

HIGHLIGHTS

- Zamboanga Communications Working Group readies over 28,000 remaining IDPs for durable solutions.
- Back-to-school campaign benefits conflict-affected children in Mamasapano.
- Communication, accountability and community participation prompted for better humanitarian response and preparedness.
- Carpenters build resilience in communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

FIGURES

Zamboanga Crisis

# of IDPs remaining in Grandstand evacuation centre	1,900
# of IDPs in transitional sites	15,100
# of IDPs hosted by relatives and friends or renting temporary homes	11,300*
# of IDPs awarded permanent shelters	2,900**
# of IDPs received home material assistance	8,300**

Source: CCCM Cluster (as of 22 June 2015), *Protection Cluster (as of December 2014) **National Housing Authority (June 2015)

Flooding in Mindanao

# of IDPs	380
# of houses damaged	65+

Source: OCD (ARMM and Regions X and XII) (as of 3 July 2015)



OCHA/A. Hashim

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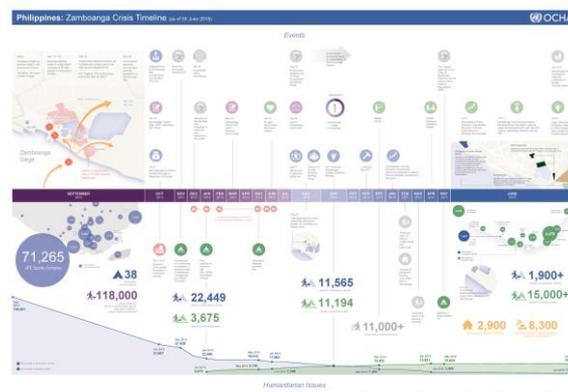
Information caravans help ready Zamboanga IDPs for durable solutions

Information caravans present the approved code of beneficiary selection

From 3 to 16 June, the Zamboanga City Communications Working Group (CWG) – led by the city’s public information officer and joined by members of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), city offices handling housing and land management, social welfare and health issues, as well as UN agencies, NGOs and volunteers – visited temporary homes of displaced people whose houses were destroyed during the September 2013 conflict in Zamboanga.

The purpose of these “information caravans” was to familiarize the internally displaced people (IDPs) with the recently approved Code of Policies for Beneficiary Selection for the Zamboanga City Roadmap to Recovery and Reconstruction (Z3R). The latter was developed by the city authorities in December 2013 to pave the way for long-term shelter solutions for the IDPs and to rehabilitate the city’s waterfront. Together with its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), the Code serves as criteria for the awarding of permanent houses to the IDPs.

The caravans visited nine different IDP sites across the city, as well as communities of “home-based” IDPs who have been hosted by friends and relatives or renting temporary homes. Over 3,000 IDPs took part in the community consultations. The city’s housing and land management official briefed the IDPs on key elements of the Code and the IRR, including the vulnerability criteria and grievance mechanisms. Applying lessons learned from previous information caravans, a respected *Badjao* (one of the ethnic groups among the IDPs) leader was invited to translate the discussion into the vernacular.



Credit: OCHA (click to download the timeline)

Displaced communities voice their concerns

In addition to gathering timely and accurate information about the Code and the IRR, the information caravans provided opportunities for the IDPs to raise concerns over the beneficiary selection and awarding processes of the permanent houses. Most IDPs who participated in the caravans stayed throughout the sessions and asked questions verbally or in writing. Being displaced for over 20 months without adequate livelihoods, many were worried about how much longer they would have to wait until they can actually move to permanent homes. Questions were also asked about who would or would not be awarded

permanent housing, as some of the IDPs before the siege were renters or informal settlers without land and house ownership.

In fact, most of the remaining 28,000 IDPs in Zamboanga are the poor and landless from minority Muslim groups. This includes about 17,000 IDPs who are staying in the Grandstand evacuation centre and 11 transitional sites, as well as an estimated over 11,000 home-based IDPs. It is now hoped that the authorities will take on the voices of those who participated in the information caravans and speed up the assistance to provide safe homes to all IDPs so that they can finally rebuild their lives that they deserve.

In September 2013, a violent clash broke out in Zamboanga City between the Philippine government forces and a faction of the Moro National Islamic Front, uprooting some 118,800 people and destroying more than 10,000 houses. As relief efforts scaled up in the following month, the CWG was formed to promote two-way communication with the IDPs and accountability for the assistance provided to them. The group has implemented a series of information campaigns and community consultation initiatives since to bridge the gap between the IDPs and responders, including orthodox suggestion boxes, newsletters, text message blasts and radio programs as well as these information caravans.

Back-to-school kits reach conflict-affected children in Maguindanao



Credit: OCHA/F. Kasuyo
Mamasapano, Maguindanao (June 2015) – A man and his daughter receive a back-to-school kit.

Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), joined by the ARMM Humanitarian Emergency Action and Response Team, local government units and the inter-agency Communications Core Group, distributed 263 back-to-school kits to pupils of Lower Pidsandawan Elementary School in Mamasapano municipality. The provision of school supplies benefited 138 girls and 125 boys from kindergarten to the sixth grade. Each kit contains ten notebooks, two pencils, an eraser, a box of crayons, a pencil case, a water bottle, a lunch container, a soap bar, a toothbrush with toothpaste, a nail clipper and a pair of boots.

“Our livelihood was destroyed by conflict and, even after we returned home, we didn’t know where to get money to prepare our children for the new school year”, said Samsodin, a father of two. “I’m happy that there are organizations helping us. Now my children can go back to school”.

In addition, every room in the school was equipped with a pail with a cover, a dipper and a trash bin. Save the Children also set up temporary learning spaces for the communities, which have been used for psychosocial programmes for children and back-to-learning campaigns for teachers and parents.

“Our livelihood was destroyed by conflict and we didn’t know where to get money to prepare our children for the new school year. I’m happy that there are organizations helping us. Now my children can go back to school.”
- Samsodin, Farmer

As a result of the government forces’ joint military operations against the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) from February to March 2015, over 125,000 people were uprooted across 15 municipalities of Maguindanao province. Amongst the affected were over 14,000 students, whose schooling was disrupted by the conflict and subsequent displacement. Thirty-four schools in the province were affected, of which nine were used as evacuation centres to host IDPs.

Local authorities and humanitarian partners are working together to restore access to quality education as part of their assistance to the affected children. Through a series of assessments and consultations, they developed key messages for the back-to-school campaign and distributed relevant information materials to the communities.

On 1 June, Save the Children in support of the local Education cluster led by the Department of Education in the Autonomous Region in

While the vast majority of the displaced families have returned home, rebuilding their livelihoods and resuming normal lives are expected to take several months.

Community engagement at the heart of emergency preparedness and response

Communication as aid and tool for accountability

In the aftermaths of the September 2013 conflict in Zamboanga and Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) which barreled through the central Philippines in November 2013, effective communication with the crisis-affected communities became an integral part of humanitarian assistance. To ensure the communities are receiving critical information on humanitarian and recovery assistance in a timely manner and also are able to voice their needs and feedback to responders, inter-agency working groups on Communication with Communities (CwC) and Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) were formed in Zamboanga and Eastern Visayas to set up two-way communication channels, feedback mechanisms and [common service projects](#).

Despite achievements in ensuring communities' access to information and compiling their feedback through extensive consultations, challenges remain in "[closing the communication loop](#)", wherein communities are informed about how their collective voice is reflected in the current and future humanitarian decision-making processes.

To better institutionalize the existing initiatives and partnerships, the Community of Practice (CoP) on Community Engagement was established in January 2015 as an overarching, dynamic structure to promote two-way communication, accountability, community participation and common service partnerships to engage crisis-affected communities. The seamless merging of the CwC and AAP groups under the CoP in the Philippines was recognized as one of the best practices globally for optimizing expertise and resources while avoiding duplication of the work between the two initiatives.

To date, the CoP membership expanded to 37 organizations, including UN agencies, international NGOs, local civil society organizations and faith-based groups, national and local media, the private sector including telecom companies and the government's information agency. Taking advantage of the relative quiet this year, the CoP is now focusing on emergency response preparedness through knowledge exchange and the conduct of workshops, as well as strengthening field mechanisms to engage conflict-affected communities in Mindanao.

Pre-positioning technology and staff for emergency communication

Applying the lessons learnt of Typhoon Haiyan and more recently Typhoon Hagupit (Ruby), the CoP is also investing in pre-positioning technology and human resources to secure emergency communication capacities across sectors before major storms hit the Philippines. Combining traditional media – such as print, TV and radio – with new platforms including social media and mobile messaging, the CoP is exploring ways to share early warning advisories, weather and situational updates and collect field reports and feedback to help the communities make informed decisions to prepare and respond to emergencies themselves.

In preparation for the coming typhoon season, the CoP has so far readied one emergency radio facility, two ham radios, over 5,000 solar radios and free SMS/voice calls/battery-charging stations for communities. Some CoP members are also part of the [Digital Humanitarian Network](#), which can be activated before and during emergencies to mobilize online volunteers to crowdsource critical life-saving information on social media.

The Philippine Information Agency is translating pre-approved guidelines and messages on humanitarian response into various local dialects. The CoP also approved templates to collect community feedback and to conduct the Rapid Information Communication Accountability Assessment, and is working with relevant government agencies to enhance referral pathways in future common service projects. Additional information about the CoP and its work can be found [here](#).

