HIGHLIGHTS

- Prolonged dry spells and stronger storms are expected to impact the Philippines this year, as the country braces for the El Niño phenomenon.
- Humanitarian partners revise the Zamboanga Action Plan; US$12.9 million needed to assist over 64,000 displaced people.
- Environmental concerns have led to the closure of a Tacloban city waste site that received over half a million cubic metres of Typhoon Haiyan debris.

PHILIPPINES BRACES FOR EL NIÑO PHENOMENON

Drier conditions and decreased rainfall expected; tropical cyclones projected to affect the north with increased intensity

Prolonged dry spells and stronger storms are expected to impact the Philippines this year, as the country braces for what could be its worst El Niño in 17 years. The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) has warned not only of drier conditions and decreased rainfall, but also of stronger tropical cyclones once the rainy season begins in June, with the peak of El Niño’s impact expected in the last quarter of 2014 or even early into 2015.

Typically, the El Niño phenomenon causes the behaviour of tropical cyclones to become erratic, affecting their path and intensity. According to PAGASA, the paths tropical cyclones follow this year could shift to the northern part of Luzon Region. El Niño could also affect average rainfall patterns, resulting in reduced rainfall across the country. PAGASA is urging local government authorities, especially those in Luzon, to prioritize mitigation and preparedness measures for this year’s El Niño. The Philippines averages 20 cyclones annually.

In 1998, an El Niño affected nearly 74,000 hectares of agricultural lands in 18 provinces in the Philippines. According to the Department of Agriculture, the country’s rice and corn production during the first half of 1998 were reduced by 27 and 44 per cent respectively. The province of Negros Occidental in the Central Visayas Region was declared under a state of calamity because of a prolonged drought that affected more than 900,000 people. In Mindanao, 74 people died and more than 450,000 agricultural families faced severe food insecurity because of the drought caused by El Niño.

HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS REVISE ZAMBOANGA ACTION PLAN

$12.8 million needed to continue providing assistance to 64,000 IDPs

More than seven months after fighting broke out between a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, over 64,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled the fighting are still unable to return home in Zamboanga City and in need of humanitarian support. A quarter of the IDPs are living in extremely difficult conditions in overcrowded evacuation centres and remain highly vulnerable to health and protection risks.

In May, humanitarian partners finalized the revised strategic response plan to the crisis in consultation with local and national authorities. With more than 10,000 homes destroyed or damaged by the fighting, Government rehabilitation efforts continue but return or permanent relocation is not expected to be fully completed until at least mid-2015.
In the interim, humanitarian partners have a critical role to ensure that IDPs receive the support they need. Further decongestion of crowded evacuation centres, water and sanitation, transitional and permanent shelter and access to culturally-sensitive livelihood opportunities for all IDPs are urgently needed.

The revised Action Plan is seeking $12.8 million with an unmet requirement of $7.4 million to continue to provide support from March to August 2014.


Environmental concerns lead to closure of Haiyan waste site

Prior to the destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda), Tacloban City was planning a new settlement north of the city. This will include 1,000 houses in a 10 hectare area called Tacloban North. Concerns were raised, however, that the area earmarked for Tacloban North is located too close to the city's waste dump site, which has received waste for the last ten years, and has most recently served as the main dumping site for Haiyan debris. Concerns have been raised for several months that residents of areas in ‘no-dwelling zones’ (as reported in the April Bulletin) may be encouraged to move to Tacloban North.

Environmental concerns have been raised because the waste site does not have bottom lining, or a system to collect the liquid waste that drains from the site, causing a high risk of infiltration directly into groundwater and open water bodies downstream. Toxic and hazardous substances and diseases could also spread through air particles, dust, consumption of animals and fish or be directly absorbed by vegetation.

In the six months since Haiyan, the site has received over half a million cubic metres of debris.

In the six months since Haiyan, the site has received over half a million cubic metres of debris, prompting Tacloban authorities to announce in May that it will close the existing dumpsite, as it has reached capacity, and establish a new landfill site at another location as soon as possible. A 200 metre buffer zone has been created around the closed site using a perimeter fence and signboards. Nearby land has also been purchased by the city for the relocation of people.

To address the environmental and health risks, and to accelerate the closure process, humanitarian organizations will assist the city with pre-closure assessments and the selection of an alternative landfill site. Environmental impact mitigation measures such as slope stabilization, compaction and soil covering have already been implemented. One proposed use for the closed waste site is as a park or leisure area, and there will likely be some land use restrictions and long-term monitoring of the impact on groundwater and open water bodies.
If there is one lesson that the residents of Region VIII say they have learned from Haiyan, it is that there is no room for complacency as a tropical storm approaches.

Humanitarians review Haiyan successes and challenges

**Eastern Visayas After Action Review of the Haiyan response**

An After Action Review of the humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan in Region VIII (Eastern Visayas) was conducted in May, aimed at identifying the successes and challenges over the last six months. It looked at the lessons learned in the three key result areas: coordination, information management and resource mobilization. The Government, humanitarian and civil society actors will be able to draw upon these lessons to better prepare for and respond to future disasters.

Among the key findings was the need to strengthen coordination and information sharing among local governments and humanitarian agencies, and the need for guidance from cluster lead agencies to strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) and contingency plans.

As part of the review, which was conducted in Tacloban City, Ormoc and Guiuan, affected people participated in focus group discussions and interviews to share their thoughts on the humanitarian response. If there is one lesson that the residents of Region VIII say they have learned from Haiyan, it is that there is no room for complacency as a tropical storm approaches.

Participants told humanitarian actors that they need to be more involved in the DRRM planning process, particularly with the DRRM Councils that are in place across the Philippines. In the case of Haiyan, some DRRM Councils were not fully activated as elections had recently taken place, and newly elected officials had not yet received appropriate training.

“Make us part of the planning process”

Participants said that if they were part of the planning process and participated in the training and drills, there would be less risks for vulnerable groups, as each member of the
community would have their role to play. In the case of Haiyan, neighbours and friends united in the spirit of community, helping each other and sharing whatever resources they had.

The elderly people of San Antonio, Tunga barangay (village) shared that disaster risk reduction orientations are carried out down to the barangay level, but the application of the strategies is another matter. Older people also highlighted that while they received aid this was not always appropriate to their needs.

In Brief

Davao Region contingency planning workshop
More than 70 humanitarians and government officials participated in a contingency planning workshop in Davao City, Mindanao on 22-23 May led by the Office of Civil Defence Region XI, and members of the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. The workshop produced contingency plans for the Davao Region with the aim to enhance the humanitarian response capacity, predictability and accountability of the Government and local humanitarian community, in order to provide effective support to people in need in time of emergency.

Information Management training for local government staff
In response to the high demand from Clusters, information management (IM) counterparts and requests from provincial and municipal officers, workshops were conducted with operational government staff in five Typhoon Haiyan-affected areas. The objectives of the workshops were to enhance knowledge of humanitarian coordination and IM skills for decision-making. Between March and June, 197 government staff from 72 local government units/municipalities attended the day and a half long workshops learning about the international humanitarian system, the national coordination structure, assessments, data collection, analysis and mapping. According to evaluations of the attendees, the workshops were highly valuable and the strongest recommendation was to increase the duration to allow more time for the hands-on modules.