BACKGROUND

On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Visayan Islands of the Philippines. With sustained winds of 195 miles per hour, the storm was the strongest on record and caused catastrophic devastation. More than 6,000 people were killed and close to 1,800 remain missing. The storm severely damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes and affected a total of 14 million people across 36 provinces.

PHILIPPINES:

TYPHOON SURVIVORS FACE OBSTACLES TO RECOVERY

On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan tore a path of destruction across the Philippines. While the emergency response was successful in providing life-saving assistance, three months on, humanitarian needs remain enormous, especially with respect to the restoration of people’s livelihoods. A lack of robust early recovery programs has left hundreds of thousands of people reliant on aid, and points to a broader problem regarding the overall efficacy of the UN’s early recovery approach to large-scale, sudden-onset natural disasters. In addition, a proposal by the Philippine government to enforce “no build zones” in typhoon-affected coastal areas in the wake of the disaster has left thousands displaced and raised numerous legal and human rights concerns. While progress has been made in recent weeks on revising the policy, the failure of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator to take up the issue from the start resulted in confusion on the ground, slowed the response, and denied adequate protection to thousands of vulnerable people.

In August 2013, a group of representatives from 10 countries came together to adopt the “Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States,” the first formal statement of principles providing a comprehensive normative framework for addressing internal displacement and relocation in the context of climate change. See http://displacementsolutions.org/peninsula-principles/

14. “Inter-Cluster Advisory to the HCT on the provision of assistance in proposed ‘no dwelling zones.’” February 13, 2014.
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March 28, 2014

Author: Alice Thomas

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) should commission an assessment of the Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster’s performance in the Haiyan response, and recommend ways to improve early recovery leadership, coordination, and effectiveness including through the use of early recovery advisors.
- The UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), with the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other donor governments, should continue to advocate at the highest levels of the Philippine government for implementation of the recommendations contained in the Inter-Cluster Advisory on “no build zones” (NBZs). They should also provide the necessary technical and financial support to do so.
- The Philippine government, at both the national and local level, must develop laws, policies, and guidance regarding the implementation of “no build zones” (NBZs). Such instruments must include measures to ensure that enforcement of NBZs, and the relocation of people away from these areas, is undertaken based on scientific evidence, in compliance with national and international law, and in a manner that respects the rights of affected individuals.
- In future large-scale natural disasters, the Protection Cluster and the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), in cooperation with the Shelter Cluster, should immediately establish a housing, land, and property (HLP) sub-cluster, and deploy more HLP advisors to provide guidance on the ground. Where relocation is likely to occur, protection and management issues must be integrated into the strategic plans of the protection, shelter, and early recovery clusters.
Despite its strong disaster preparedness and response capability, the Philippines government accepted the international community’s offer of assistance given the magnitude of the crisis. It welcomed the deployment, in the initial phase of disaster response, of significant military assets by the U.S. and other countries. The international humanitarian community responded in full force as well. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance by the UN and its partners, formally declared a system-wide Level 3 (L3) emergency – a status reserved for major sudden-onset crises caused by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization. This triggered a substantial influx of humanitarian staff, resources, and mechanisms designed to ensure a timely and effective response.

While the initial response to the emergency was generally viewed as successful by the government, the international community, and affected populations, humanitarian needs remain significant more than three months later. Close to six million workers were directly affected by the typhoon, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were felled, putting at risk the livelihoods of over a million farming households. Nearly two-thirds of fishing communities – also extremely poor to begin with – were severely affected.

In addition, significant numbers of people are still displaced. According to the Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), as of writing, more than 900,000 people remain displaced,1 approximately 17,000 of whom were already living at or near the poverty line.2 More than 33 million coconut trees were felled, putting at risk the livelihoods of over a million farming households. Nearly two-thirds of fishing communities – also extremely poor to begin with – were severely affected.

Unfortunately, at the time of RI’s visit, little progress had been made in helping affected populations to recover their livelihoods and become self-sufficient. The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, which was implementing early recovery activities relating to agriculture and fisheries, had made some important interventions in terms of seed distributions, despite the short window between the time the typhoon hit and the planting season. However, the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ER&L) Cluster, which is responsible for restoration of the economy in the non-fisheries/non-agriculture sectors, was seriously lagging behind other clusters.

Much of the problem lay with lack of funding. Despite strong rhetoric by the U.S. and other donors that their assistance would build resilience among affected populations,3 at the time of RI’s visit, the ER&L Cluster remained woefully underfunded at less than 18 percent.4 As a result, the majority of poor, typhoon-affected communities who lost homes, jobs, and assets are now far more vulnerable as they head into the next typhoon season.

