

IRP Regional Workshop
“Action for Effective Management of Post-Disaster Recovery”

Impression, Josefina Porcil, NDCC Philippines

This was one very significant event that gathered together different sectors and stakeholders in the society to share and learn from each other on the experiences and recovery practices of various groups and individuals on the disasters that they got to experience and that hit their countries in a major way.

Through the technical presentations, country presentations, thematic sessions, panel discussions, and open forum, participants were given opportunities to share their experiences and learn from each other’s recovery practices, as well as from other countries’ stories and lessons learned. The local communities’ participation was also significant as actual accounts of experiences came directly from local residents themselves in the affected community.

The visit to the earthquake-stricken areas was also one good opportunity to witness and learn on the recovery practices of the affected communities; how they were able to rebuild what was left of them, reconstruct vital facilities in their areas, and most importantly rise up and recover fully again from their loss with fervent hope, thru the restoration of their main source of livelihood, and back to living their normal lives again.

It was also noteworthy how various organizations and donors, government and private, local and international, worked together, contributed and harmonized their actions towards a successful journey to recovery.

This activity was also made interesting with the active involvement of the academe thru the Gadjah Mada University, in utilizing its resources, with the able assistance of its professors and students. Thus, making this workshop possible and holding it successfully.

Key Recovery Lessons Drawn from the Philippine Experience

Honorable Guests, Ministers, Officials, Professors, Students, Colleagues in the field of disaster management, and the rest of the participants, good afternoon.

On behalf of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) in the Philippines and the Chairman of our organization, the NDCC, I am here today to present to you the Early Recovery Initiatives of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, thru the NDCC, on the effects brought about by the devastation of the two recent typhoons that hit the Philippines, “Ketsana” and “Parma”, locally named “*Ondoy*” and “*Pepeng*”, respectively.

On 26 September 2009, Typhoon Ketsana (locally named “*Ondoy*”) the 15th tropical cyclone to enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) battered Central Luzon causing the worst flooding in the Philippines that reached up to a height of 6 meters in 40 years. According to the local weather bureau, the amount of heavy rainfall it brought in only 6 hours which was 341 mm. was recorded as the highest since 1947, even surpassing the 334 mm. recorded highest 24-hour rainfall 42 years ago. It was also almost equal to the average monthly rainfall in Metro Manila, which was pegged at 392 mm. Towns east of Manila were submerged, with landslides in other parts of Luzon. Excessive flooding was experienced particularly in cities in the National Capital Region and in the provinces in Calabarzon areas.

Barely a week has passed, another powerful cyclone, Typhoon Parma (locally named “*Pepeng*”) entered the Philippine territory and made its landfall in Northern Luzon a week after Ketsana. It dumped massive amounts of rain into the already saturated lands on the northern part of the nation/country. It remained stationary for a while, weakened, looped back to northern Luzon, and made a landfall thrice. The huge amount of rainfall it brought triggered massive landslides, isolating and burying entire villages, communities and people in mud in Benguet, Mountain Province and in the City of Baguio. Scenes of the killer floods spawned by Ketsana in Metro Manila were replicated in the Province of Pangasinan, northwest of Manila, with raging waters forcing residents to clamber to their rooftops to save themselves. The amount of rainfall caused by Parma has been recorded the highest in Baguio City in the Cordilleras.

Areas and regions mostly in the northern and central portions of Luzon Island in the Philippines were worst-hit by the two typhoons. Most cities in the National Capital Region, particularly in the eastern part of Metro Manila, were heavily-affected by the wrath of Ketsana (26 provinces, 171 municipalities, 16 cities, 1,986 barangays; 968,331 families/4,755,759 persons). As for Parma, severely-affected by flooding are the Provinces in Region I and the killer landslides which occurred in most parts of the Cordillera Region in Mt. Province in Benguet, northern Philippines (27 provinces, 364 municipalities, 36 cities, 5,486 barangays; 954,087 families/4,478,284 persons).

Typhoon Ketsana's death toll reached 464, while it is 465 for Parma. Most number of deaths for Ketsana was due to drowning and the water-borne infectious disease called Leptospirosis. As for Parma, landslides have caused the huge number of deaths and also those who were drowned in raging floodwaters.

