Philippines Emergency: One Year after Typhoon Haiyan

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Introduction

Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest storms in recorded history, swept through the Philippines on November 8, 2013, causing an estimated US$12.9 billion in damages and affecting almost 15 million people. Approximately 8,000 people lost their lives, while 4.1 million people across 171 municipalities were forcibly displaced after the storm totally destroyed one million homes. Handicap International, which has been present in the country since 1985, launched a major emergency relief effort in the days immediately following the storm.

Handicap International’s teams set up a logistics platform to transport humanitarian aid to isolated areas and remove debris over several months. Our teams also transported 1,640 tons of food to people living in the municipalities of Tacloban, Tanauan and Palo, and distributed 1,390 tents in Lawaan, Eastern Samar Province, and in Batad, Iloilo Province.

One project consists of providing tools to 800 people so that they can resume their commercial activities, and building more than 1,200 temporary shelters.

The organization also supports the inclusion of children with disabilities in 50 child friendly spaces set up in Haiyan-affected areas.

Expatriate staff members and 100 Filipinos are currently implementing the organization’s projects, which now focus on post-emergency operations.
Key data

Background

The Philippines is a disaster-prone archipelago subjected to approximately 20 strong typhoons a year. Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) which hit central Philippines on November 8, 2013 was the most violent in recorded history and caused considerable damage. Between 80% to 100% of homes and infrastructures within 50km of the eye of the storm were destroyed. Typhoon Haiyan also decimated agricultural crops, which majority of the people rely on for livelihood.

Handicap International deployed a team of emergency workers to the Philippines immediately after the typhoon. The organization distributed emergency shelters in Iloilo and Eastern Samar. A logistics platform equipped with trucks was set up in Tacloban to speed up the supply of humanitarian aid to the population by the local authorities. Lastly, Handicap International assisted medical centers and vulnerable individuals by providing rehabilitation care and orthopedic materials.

The organization is now concentrating its efforts on post-emergency projects to allow people to rebuild their homes and gradually return to normal life (economic, social and family, etc.)

Needs

- Recovery and rehabilitation efforts are ongoing one year after the typhoon. Debris has been cleared, many roads are open and reconstruction is in full swing. However, residual needs, particularly in shelter and livelihoods, must still be addressed.
- The post-emergency and reconstruction phases will require considerable resources. Permanent houses must be built for tens of thousands of people still living in emergency shelters that are exposed to heightened risks. Immediate action is also needed to reinvigorate local economic activity, especially among vulnerable groups, in order to help people regain their independence and dignity.

Means

Supporting the efforts of affected municipalities

- Situated in the center of the typhoon belt and the Pacific Ring of Fis, the Philippines is regularly hit by natural disasters and takes disaster preparation seriously. Despite being directly affected, local authorities play active roles in organizing relief efforts and clear-up operations, with the help of the local population. Despite these efforts, their financial and logistical resources are severely limited. Therefore, Handicap International decided to set up a logistical platform with a fleet of trucks to help distribute aid and clear debris.
- From January-April, Handicap International extended its support by setting up a Cash for Work project to fund the work of 42 people over 18 days in 18 barangays (neighborhoods). In total, this project enabled 900 men and women, selected on the basis of their vulnerability, to take part in the clear-up operation and to earn an income for their families.
**Reconstruction**

- To assist and support the shelter reconstruction efforts already being made by the local population, Handicap International provides technical and financial support to vulnerable families. The organization has completed the distribution of recovery shelter packages to 206 vulnerable households in 3 barangays of Sigma (Capiz Province, Region VI). A similar project targeting 800 households in Capiz, in addition a shelters and latrines construction project in municipalities of Leyte are currently underway in order to support 200 vulnerable families.

**Livelihood**

- An asset replacement project that aims to restore lost livelihood assets of 800 vulnerable households in Leyte is also ongoing.

**Protection of the most vulnerable**

- In response to persistent protection issues faced by persons with disabilities and specific needs during the recovery phase, Handicap International continues to distribute mobility and assistive devices to individuals within its areas of intervention. Sensitization sessions and trainings on inclusion and accessibility are also conducted for the benefit of local communities and other humanitarian partners. The organization is also in the beginning stages of a project that aims to provide technical support for inclusive child-friendly spaces benefitting children with disabilities in Eastern and Western Visayas regions.

**Our Activities**

**Support to medical facilities, psychosocial support and rehabilitation care (completed)**

**Tacloban/Leyte**

- As part of the DVFP (Disability and Vulnerability Focal Point) project, Handicap International has deployed two physiotherapists, an occupational therapist and a nurse in three hospitals (Tacloban public hospital and two MSF hospitals, in Tacloban and Tanaouan, more to the south).
- Handicap International’s teams also identified locally-available services, particularly orthopedic-fitting services for amputees, to guarantee the continuous case-management of the injured.
- The organization also ran a psychosocial support project for 803 people with injuries/suffering from trauma.

**Identification, referral and case-management of the most vulnerable people (completed end of April)**

**Tacloban/Leyte**

- As part of its DVFP project, the organization’s community officers identified particularly vulnerable people still living in displacement sites including evacuation centers, formal tent settlements and transitional sites (bunkhouses) in Tacloban. They travelled around the city its surrounding area to check that everyone who needs care has access to it. The organization expanded this project to make it an essential component of its activities.
Collective action in cash-for-work program (completed end of April)

**Palo and Tolosa (south of Tacloban)**

- 900 particularly vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, were employed and paid minimum wages to help clear up debris, particularly in and around public buildings and schools. This scheme also allows us to provide economic assistance to affected communities.
- Involving people who are often excluded from their communities in clear-up operations also allows us to provide them with psychosocial support and helps them play an active role in rebuilding their communities.