The CoP on Community Engagement draws on its diverse membership to promote two-way communication, accountability, community participation and common service partnerships to engage crisis-affected communities

“Building back better” homes and livelihoods lost to Typhoon Haiyan

In the 18 months since Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines and damaged over 1 million houses, shelter partners have provided emergency tents and tarpaulins, temporary shelters, home repair and reinforcement materials and permanent homes to hundreds of thousands of affected families. This includes over 59,000 homes completed by the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. An important component of shelter recovery has been to employ more than 3,500 carpenters and masons. These craftsmen not only bring their own skills, but they are also taught the key principles of how to build back better, which they then pass on to other workers.

Among the thousands who have acquired updated skills is Modesto Sumaraga, a spritely carpenter from the fishing village of San Isidro, Busuanga municipality, northern Palawan.

Now in his mid-60s, Modesto says he cannot wait to start work every morning. His zest for work and enthusiasm brought him to the attention of the San Isidro *barangay* (the lowest administrative unit in the Philippines) captain, who put his name forward for training as part of the Philippine Red Cross/Swiss Red Cross shelter programme.

Modesto, who has been in the building trade since the age of 15, says at first he was worried he would be too old to be accepted into the programme, but Red Cross was happy to take him on because of his experience and desire to work.

“I want to wake up every morning and do something,” Modesto says with a grin. “I always make sure I have my toolbox nearby and that I do some physical exercise to keep me young.”

Once the training was completed for about 70 carpenters in the municipalities of Busuanga and neighbouring Coron, Modesto became something of a mentor to the younger men. Even though he is the oldest carpenter to have participated in the training, gaining a Certificate in Carpentry and Masonry, Modesto’s willingness to expand his skills and pass them on to others have already made him a valuable member of the team.

“Now I have a certificate I am hopeful of finding more work once the Red Cross shelters are finished,” Modesto says. Besides building new homes, Modesto and other carpenters conduct house-to-house visits to spread the message of resilience to build back better the communities and to check on the existing structure and make repairs where needed.

“What makes me happy is seeing the houses built and knowing that I helped in the construction and that the design makes them safer than before.” Modesto smiles when he recalls his proudest moment, when his wife surprised him by turning up at his certificate graduation and placed a garland of flowers around his neck. “I never finished school, so I was so happy to experience my graduation at last,” he says. “That has inspired me to make sure that we have enough money so that all my children can complete their schooling.”

This article was adapted from the IFRC/PRC newsletter for June 2015.

In brief

Heavy rains trigger flooding and renewed displacement in Mindanao

Moderate to heavy rains since 23 June have caused flooding in six provinces of Mindanao. As of 3 July, five people have died, eight injured and over 65 houses



Credit: IFRC/ Noel Celis
Modesto Sumaraga, Busuanga, Palawan (April 2015).

“What makes me happy is seeing the houses built and knowing that I helped in the construction and that the design makes them safer than before.”

- Modesto, Carpenter

damaged, of which at least 17 were totally destroyed, according to local authorities. While over 3,800 people initially took refuge in evacuation centres, about 380 people remain displaced in the most-affected provinces of Maguindanao (ARMM), South Coatabato and Sultan Kudarat (Region XII). The municipality of Sultan Sa Barongis in Maguindanao province, where some 9,700 people were heavily affected, declared a state of calamity on 30 June. Thirty-two schools in Maguindanao province with some 10,000 students were affected and classes were suspended. Local authorities at the municipal, provincial and regional levels are leading the initial responses by conducting rapid damage and needs assessments, facilitating evacuation and returns of the displaced and distributing food and non-food items to the affected families.

ARMM authorities present the Humanitarian Development Action Plan to build resilience in the communities prone to conflicts and natural disasters

Some of the municipalities in Maguindanao province affected by the flooding had also been affected by the conflict between the government and the BIFF earlier this year. Recognizing the recurrent displacement due to conflicts and hydro-meteorological hazards in Maguindanao and the surrounding provinces, the ARMM authorities presented a PhP5.5 billion (US\$122 million) Humanitarian Development Action Plan to the national authorities and international partners on 11 June, detailing the strategies to enhance emergency response and recovery and build resilience in the communities prone to natural and man-made emergencies.

The Mindanao Humanitarian Team convened on 3 July to review the latest humanitarian situation in the flood-affected provinces as well as the residual humanitarian needs of the communities affected by earlier armed conflict in Maguindanao. The team will continue to support local partners and monitor the situation in case of larger-scale calamities, which may call for extended international assistance.

New UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator arrives in the Philippines



Credit: UN Philippines/A. Cadiogan Manila (June 2015).

Mr. [Ola Almgren](#) of Sweden took office as the new UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines on 22 June. He brings with him 25 years of working experience in the UN system in the areas of the coordination of humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, and peace and security. From 1990 to 1998, he served in various functions with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its predecessors, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO). He was instrumental in the establishment of the [UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination \(UNDAC\)](#) Team and the development of the [International Search and Rescue Advisory Group \(INSARAG\)](#).

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