Donor funding preferences aside, however, there was broad consensus among humanitarian actors and donors on the ground that the funding situation reflected the weak performance of the ER&L Cluster. There was a lack of confidence in its leadership and coordination capacity.

From the onset, the ER&L Cluster faced challenges. First was the decision in early December to merge early recovery and livelihoods into one cluster. A unique arrangement was implemented whereby the cluster would be co-led by the UN Development Program (UNDP), which is the cluster lead for early recovery in natural disasters, and the International Labor Organization (ILO), which had a preexisting memorandum of understanding with the Philippines government to provide livelihood assistance in the aftermath of disasters. By all accounts, the decision to merge the clusters – while sound in principle – proved disastrous on the ground. According to RI interviews, the ER&L Cluster spent the first two months following the typhoon squabbling over who was going to take the lead.

The unique nature of this arrangement was undoubtedly part of the problem. Nonetheless, many felt that the problem lay with UNDP, and its failure to meet its obligations as the lead agency for early recovery and a member of the IASC in a L3 emergency. Specifically, there was consensus that UNDP had fallen short of its required L3 staff deployments – both in terms of the staff levels co-located in humanitarian emergencies and the duration of their deployments. Leadership was viewed as extremely weak, and the early recovery advisor who was deployed for a brief period was seen as ineffective. Field coordinators were not deployed until January. According to one senior UN official, “If UNDP had had better people on the ground they probably could have gotten past the coordination issues with ILO. Instead, it became a big sideshow, a real distraction.”

In addition, the cluster was seen as failing to inform strategic decision-making and to define and coordinate areas of early recovery work not covered by other clusters. After spending the entire month of December trying to figure out how to work together, UNDP and ILO were still unable to articulate a coherent approach. Their activities remained focused primarily on labor intensive, short-term, cash-for-work programs involving debris clearing and waste collection. Although this type of assistance was important during the emergency response, three months after the typhoon hit, the cluster had yet to articulate a clear strategy for the recovery of longer-term, sustainable livelihoods that would build national capacity and link with the government’s recovery and reconstruction plan (known as the Reconstruction Assistance on Yolanda plan, or RAY).

Moreover, the cluster fell far short of its own targets. A report released in mid-February revealed that the cluster had not met 62 percent of its vulnerable households through cash-for-work programs while only two percent of targeted workers had received skills training.4 The operational peer review (OPR) conducted in mid-January by a team of UN and non-governmental officials as a requirement of the L3 squarely picked up on this. The OPR, which is required in all L3 emergencies, is to identify areas to advance the response (or so-called “course correctors”) and collect learning and good practice. The OPR’s summary report noted the need to “strengthen the leadership, management and strategic direction of the early recovery and livelihoods cluster in order to better support the response to pressing early recovery needs of hundreds of thousands of people.” The RC/HC was instructed to report back to the IASC in mid-February to ensure that the cluster’s leadership, coordination, and strategic issues were resolved. The ER&L Cluster was required to draft a transitional strategy to guide its work.5 Thereafter, and subsequent to RI’s visit, the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) released the Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan, which sets strategic priorities and programming to meet early recovery needs in the period from March to November 2014, before the government’s own reconstruction plan is implemented.

Whether the ER&L Cluster is able to attract donor support through this plan remains to be seen. But power struggles with ILO aside, many humanitarian actors with whom RI spoke felt that the poor performance of the ER&L Cluster in the Philippines signals a lack of understanding among senior UNDP managers regarding what early recovery means, how to effectively coordinate and integrate in humanitarian crises, as well as a tendency to work in parallel to the cluster system. Humanitarian actors felt that their part, were unclear on the role of the ER&L Cluster and the early recovery advisor in the Philippines. Of greater concern is the fact that the coordination, leadership, and funding challenges to early recovery in the Philippines are not unique, and come on the heels of a long discussion regarding the need to improve early recovery in humanitarian settings.

