administration and planning is inadequate. Most local governments are unable to provide accurate information about land ownership, boundaries and land value. In Manila, there is ongoing recrimination over why the typhoons were so devastating.

A Catholic cardinal described the government’s urban recovery and land use policies as a “a structure of sins” for prioritising shopping malls, upmarket residential developments and golf courses over providing safe dwellings for the urban poor. Defending slum dwellers from the accusation they were responsible for the extent of 2009 flooding, the church apportions blame to politicians, property developers and loggers and warns of future flooding (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2009). In the absence of long-term solutions –from either the Philippine authorities of the international community – and with no other option available to them (Baldwin 2009) – people have returned to regions prone to flooding and are rebuilding poor, informal housing structures that may again put their lives in danger, especially if there is no investment in disaster preparedness (IRIN 2010c).

In Mindanao, international actors seem to have limited understanding of the local dynamics, particularly around access to land, which drove Islamic radicalisation, conflict and displacement. They wrongly assume, like the government, that most want to return to place of origin. Observers note that a large number of urban IDPs are landless and have no reason to return home if they have no prospects of establishing agricultural livelihoods or regaining land taken from them at gun-point. International Alert notes that “the core of the problem is the exclusionary political economy that is developed and sustained through a complex system of contest and violence... Muslim Mindanao continues to be excluded from the fruits of national growth... growth in the region itself is unsustainable and mainly dependent on election and reconstruction-related consumption spending,” (Lara et al. 2009).

The international community seems to have washed its hands of Mindanao and provides only minimal support to reconciliation processes, which are of crucial significance. In the aftermath of the Maguindanao massacre, donors are wary of committing reconstruction funds, seeing an endless cycle of impunity, violence and revenge. The ICRC notes with regret that the conflict in Mindanao rarely gets media attention (AlertNet 2010).

Assessing donor performance

Many donors responded quickly to the typhoons’ Flash Appeal. Humanitarian organisations highlighted the prompt response of the US and Japan. Especially slow to respond were Australia, the CERF, and ECHO, reportedly requiring long negotiations with implementing partners that deterred some agencies from working with them. Similarly, CERF disbursements took excessively long to deliver, and then imposed unrealistic spending deadlines. This was less problematic for UN agencies able to advance their own funds, but for some INGOs, these conditions meant that they were unable to use CERF funding. Feedback on the timeliness of Spain’s funding varied. While it was slow to respond to the Flash Appeal, Spanish NGOs with framework agreements with the AECID received funding quickly.

“The international community seems to have washed its hands of Mindanao.”



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Donors did not always channel their resources to the best placed organisations to meet the needs. In general, donors provided little support to either LGUs or the many community-based organisations found throughout the Philippines. They instead preferred to work with traditional international partners with slower deployment capacity and with early withdrawal strategies. Japan, for example, channelled the vast majority of its funding bilaterally through the Philippine government, also supporting Japanese NGOs.

Responding to needs proportionally is a challenge for many donors. Many prioritised food, despite gaps in other sectors. The US and Japan are both reported to have engaged in food dumping, which was highly inefficient and missed more isolated areas. Japan, on the other hand, is highly involved in rehabilitation and reconstruction through the World Bank’s Post Disaster Needs Assessment. Similarly, Australia is renowned for its efforts toward early recovery, which was neglected by many other donors.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is essential in such a disaster-prone country and this is increasingly reflected in donors' priorities for the Philippines. ECHO has been investing in long-term DRR for the past few years and Australia has established a large programme for the Philippines. The US considers DRR a priority for its future country strategies, yet some field organisations considered that the US needs to do more to ensure that risk reduction is incorporated earlier in emergency response.

The response of key donors to the Mindanao crisis is characterised by inconsistent efforts or biased agendas. The US is regularly involved in this crisis. Some attribute this to the US' security agenda to support the Philippine government and their military operation stationed there. ECHO's presence in Mindanao has been intermittent, but they recently released a new funding line for Mindanao. Australia also has a conflicting agenda in Mindanao, as a result of their security agreement with the government. They are known in the Philippines, however, for helping with coordination and engaging in advocacy, as compared to other donors. Spain is also involved in Mindanao through the Mindanao Trust Fund, a mechanism for development partners to pool resources and coordinate support for the reconstruction and development of conflict-affected areas.

Lessons learnt and recommendations for the future¹

The responses to the typhoons and conflicts in Mindanao offer opportunities to learn from the past, in the hope of improving current and future responses. The HRI team urges the international community to provide additional funding for emergency and reconstruction needs in Mindanao and to focus on key issues which have constrained the response to recent disasters in a nation which is already one of the world's most hazard-prone and is now increasingly vulnerable to climate change.

1 Investment in disaster preparedness:

The severity of damage and loss of lives and livelihoods in Luzon should not have come as a surprise, for experts and donors have long lamented the Philippines lack of coordination and preparedness (IRIN 2010d). This is compounded by a low level of public awareness of climate change issues (IRIN 2010e). Some donors invest significantly in disaster risk reduction (such as Australia) but far more effort is needed, especially in community preparedness.

2 Needs assessment:

Needs assessments were often carried out individually, without a coordinated analysis and common approach. This is a recurrent problem that the humanitarian system fails to address. Recent experience in the Philippines again highlights how important it is to use – and share the results of – common assessment templates and standardised needs assessments when planning responses to rapid onset natural disasters.

3 Supporting local capacity:

Donors must stop uncritically channelling assistance through central government. While humanitarian agencies should not bypass national authorities, they need support from donors to clearly define national and local level state responsibilities. All must work together to enhance the preparedness and response capacity of LGUs and civil society.

4 Supporting early recovery:

Much more needs to be done to support early recovery, especially around shelter and livelihoods issues. As the HRI team was told by an implementing agency: "we need more support after the 'euphoria' is over, four to five months after the disaster, for mid-term projects."

5 Transparency:

Preventing future climate-change disasters will require transparent, accountable and results-based recovery and reconstruction programmes that will monitor activities, track funds, evaluate interventions and report these to the public.

6 Making the cluster system work:

The cluster system needs stronger UN leadership to improve coordination with the government in order to mitigate the, generally negative, impact of government domination. Future responses should not again be based upon parallel coordination systems – one for national coordination and the other to coordinate the international effort.

7 Humanitarian access:

In Mindanao, the most powerful donors do not do enough to advocate for access and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in their bilateral talks with the government. It is essential that donor governments raise these issues, make genuine efforts to separate security and humanitarian agendas when liaising with the government and do more to promote to the authorities the importance of adhering to *Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)*.

¹ For a more comprehensive list of recommendations arising from the response to the Luzon storms, and more background information and analysis, see the DARA-led real time evaluation report (Polastro et. al. 2010).

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Information based on field interviews with key humanitarian agencies in the Philippines from 16 to 22 January 2010, and 103 questionnaires on donor performance (including 74 OECD/DAC donors).

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