

Calling for a Comprehensive Shelter Strategy in Mindanao

Nearly a million people living in makeshift shelters in Mindanao are facing the monsoon season in May and a typhoon season later in the year. Currently, only 42% of the appeal is funded. A comprehensive shelter strategy, either at national or local level, is missing. Multiple, creative and proven sheltering options should be considered, such as host family support, cash programming, rental support and livelihood programs that assist rebuilding. The local municipalities lack the technical capacity to address mitigation challenges and need immediate support.

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The Shelter and Settlements Working Group (SSWG) of InterAction conducted a field visit to the areas affected by typhoons Washi (known locally as Sendong) and Bopha (Pablo) in Mindanao, Philippines. This paper highlights the immediate concerns for the humanitarian shelter and settlements sector. A detailed account of the situation will be presented at the SSWG meeting in April 2013.

Background

Typhoon Bopha hit the southwest coast of Mindanao in December 2012, affecting 6.2 million people and damaging or destroying over 235,000 homes. In some areas, approximately 80% of the banana and coconut plantations, two primary sources of livelihood, were also destroyed. Three months later, 40% of the families are still waiting for humanitarian shelter assistance. In January 2013, over 200,000 more people were affected in Mindanao by flooding from tropical depression Shanshan, including those affected previously. Although the Philippines is the third most disaster prone country in the world, Eastern Mindanao has not experienced such severe storms for several decades. That extended typhoon-free period translated into the people and institutions of Eastern Mindanao being more vulnerable and less prepared.

Results of the initial Shelter Cluster REACHⁱ assessment in December 2012 showed that the majority of women identified shelter as an immediate priority. This was reflected in UN OCHA's Bopha/Pablo Action Planⁱⁱ (BAP), a \$76M USD appeal. The BAP proposes to address the humanitarian needs of the one million most vulnerable people. Currently, only 42% of this appeal is funded.

Emergency Shelter Response

Typhoon Bopha affected 750km of the coastline and interior, rendering most settlements inaccessible. Indigenous people in the interior, and those living in poor quality shelters were especially affected. The vast majority of shelter assistance has been the distribution of CGI Sheets, tarpau-

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lins, tools, and basic repair kits (25% coverage). In the past, due to an overwhelming need, the cluster advocated for a single tarpaulin per household, which is less than adequate for a family. Provision of shelter repair kits has had more impact than basic emergency assistance such as tarpaulins alone. A smaller number of relocation centers (bunkhouses/community houses) has been built for the most vulnerable families along with a few transitional shelter models.

Currently, there is an immediate humanitarian need to provide life-saving emergency shelter support for a minimum of 40,000 out of the 180,000 families (970,000 people or 75% of the affected population) needing shelter assistance. The estimated cost per household ranges from 100 to 600 USD. Some technical support must be provided to improve the quality of housing and the use of tarpaulins. Abundant and mature coconut timber is available from fallen trees and can be used for framing, thereby reducing the cost of shelters.

Relocation and No Build Zones

The Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the Philippines has mapped areas in the affected provinces as high, medium and low risk to flooding and landslides. This has resulted in an unofficial interpretation of no build zones in high risk areas (in some cases the whole municipality, like New Bataan) and potential forced relocation of people who already live there. No official policy has been released. This complicates humanitarian and recovery efforts. Past experience has shown that relocation of communities is the costliest and least effective method to address disaster risksⁱⁱⁱ. Another crucial consideration is the indigenous people of Mindanao and their relationship to their ancestral lands. The majority of the population relies on subsistence and commercial farming for their livelihood and relocation to land unsuited for such could be devastating. A collective position should be taken by all actors to ensure that relocation is considered as a last resort after all other mitigation options are exhausted^{iv}.

Shelter Strategy

Typhoon Washi hit the northern coast of Mindanao exactly 12 months earlier in December 2011. In the aftermath of Typhoon Washi a Local Inter-Agency Committee (LIAC) was formed which drafted and approved a policy for sheltering affected people in Illigan and Cagayan de Oro municipalities. The LIAC, consisting of all key local and national agencies and local municipalities, has played an important role by coordinating with and leveraging international and national assistance. The policy clarified assistance to those living in relocation centers, those who own and reside in homes outside the danger zones, renters, and other affected vulnerable populations. The policy focused on permanent housing solutions. In Cagayan de Oro, about 8000 of those permanent houses are either complete or in progress. The government worked closely with aid organizations to provide the necessary community infrastructure and as a result, the families are transitioning well. Around 15,000 other families are yet to be assisted with a durable solution and are currently displaced or living in makeshift or damaged houses. Findings and recommendations by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center^v regarding pending relocation plans in Mindanao must be considered seriously by all stakeholders.

In response to Bopha, such a policy is yet to be drafted. The absence of a strategy further hinders humanitarian assistance as communities, local authorities, and the humanitarian stakeholders await clarity. However, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is in close working relationship with the cluster system and is aware of the urgency. The DSWD has made incremental progress in some localities. Due to Pablo's much larger impact and geographical reach, the authors should adequately consult constituents, local municipalities and shelter stakeholders. This will ensure the humanitarian assistance provided is well leveraged and assists in the process of transition. Further complicating matters, an election is set for May and regulations restricting spending during elections in the Philippines are affecting the delivery of nationally funded assistance. In response the international community should strengthen its efforts because the communities cannot await the end of upcoming elections to receive shelter assistance.

Frequent rotation of cluster coordinators further hinders the predictability of the cluster mechanism.

In conclusion, the people of Mindanao are facing yet another threat with the monsoon season looming in May and a typhoon season later in the year. Some aid agencies are winding up their shelter programs at a time when it is most needed. Government strategy for shelter assistance is unclear and there is a glaring lack of technical capacity at the municipal level to strategically address mitigation challenges.

This leaves the humanitarian shelter stakeholders with a number of avenues to engage, assist, and make a positive impact in the lives of Bopha affected communities. Multiple, creative and proven sheltering options should be considered, such as host family support, cash programming, rental support and livelihood programs that assist rebuilding. Technical support at the municipal level needs to be shored up and that assistance could come from the aid community or the private sector, either nationally or internationally. And finally, national, international and private sector resources and assistance need better coordination.



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i <http://www.reach-initiative.org/>

ii OCHA Typhoon Bopha Action Plan revised (BAP) (25Jan2013)

iii GFDRR – “[Cities and Flooding](#)”, Relative costs and benefits of flood management options (P37)

iv [Housing, land and property right of disaster affected population](#) – Protection Cluster

v IDMC report on [Disaster-induced internal displacement in the Philippines](#)