Given the critical role of early recovery in large-scale, sudden-onset natural disasters, the IASC urgently needs to take up this issue. First, it should commission an assessment of UNDP’s performance in Haiyan and recommend ways to improve its leadership, coordination, and effectiveness – including through the use of early recovery advisors. Second, HCT members on the ground will need far more training regarding the role and responsibilities of the ER&L Cluster, where it is activated, the role of the early recovery advisors, and the integration of early recovery activities within the HCT’s various sectors. UNDP, for its part, must demonstrate its commitment to early recovery in post-disaster settings. Its 2014-2017 Strategic Plan lists among the agency’s outcomes “Early recovery and rapid return to sustainable development pathways are achieved in post-conflict and post-disaster settings.” UNDP cannot expect to work collaboratively with humanitarian actors on implementing early recovery activities until it demonstrates that it can effectively deliver through improved leadership, coordination, and strategic results. Achieving this will require inculcating both senior managers and field staff on what early recovery means in post-disaster settings and on how to work effectively within the humanitarian program cycle. It also will be necessary for UNDP to build trust in its relationships with humanitarian agencies through improved communication, collaboration, and transparency.

NO BUILD ZONES: THE GHOST HAUNTING THE RESPONSE

At the time of RI’s visit, one of the main issues hindering recovery and prolonging the displacement of thousands of typhoon-affected people relates to the Philippine government’s poorly executed policy regarding “no build zones” (NBZs).
Despite its strong disaster preparedness and response capability, the Philippine government accepted the international community’s offer of assistance given the magnitude of the crisis. It welcomed the deployment, in the initial phase of disaster response, of significant military assets by the U.S. and other countries. The international humanitarian community responded in full force as well. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance by the UN and its partners, formally declared a system-wide Level 3 (L3) emergency – a status reserved for major sudden-onset crises caused by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization. This triggered a substantial influx of humanitarian staff, resources, and mechanisms designed to ensure a timely and effective response.

While the initial response to the emergency was generally viewed as successful by the government, the international community, and affected populations, humanitarian needs remain significant more than three months later. Close to six million workers were directly affected by the typhoon, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were lost, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were lost, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were lost, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were lost, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line. More than 33 million coconut trees were lost, 2.6 million of whom were already living at or near the poverty line.

In January and February of 2014, RI sent a team to the Philippines to assess the response to the typhoon. The team found that despite the strong emergency response, humanitarian needs remain enormous, especially in terms of early recovery and livelihoods. Nearly every typhoon survivor with whom RI spoke said his or her main need at the time of RI’s visit was the need to relocate to transitional sites such as bunkhouses. Unfortunately, at the time of RI’s visit, little progress had been made in helping affected populations to recover their livelihoods and become self-sufficient. The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, which was implementing early recovery activities relating to agriculture and fisheries, had made some important interventions in terms of seed distributions, despite the short window between the time the typhoon hit and the planting season. However, the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ER&L) Cluster, which is responsible for restoration of the economy in the non-fisheries/non-agriculture sectors, was seriously lagging behind other clusters.

Much of the problem lay with lack of funding. Despite strong rhetoric by the U.S. and other donors that their assistance would build resilience among affected populations, at the time of RI’s visit, the ER&L Cluster remained woefully underfunded at less than 18%. As a result, the majority of poor, typhoon-affected communities who lost homes, jobs, and assets are now far more vulnerable as they head into the next typhoon season.

Donor funding preferences aside, however, there was broad consensus among humanitarian actors and donors on the ground that the funding situation reflected the weak performance of the ER&L Cluster, and the lack of confidence in its leadership and coordination capacity.

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The unique nature of this arrangement was undoubtedly part of the problem. Nonetheless, many felt that the problem lay with UNDP, and its failure to meet its obligations as the lead agency for early recovery and a member of the IASC in a L3 emergency. Specifically, there was consensus that UNDP had fallen short of its required L3 staff deployments – both in terms of the number of staff deployed and in humanitarian emergencies and the duration of their deployments. Leadership was viewed as extremely weak, and the early recovery advisor who was deployed for a brief period was seen as ineffective. Field coordinators were not deployed until January. According to one senior UN official, “If UNDP had had better people on the ground they probably could have gotten past the coordination issues with ILO. Instead, it became a big sideshow, a real distraction.”

In addition, the cluster was seen as failing to inform strategic decision-making and to define and coordinate areas of early recovery work not covered by other clusters. After spending the entire month of December trying to figure out how to work together, UNDP and ILO were still unable to articulate a coherent approach. Their activities remained focused primarily on labor intensive, short-term, cash-for-work programs involving debris clearing and waste collection. Although this type of assistance was important during the emergency response, three months after the typhoon hit, the cluster had yet to articulate a clear strategy for the recovery of longer-term, sustainable livelihoods that would build national capacity and link with the government’s recovery and reconstruction plan (known as the Reconstruction Assistance on Yolanda plan, or RAY).