Damages and losses to infrastructure, agriculture and private properties totaled PhP 11.060B (US\$ 262.174M) for Ketsana and PhP 25.575B (US\$ 555.978M) for Parma. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines has launched a Flash Appeal worth US\$74 M thru the United Nations Resident Coordinator to request for the assistance of the international community in responding to the effects of the typhoons. **As of the moment, 27% of the total appeal has... latest figure/amount on pledges and donations...**

During the emergency response, Advance Command Posts were strategically established as support to the local government units affected and to optimize resources available. Military, police forces, government equipment were all deployed and utilized to conduct evacuation, search and rescue, recovery and retrieval operations in the affected areas. The government, with assistance from NGOs, private and international organizations conducted massive relief operations, providing basic and immediate life-saving needs to the affected population. Due to the enormous amount of debris and other waste materials left by the typhoons, community clean-up operations were immediately carried out, including that of drainage and waterways. Major roads and highways were also cleared to enable access to affected areas. A joint rapid needs assessment was conducted by the NDCC and the UN System in the Philippines to identify and prioritize urgent needs of victims and evacuees on food, shelter, water, sanitation, health and nutrition, among others, providing findings, recommendations, challenges to improve response and relief efforts. Aside from being disaster-resilient people, one characteristic evident in the Filipinos is their act of volunteerism and cooperation in extending help and assistance whichever way they can to neighbors and friends who need them, displaying bravery and heroism unmindful of dangers and threat to their own lives and safety.

As for early recovery initiatives, one of the urgent priorities at that time was the immediate restoration of basic facilities to continue with work on relief, rescue and recovery. Aside from work on the damaged municipal, city and barangay halls, another top priority was the repair of damaged facilities such as local hospitals and health care units, and schools to be able to continue with the delivery of basic services to the affected population. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) implemented the "Balik Probinsya" program through the provision of transportation assistance and subsistence allowance to family victims who preferred to return to their provincial places of origin or area of choice for resettlement or permanent residence. Cash or Food-for-Work (CFFW) projects were also implemented to provide temporary employment opportunities to the affected families. They can assist in cleaning of waste/debris in evacuation centers, as well as in the affected communities, dredging of canals/waterways, and repair of damaged community facilities. Victims were also granted immediate emergency loans with minimum payment and restructuring schemes so they can start rebuilding their lives and properties. The special private-public commission to be headed

by a well-known figure from the private sector, was also created by the President to seek aid for reconstruction funding. Its key tasks include: 1) rehabilitation of infrastructure; 2) raising funds specially grants; 3) prioritize programs; 4) it will also be in-charge of the implementation of the programs; 5) serve as the clearing house; and 6) make requests from the UN and World Bank (WB) for international pledge. Conduct of a post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) is also being scheduled by the government and its development partners to determine the extent of the damage caused by Typhoons Ketsana and Parma, and to draw up reconstruction and recovery plans.

Gaps/Challenges

The disruption of basic and vital local government functions and facilities, such as, local hospitals and health care units and schools and the lack of access to affected communities have reduced the capacity of local government units to fully discharge duties and responsibilities that also hampered the delivery of urgent basic needs to the affected population. There also has to be a review and evaluation specific operational functions of other NDCC member-agencies for disaster response. One major problem that needs crucial attention are the clogged drainage systems and waterways in the country, as well as managing wastes/garbage disposal. Power restoration in flooded areas took a long time than usual because floodwaters took several days to recede. In fact, until now there are some areas that still remain under floodwaters and people there still have to wait for some time for their places to be drained from floods. Some people living in danger zones would still insist on going back to their homes with the hope of rebuilding their houses and returning to their normal lives again. Some are immovable and since their livelihood is there, they do not want to move any farther from Manila. So relocation sites should offer livelihood opportunities for them. For the urgency of their immediate relocation to safer places, there were already available government lands identified for the purpose but complete or total relocation may take a while to be accomplished as it would entail much cost on the part of the government and in some cases would require forced relocation of affected families who would refuse to leave the dangerous areas for reasons mentioned above.

It would take some time for us to say that the Philippines has fully recovered from the wrath of Typhoons Ketsana and Parma. We have been slowly jumpstarting from relief to early recovery, plans and different programs are underway but their successful implementation would entail support from different stakeholders, particularly financial assistance from funding agencies and of course full cooperation from concerned local government units and the community. One, there is a need for more extensive studies/researches on urban planning and development, putting into consideration extreme weather conditions brought about by the effects of climate change in the Philippines. Mid-term and long-term strategies and approaches to recovery also have to be identified and carried out progressively. The Government of the Philippines is looking forward to more partnerships and collaboration projects with donor-agencies so the country and its people would be able to rebuild, recover and go back to their normal lives again.