**Rebuilding safer shelters for the most vulnerable people**

**Capiz (south of Roxas)**

- This reconstruction project provides vulnerable people who lost their houses with cash assistance, material and technical support based on build-back-better techniques to enable them to rebuild safer and more disaster-resilient homes.
- As of September 30, the organization has completed a shelter reconstruction project in 3 barangays of Sigma, Capiz for 206 families with the training of 50 carpenters. A similar project covering 11-12 barangays in the same area is ongoing for supporting the reconstruction of 800 houses. The reconstruction of 200 shelters and latrines for vulnerable families in Tacloban and nearby municipalities are also underway. Families benefiting from this assistance will also be provided with financial support to get their homes up and running again.

**Inclusion of persons and children with disabilities**

**Eastern and western Visayas**

- The organization is in the early stages of a project that pushes for the inclusion of children with disabilities in child friendly spaces set up in Haiyan-affected areas of Eastern and Western Visayas. As of September 30, HI inclusion officers have already visited 80 CFS across 5 provinces in Regions VI and VIII. HI is also providing on-site support for 50 CFS facilitators and technical advice on accessibility modifications for partners.
- To promote the inclusion of vulnerable persons in disaster risk reduction, HI is also distributing protection kits containing early-warning items (solar lamps, rechargeable radios, waterproof pouches) to persons with disabilities and specific needs.

**Supporting livelihood restoration**

**Tacloban area**

- In an effort to help vulnerable people who lost their livelihoods to Haiyan, Handicap International is implementing a project that hopes to restore tools and assets of 800 households and 20 community groups (332 household received tools and assets until now) to enable them to regain financial independence, speed-up the recovery efforts and strengthen local economic and social ties. Destroyed pig pens, small village stores and canteens are also set to be rebuilt using build-back-safer techniques. As of September 30, the organization has started the distribution of 150 pigs and hog-feed needed by households running backyard piggeries. 96 pigs were already distributed to beneficiaries.

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1 Donors : ADH and 12 12  
2 Donor : DFATD  
3 Donors : Shelter Box International and 12 12
Interview
“Handicap International is providing a sustainable response to the emergency”

The Philippines, October 2014. One year after typhoon Haiyan swept across the country, Stéphane Moissaing, Handicap International’s head of mission in the Philippines, tells us what conditions are like on the ground.

What are conditions like in areas affected by typhoon Haiyan?
Between November and July, our teams conducted a large number of emergency operations in Tacloban and Palo. They distributed 1,430 tents to displaced people, helped distribute 1,640 tonnes of food and organized 1,583 rehabilitation sessions. Since July, we have shifted our focus to post-emergency (“recovery”) operations. Things might appear to be back to normal on the photos, but needs are still great. The storm caused an estimated US$12.9 billion in damages. 700,000 people are yet to receive sustainable aid. The country’s socio-economic problems are worsening. It would be extremely vulnerable to another disaster. NGOs and the government hope to sustainably re-launch the economy by 2015.

What are Handicap International’s current priorities?
Around 4.13 million people were displaced by the disaster and many have yet to find decent housing. Handicap International has built new, sustainable, solid homes adapted to the local environment for 1,206 families in the provinces of Capiz and Leyte. This is our priority. Families are actively involved in building the houses and receive financial support to buy the materials – wood – or to employ local carpenters. They will be more able to maintain and rebuild their homes as a result. Handicap International’s livelihood project has also helped 800 families who have lost equipment for their petty business to get back to work. Each beneficiary is given money and a gift in kind (a pig or pedicab) to start their venture. Alternatively, they may just be given a grant to invest in a small restaurant, itinerant trade or local grocery store. Beneficiaries can then get back to work. These projects provide a sustainable response to the emergency. Another priority is to put in place infrastructure to help people access drinking water, evacuate waste water and build latrines.

4 €9.92 billion.
To what extent does Handicap International give special attention to the most vulnerable people?

We use various criteria to identify women, children, older people and disabled people, including poverty, health, and resilience. We want these vulnerable people to be included in emergency actions. We make sure our projects are accessible by building ramps, for example, or providing rehabilitation care or technical training to facilitators in 50 Child Friendly Spaces to help children with disabilities. We also conduct advocacy to ensure these vulnerable people are included by NGOs and authorities in emergency operations. That’s essential.

Have you learned a lot from this disaster?

Yes, and we’re still learning. We found, for example, that we need to make natural disaster warning systems more responsive, and that evacuation centers should be more accessible to people with disabilities. We’ve been working on these points. We’ve also developed new ways of building sustainable, solid shelters that resist to future disasters. I think we’re better prepared to deal with a natural disaster than before.

Did NGOs work together in their response to the disaster?

Yes, absolutely. Immediately after the disaster, NGOs arrived in the coastal regions, which suffered terrible damage. We divided the work between us, according to our expertise. The working conditions were terrible: there was no water, no electricity, and it was difficult to transport equipment. But we quickly set up a logistics platform, which worked smoothly.

The situation has improved, but there are lots of challenges ahead. After 20 years in the field, what drives you?

Silence. Smile.

What a long time...

That’s an interesting question. You discover new cultures, another way of thinking, new systems. It’s satisfying work, passing on your expertise, a methodology, and finding sustainable solutions. It’s fascinating. And you get to lend a hand. Firemen must feel the same way – the stress you experience in disaster situations. It’s also satisfying providing constructive support during disasters, and for the future.

Note

Stéphane Moissaing, 40, has spent many years working in the field of development and emergency aid (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Congo, Somalia, Liberia, etc.). He arrived in the Philippines immediately after the disaster.

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5 These spaces were opened after the typhoon hit, with support from Unicef, and in conjunction with Save the Children, Childfund, Plan International and Handicap International.