Moreover, the cluster fell far short of its own targets. A report released in mid-February revealed that the cluster had not reached 50% of its L3 targets. Despite having received almost $2 billion through cash-for-work programs while only two percent of targeted workers had received skills training. The operational peer review (OPR) conducted in mid-January by a team of UN and non-governmental officials as a requirement of the L3 sparately picked up on this. The goal of the OPR, which is required in all L3 emergencies, is to identify areas to advance the response (or so-called “course correctors”) and collect learning and good practice. The OPR’s summary report noted the need to “strengthen the leadership, management and strategic direction of the early recovery and livelihoods cluster in order to better support the response to pressing early recovery needs of hundreds of thousands of people.” The RC/HC was instructed to report back to the IASC in mid-February to ensure that the cluster’s leadership, coordination, and strategic issues were resolved. The ER&L Cluster was required to draft a transitional strategy to guide its work. Thereafter, and subsequent to RI’s visit, the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) released the Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan, which sets strategic priorities and programming to meet early recovery needs in the period from March to November 2014, before the government’s own reconstruction plan is implemented.

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NO BUILD ZONES: THE GHOST HAUNTING THE RESPONSE

At the time of RI’s visit, one of the main issues hindering recovery and prolonging the displacement of thousands of typhoon-affected people relates to the Philippine government’s emphasis on a poorly executed policy regarding “no build zones” (NBZs).
LACK OF A PLAUSIBLE RELOCATION PLAN

Not long after the disaster, President Benigno Aquino announced that, given the Philippines’ high susceptibility to typhoons, it would enforce NBZs along coastal areas and relocate tens of thousands of people who previously lived in these areas. Local authorities in all typhoon-affected areas were instructed to impose NBZs restricting any rebuilding within 40 meters of the high-water mark. Given the country’s high exposure to typhoons and other forms of severe weather (it gets 20 storms each year on average), it had been clear before Typhoon Haiyan that whatever steps were taken will only increase their frequency and force, the government’s apparent commitment to mitigating disaster risk and promoting public safety seems well intentioned. But serious flaws in the NBZ policy not only raise concerns regarding its legitimacy, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating the extent to which building restrictions in different coastal areas should be enforced as a matter of public safety. In addition, the retroactive and uneven way in which the law is being enforced raises serious due process concerns. For example, at the time of RI’s visit, not all municipalities were enforcing the rule. In fact, in some typhoon-affected areas, 90 percent of residents were living within the proposed NBZs. At the time of RI’s visit, the Guianan government was in the process of purchasing the land but had no money to build homes or hook up services, and it was unclear how relocated families would pay transportation costs. As one aid worker put it, “Currently, no one is talking about any other plan than shipping people to remote land even though it won’t cover the case load.”

RI met with numerous families living in evacuation centers, some of whom had been promised a new home in a new location either by the government or a private entity, but few had been informed of when, how, or where they would be relocated, who would be selected for relocation, and what would happen to those who are not selected. There was also a lack of confusion around whether people would be given both a home and land, whether they would have to take out loans, or whether they would have to rent.

The result is that tens of thousands of poor and landless people living in NBZs face uncertain futures and limited options. Those who remain in the evacuation centers constantly fear eviction and endure unsanitary and undignified conditions. Those who have chosen to return to NBZs (where, at the time of RI’s visit, they were prohibited from receiving any form of permanent shelter assistance) live in unsafe, make-shift shelters comprised of plastic tarps, wood, and metal sheeting. They are deeply fearful of another storm, with one resident telling RI, “We won’t be heeled, won’t recover psychologically, until we are safe; until we are relocated.”

FAILURE OF THE UN TO ADDRESS THE NBZ POLICY FROM THE START

According to RI interviews, members of the HCT in Manila were well aware of the government’s intention to enforce 60,000 families currently residing in NBZs in typhoon-affected areas. Indeed, it is unlikely that such a plan could be provided since there simply is not enough available land to accommodate that number of people. For example, in the Eastern Visayas Region, which includes some of the worst hit areas of Leyte and Samar, close to 28,500 families live in NBZs, but the authorities have only identified permanent relocation sites for 12,000. It seems that they have no idea where the remaining 16,500 families will go. In addition, many of the selected relocation sites are in remote areas and lack access to services and livelihood opportunities. For example, in Guianan, the local government plans to relocate poor fishing communities to a plot of vacant land approximately four miles from the coast that lacks electricity, water, and other services. At the time of RI’s visit, the Guianan government was in the process of purchasing the land but had no money to build homes or hook up services, and it was unclear how relocated families would pay transportation costs. As one aid worker put it, “Currently, no one is talking about any other plan than shipping people to remote land even though it won’t cover the case load.”

The appointment in December of an experienced deputy humanitarian coordinator (DHC) to support the RC/HC in leading and coordinating the response created an opportunity to identify the NRZ issue in the field and step up the efforts to resolve it. Unfortunately, the DHC ended up getting absorbed in the time-consuming process of preparing a Strategic Response Plan in Manila (a procedural requirement of the 13), rather than spending time in the field facilitating coordination and leadership on key challenges like the NBZ policy. Many cluster members expressed to RI their frustration with the lack of a unified strategy within the HCT on the NBZ issue. One agency representative in Tacloban told RI, “The problem is that the government has been unclear and the HCT hasn’t challenged them on that.” Some felt that rather than forcing camp coordination and shelter actors to muddle through, the RC/HC, with the support of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), should have shown better leadership. As one shelter actor told RI, “The discussion of land issues should have started immediately. This comes up in every single emergency OCHA should have been taking the lead in negotiating with the government.” Others saw donors as being weak on the issue. A representative of one aid agency told RI, “Donors have the best leverage to push the [NBZ] issue, but so far, they won’t touch it.” It is true that the vast majority of the humanitarian caseload resides outside the NBZs. But the failure to address what was clearly a political issue at a higher level ended up taking time and focus away from the larger humanitarian response on the island. Moreover, donor funds were not provided until most vulnerable communities previously lived in NBZs. To deny them assistance and protection was seen by some humanitarian actors as being in direct conflict with humanitarian principles. At the same time, humanitarian agencies were reluctant to encourage the rebuilding of informal settlements in at-risk areas. As one humanitarian actor put it, “Either way, in trying to do no harm, we end up doing harm.”

By mid-February, three months after the typhoon hit, the issue had yet to be resolved. According to a February 14 camp coordination and camp management cluster brief, “Lack of clarity on the implementation of the ‘no build zone’ policy is leading to protracted displacement and prolonged assistance. There is a lack of a consistent policy in all areas, others taking the position that only emergency assistance would be allowed, and still others reportedly threatening to shut down humanitarian agencies that provided any assistance in NBZs.”

Given the numerous protection concerns that arose around the NBZ issue, it is surprising that the Protection Cluster did not establish a housing, land, and property (HLP) sub-cluster. Invariably, HLP issues are some of the most difficult in the aftermath of sudden-onset natural disasters. The 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake clearly demonstrated how HLP issues can hamper recovery, prolong displacement, and put vulnerable people at risk of eviction in pursuit of political and economic interests. The UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) is the globally-designated focal point agency for HLP. In the Philippines, members of the Shelter, Protection, and CCCM Clusters ultimately formed an HLP working group to try to
Not long after the disaster, President Benigno Aquino announced that, given the Philippines’ high susceptibility to typhoons, it would enforce NBZs along coastal areas and relocate tens of thousands of people who previously lived in these areas. Local authorities in all typhoon-affected areas were instructed to impose NBZs restricting any rebuilding within 40 meters of the high-water mark.

Given the country’s high exposure to typhoons and other forms of severe weather (it gets 20 storms each year on average), it was highly likely that attempting to increase their frequency and force, the government’s apparent commitment to mitigating disaster risk and promoting public safety seems well intentioned. But serious flaws in the NBZ policy not only raise concern regarding its legality, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating areas to be enforced as a matter of public safety, but for not for residential dwellings. Finally, no hazard risk mapping has been undertaken that would provide a legitimate, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating the extent to which building restrictions in different coastal areas should be enforced.

Moreover, while the Water Code prohibits the building of all structures in areas of severe weather (it gets 20 storms each year on average), the likelihood that enforcing NBZs will only increase their frequency and force, the government’s apparent commitment to mitigating disaster risk and promoting public safety seems well intentioned. But serious flaws in the NBZ policy not only raise concern regarding its legality, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating areas to be enforced as a matter of public safety, but for not for residential dwellings. Finally, no hazard risk mapping has been undertaken that would provide a legitimate, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating the extent to which building restrictions in different coastal areas should be enforced.

VI.

In addition, the retroactive and uneven way in which the build rule is questioned, and as of the writing of this report, no written ordinance or policy had been issued by the national government. The government’s assertion that the policy is grounded in the Water Code – which is designed to protect water sources, not public safety – is controversial. For example, at the time of RI’s visit, not all municipalities were enforcing the rule. In fact, in some typhoon-affected areas, 90 percent of residents were living within the proposed NBZs. The government’s NBZ policy allows development for tourism and livelihood purposes, but not for residential dwellings. Finally, no hazard risk mapping has been undertaken that would provide a legitimate, scientifically-grounded basis for delineating the extent to which building restrictions in different coastal areas should be enforced as a matter of public safety.

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VI.

RI met with numerous families living in evacuation centers, who have been relocated to NBZs, all of whom had been promised a new home in a new location either by the government or a private entity, but few had been informed of when, how, or where they would be relocated, who would be selected for relocation, and what would happen to those who are not selected. There was also reports of confusion around whether people would be given both a home and land, whether they would have to take out loans, or whether they would have to rent.

The result is that tens of thousands of poor and landless people living in NBZs face uncertain futures and limited options. Those who remain in the evacuation centers constantly fear eviction and endure unsanitary and undignified conditions. Those who have chosen to return to NBZs (where, at the time of RI’s visit, they were prohibited from receiving any form of permanent shelter assistance) live in unsafe, make-shift shelters comprised of plastic tarps, wood, and metal sheeting. They are deeply fearful of another storm, with one resident telling RI, “We won’t be heeded. won’t be heeded, won’t be heeded. If it rains, we will suffer. If the government says we can’t stay, we won’t stay.”

VI.

Making matters worse is the lack of a plausible plan for relocating what DSWD estimates to be approximately 60,000 families currently residing in NBZs in typhoon-affected areas. Indeed, it is unlikely that such a plan could be provided since there simply is not enough available land to accommodate that number of people. For example, in the Eastern Visayas Region, which includes some of the worst hit areas of Leyte and Samar, close to 28,500 families live in NBZs. The authorities have only identified permanent relocation sites for 12,000. It seems that they have no idea where the remaining 16,500 families will go.

In addition, many of the selected relocation sites are in remote areas and lack access to services and livelihood opportunities. For example, in Guiuan, the local government plans to relocate poor fishing communities to a plot of vacant land approximately four miles from the coast that lacks electricity, water, and other services. At the time of RI’s visit, the Guiuan government was in the process of purchasing the land but had no money to build homes or hook up services, and it was unclear how relocated families would pay transportation costs. As one aid worker put it, “Currently, no one is talking about any other plan than shipping people to remote land even though it won’t cover the cost.”

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It is true that in order to be successful, planned relocations will need to be part of a more comprehensive planning process that looks at land use and human settlements, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation overall, and that has the political buy-in and required funding from the government affected. Nonetheless, humanitarian actors need to be part of the discussion, and they should be prepared to address NBZs and relocations in post-disaster settings.

In future large-scale natural disasters, the Protection Cluster and UN-HABITAT, with support from the Shelter Cluster, should immediately establish an HLP sub-cluster and deploy more HLP advisors to provide guidance on the ground. Guidance on how to address relocation issues in post-disaster settings should be integrated into the protection, shelter, and ER clusters’ strategic plans from the onset. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development (DfID), and other government humanitarian agencies should likewise ensure that their partners are implementing guidance and best practices regarding planned relocations in post-disaster settings.

The Philippines and other national governments, for their part, must develop and implement relocation plans that are consistent with national and international law, protect the rights of affected populations, and include sufficient safeguards to ensure that people are not left worse off. In the Philippines, the national and local governments must develop laws, policies, and guidance regarding the imposition of NBZs, assistance to populations living in areas declared NBZs, and relocation of affected communities away from NBZs to guide the response in future natural disasters. Such laws and policies must include measures to ensure that enforcement of NBZs and planned relocations are undertaken based on hazard risk mapping, climate modeling, and other scientific evidence. They should also outline specific criteria to be used to determine when communities need to be relocated. When drafting such laws and policies, the Philippine government should draw upon the recently-adopted Peninsula Principles for Climate Displacement within States, which lay out a normative framework and best practices regarding planned relocations in the context of natural disasters and climate change.

Where relocation is deemed necessary to protect human health and safety, emphasis must be placed on restoration of livelihoods, community participation in the relocation process, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Where relevant and appropriate, such laws and policies should be implemented into land use, disaster risk management, and climate change adaptation plans.

In the Philippines, the HCT’s recently released Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan (discussed above) contains an interesting proposal on how to relocate affected populations. One of the goals of the plan is to foster improved disaster management systems by helping local authorities adopt a rights-based approach and minimum standards in the implementation of the NBZ policy.

The plan proposes to accomplish this through the creation of five “Disaster Risk Management Hubs” staffed by UNDP, UN-HABITAT, the UN Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and the National Human Rights Commission. The hubs would assist local authorities with vulnerability assessments, hazard mapping and relocation site planning and management, and monitoring and oversight to ensure that the relocation process is rights-based.

Of some concern is whether the proposal was developed with the full consultation of national and local government institutions. (Reportedly, the National Human Rights Commission did not assist in the drafting of the proposal in the Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan, even though it is the appropriate entity to engage on the issue.)

Nonetheless, the proposal to establish Disaster Risk Management Hubs presents a coherent way for the UN to provide technical expertise to local authorities in implementing NBZs as well as lawfully managing any required relocations in a way that ultimately builds the resilience of vulnerable populations, instead of eroding it. The role of the National Human Rights Commission is key to providing national oversight and accountability to the relocation process. To the extent that UNDP is able to demonstrate an effective coordination mechanism for the operation of the hubs, and the proposal gains the confidence and support of local authorities and other relevant Filipino institutions, the U.S. and other major donors should support the proposal.

The findings in this report are based on information collected by Refugees International (RI) during a three week trip to Leyte and Samar in January and February 2014. RI interviewed affected individuals, Philippine and donor government officials, UN officials, and representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international non-government organizations, and local civil society organizations.
sort through the NBZ and other HLP issues. Why UN-HABITAT did not establish an HLP sub-cluster, or why long-term HLP advisors were not deployed by UN-HABITAT or the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to the Protection Cluster, remains unclear. Regardless, what ended up being one of the most complicated and politically sensitive issues post-Haiyan ended up falling on the shoulders of a single HLP advisor to the Shelter Cluster, who much of the time was also required to stand in as interim national Shelter Cluster coordinator in Manila.

It was not until mid-February that the RC/HC finally acted and sent an HCT position paper on the proposed NBZs to the Philippine government.12 The paper was the result of many weeks of work by the aforementioned HLP advisor and others to bring inter-cluster consensus on a set of common principles to guide humanitarian actors. In recent weeks, both the national government and the mayor of Tacloban have indicated that they are giving serious consideration to the points raised in the position paper, including the requirement of hazard mapping prior to the enforcement of NBZs.13 Given the government’s willingness to reconsider the issue, it will be important for the RC/HC and donor governments to continue to advocate at the highest levels for implementation of the recommendations contained in the position paper, and to provide whatever technical and financial support is necessary to do so.

NEED FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS TO PLACE GREATER ATTENTION ON PLANNED RELOCATIONS

“The problem with HLP is that it’s a long-term issue that needs strategic thinking. However, humanitarians run into it and don’t know how to deal with it.”

—Humanitarian agency staff member

The increase in weather-related disasters and other anticipated effects of climate change are likely to increase not only the numbers of internally displaced persons in coming decades, but also the need to relocate communities away from coastal and other at-risk areas. At present, very few successful cases of planned relocation exist. Rather, experience from development-induced displacement shows that invariably, relocated populations experience a sharp decline in their standard of living and end up far poorer and worse off.14 Despite their experience with protecting and assisting people displaced by conflict and natural disasters, humanitarian actors seem reluctant to engage on the issue of planned relocations, preferring instead to leave it to development actors. The same goes for donor governments.

It is true that in order to be successful, planned relocations will need to be part of a more comprehensive planning process that looks at land use and human settlements, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation overall, and that has the political buy-in and required funding from the government affected. Nonetheless, humanitarians need to be part of the discussion, and they should be prepared to address NBZs and relocations in post-disaster settings.15

In future large-scale natural disasters, the Protection Cluster and UN-HABITAT, with support from the Shelter Cluster, should immediately establish an HLP sub-cluster and deploy more HLP advisors to provide guidance on the ground. Guidance on how to address relocation issues in post-disaster settings should be integrated into the protection, shelter, and ER clusters’ strategic plans from the outset. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and other government humanitarian agencies should likewise ensure that their partners are implementing guidance and best practices regarding planned relocations in post-disaster settings.

The Philippines and other national governments, for their part, must develop and implement relocation plans that are consistent with national and international law, protect the rights of affected populations, and include sufficient safeguards to ensure that people are not left worse off. In the Philippines, the national and local governments must develop laws, policies, and guidance regarding the imposition of NBZs, assistance to populations living in areas declared NBZs, and relocation of affected communities away from NBZs to guide the response in future natural disasters. Such laws and policies must include measures to ensure that enforcement of NBZs and planned relocations are undertaken based on hazard risk mapping, climate modeling, and other scientific evidence. They should also outline specific criteria to be used to determine when communities need to be relocated. When drafting such laws and policies, the Philippine government should draw upon the recently-adopted Peninsula Principles for Climate Displacement within States, which lay out a normative framework and best practices regarding planned relocations in the context of natural disasters and climate change.16

Where relocation is deemed necessary to protect human health and safety, emphasis must be placed on restoration of livelihoods, community participation in the relocation process, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Where relevant and appropriate, such laws and policies should be implemented on land use, disaster management, and climate change adaptation plans.

In the Philippines, the HCT’s recently released Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan (discussed above) contains an interesting proposal on how to relocate affected populations. One of the goals of the plan is to foster improved disaster management systems by helping local authorities adopt a rights-based approach and minimum standards in the implementation of the NBZ policy.

The plan proposes to accomplish this through the creation of five “Disaster Risk Management Hubs” staffed by UNDP, UN-HABITAT, the UN Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and the National Human Rights Commission. The hubs will assist local authorities with vulnerability assessments, hazard mapping and relocation site planning and management, and monitoring and oversight to ensure that the relocation process is rights-based.

Of some concern is whether the proposal was developed with full consultation of national and local government institutions. (Reportedly, the National Human Rights Commission did not assist in the drafting of the proposal in the Early Recovery, Livelihoods and Agriculture Plan, even though it is the appropriate entity to engage on the issue.) Nonetheless, the proposal to establish Disaster Risk Management Hubs presents a coherent way for the UN to provide technical expertise to local authorities in implementing NBZs as well as lawfully managing any required relocations in a way that ultimately builds the resilience of vulnerable populations, instead of eroding it. The role of the National Human Rights Commission is key to protecting national oversight and accountability to the relocation process. To the extent that UNDP is able to demonstrate an effective coordination mechanism for the operation of the hubs, and the proposal gains the confidence and support of local authorities and other relevant Philippine institutions, the U.S. and other major donors should support the proposal.

Alice Thomas traveled to the Philippine islands of Leyte and Samar to assess the humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan in February 2014. She interviewed affected individuals, Philippine and donor government officials, UN officials, and representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international non-governmental organizations, and local civil society organizations.


5. Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development presentation for Inter-cluster meeting in Tacloban City, March 5, 2015.


10. “Inter-Cluster Advisory to the HCT on the provision of assistance in pro-"
PHILIPPINES: TYPHOON SURVIVORS FACE OBSTACLES TO RECOVERY

On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan tore a path of destruction across the Philippines. While the emergency response was successful in providing life-saving assistance, three months on, humanitarian needs remain enormous, especially with respect to the restoration of people’s livelihoods. A lack of robust early recovery programs has left hundreds of thousands of people reliant on aid, and points to a broader problem regarding the overall efficacy of the UN’s early recovery approach to large-scale, sudden-onset natural disasters.

In addition, a proposal by the Philippine government to enforce “no build zones” in typhoon-affected coastal areas in the wake of the disaster has left thousands displaced and raised numerous legal and human rights concerns. While progress has been made in recent weeks on revising the policy, the failure of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator to take up the issue from the start resulted in confusion on the ground, slowed the response, and denied adequate protection to thousands of vulnerable people.

BACKGROUND

On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Visayan Islands of the Philippines. With sustained winds of 195 miles per hour, the storm was the strongest on record and caused catastrophic devastation. Most heavily affected were the islands of Samar and Leyte, where the typhoon first made landfall, bringing with it a 15 to 19 foot storm surge. More than 6,000 people were killed and close to 1,800 remain missing. The storm severely damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes and affected a total of 14 million people across 36 provinces.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) should commission an assessment of the Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster’s performance in the Haiyan response, and recommend ways to improve early recovery leadership, coordination, and effectiveness including through the use of early recovery advisors.
- The UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), with the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other donor governments, should continue to advocate at the highest levels of the Philippine government for implementation of the recommendations contained in the Inter-Cluster Advisory on “no build zones” (NBZs). They should also provide the necessary technical and financial support to do so.
- The Philippine government, at both the national and local level, must develop laws, policies, and guidance regarding the imposition of “no build zones” (NBZs). Such instruments must include measures to ensure that enforcement of NBZs, and the relocation of people away from these areas, is undertaken based on scientific evidence, in compliance with national and international law, and in a manner that respects the rights of affected individuals.

- In future large-scale natural disasters, the Protection Cluster and the UN-Habitat Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), in cooperation with the Shelter Cluster, should immediately establish a housing, land, and property (HLP) sub-cluster, and deploy more HLP advisors to provide guidance on the ground. Where relocation is likely to occur, protection and management issues must be integrated into the strategic plans of the protection, shelter, and early recovery clusters.