

TYPHOON HAIYAN EMERGENCY - PHILIPPINES

Introduction

Typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Yolanda, hit the Philippines in the early morning of 8 November, affecting more than 9.5 million people. At least 670,000 have been displaced, 80,000 homes have been destroyed and the number of casualties continues to rise, with Tacloban City, in Leyte province, reportedly flattened by winds of up to 200mph and storm surges as high as six metres.

Efforts are underway to reach affected areas, including the worst-hit provinces of Samar, Eastern Samar, Leyte, Iloilo, and Capiz, which have been without electricity and communication lines for days. Before the typhoon, most if not all of these provinces were categorised as the poorest in the country.

The Philippines government announced a national state of calamity on 11 November to speed aid delivery to affected areas, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is organising international support for the emergency. As part of this effort, Christian Aid staff and partners, and ACT Alliance members, are responding to the emergency.

Response and recovery

Needs assessments are being undertaken across the country, with immediate calls for food, water, shelter and medical supplies to be provided for the hundreds of thousands forced from their homes. An estimated 2.5 million people are in need of food. The UN Humanitarian country team has launched an action plan, calling for US\$301m to meet the needs of those affected.

Many of the archipelago's 7,000 islands are difficult to access. Inland, floods and debris have made some communities hard to reach. In Tacloban City, there are growing security concerns, as people who have been without food and water for several days become increasingly desperate. According to some reports, attempts to deliver food aid have resulted in stampedes, and police and military have been flown in from the capital Manila to provide additional security as local police forces have been overwhelmed.

Christian Aid is working with eight national partners to assess the impact and deliver much-needed relief.

Along with World Vision and Habitat for Humanity, we will deliver food, shelter and other essential items such as toiletries and cooking pans to 15,000 families in Samar and Iloilo, while we are also preparing to respond in Leyte.

Causes

Disasters happen when a community's ability to manage the shocks and stresses of hazards such as typhoons is overwhelmed. With sustained wind speeds of more than 190mph, Haiyan is the most powerful tropical cyclone to hit land in recorded history. The typhoon also brought substantial storm surges, with waves as high as 15 metres, and up to 400mm of rain.

Climate

While it is difficult to attribute any one event to climate change, it is clear from climate scientists that climate change makes extreme events like Typhoon Haiyan more likely.

What the science says:

- all events of this nature are affected by climate change because the climate is warmer and moister than it used to be, both features that enhance the chances of stronger cyclones¹
- likewise, climate change-driven sea level rise has enhanced storm surges, with Haiyan, as with Sandy last year²
- and climate change increases the probability of the occurrence of extreme events like Typhoon Haiyan.³

Vulnerability and exposure

People who are poor or vulnerable are often hardest hit by disasters, as they have no savings to fall back on, and often have little option but to live in areas prone to hazards. The loss of beloved family members and the destruction of homes, assets and ways to make a living are devastating and can be very difficult to recover from, leaving people increasingly vulnerable to further shocks.

Haiyan is the third disaster to strike the Philippines in less than a year. In August, Typhoon Trami caused massive flooding on the island of Luzon, and in

December 2012, Typhoon Bopha killed up to 2,000 people and cost US\$1.7bn of damage to the island of Mindanao.⁴ The total economic impact of Haiyan could reach US\$14bn, according to a report by a senior insurance analyst at New York based data company Bloomberg Industries.⁵

Emergency response funding

The UN has called for US\$301m to meet the needs of the millions affected by Haiyan for the next six months. More than 20 organisations – including UN agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration – have developed projects across 15 sectors, prioritising food, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene provision.

The plan is aimed at providing the materials and services necessary for a safe and healthy living environment until reconstruction restores normality and people's self-reliance. Some 22 UN member states have pledged to assist this UN appeal.

Learning from past emergencies

The devastation caused by Haiyan has been likened to the impact of the 2004 Tsunami. Almost nine years on, it is key that the lessons from that international response and other disaster responses in Pakistan, Haiti, East Africa and the world over are not forgotten.

Critical for Christian Aid is the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition's call for a 'fundamental reorientation from supplying aid to supporting and facilitating communities' own relief and recovery priorities'.⁶ Learning from past emergencies shows that local authorities can be overwhelmed when large numbers of external agencies arrive in a country to offer support. While the motivation to assist is laudable, aid agencies should be sure they will add value; local capacity already exists and needs to be supported rather than overrun.

Ensuring strong coordination and response efforts based on needs is critical, as is working with government and local civil society structures to ensure that aid is appropriate, effective and connected to longer-term resilient recovery. For more detail on this, see the recent report *Missed Opportunities: the Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-based Humanitarian Responses*.⁷

Responding to emergencies and making them less likely in future

Emergency response

Donors must provide the US\$301m outlined in the UN Haiyan Action Plan, but also commit long-term funding for recovery and resilient reconstruction. Response efforts must be coordinated and work with national government and local and national organisations to ensure aid is relevant, appropriate and connected. Priority should be given to ensuring the safety of women and girls, who are often at higher risk of threats to their safety, trafficking and abuse during emergencies. Above all, aid delivery must be transparent and accountable to beneficiaries.

Mitigation

Substantial emissions reduction is necessary to prevent similar or worse disasters occurring more frequently. All countries must commit to their fair share of emissions reductions, determined by their historical responsibility and capacity. A good place to start would be the immediate transfer of US\$500bn of annual fossil fuel subsidies to provide renewable energy to poor communities.⁸

Adaptation and disaster risk reduction

Damage has already been done and the consequences of climate change will be felt in the coming decades due to irreversible warming. It is therefore crucial that the rich, industrialised countries most responsible for climate change help vulnerable countries to cope with its consequences. In many cases, this will require finance, technology and strategic support for adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures, such as access to scientific data, to help communities build resilience and withstand climate-related hazards.

Integrating risk management into development plans

Disaster risk management must be every government's priority and incorporated into national development plans if the world is going to be better able to manage the impacts of hazards like Haiyan. The post Millennium Development Goal framework must include a specific target to reduce the impact of disasters, and disaster risk management must be included across the other development goals.

Loss and damage

A loss and damage mechanism should be established to deal with those impacts on poor communities and countries that are unavoidable due to barriers and limits to adaptation. This should also fund practical measures to help the poorest and most vulnerable rebuild their lives, and develop resilience to current and future climate hazards.

Addressing vulnerability

It is clear from the aftermath of Haiyan that the poorest are the most affected. Those who did not leave areas exposed to hazards or who live in less resilient homes suffered severely from the typhoon's impact. Addressing vulnerabilities such as poverty or marginalisation to strengthen people's ability to manage disaster risks is a key part of the UN's Hyogo Framework for Action. Yet the framework, aimed at making the world safer from natural hazards, has not been delivered well by states. Negotiations have begun for a second HFA, to be agreed in 2015. The new agreement must have a clear plan for addressing vulnerability. This should include a clear commitment by donors to allocate a higher proportion of aid to disaster risk reduction and resilience in the most disaster-prone countries, thus targeting the most vulnerable communities.

Endnotes

1 Dr Kevin Trenberth, Attribution of Climate Variations and Trends to Human Influences and Natural Variability, *Climate Change*, 2011.

2 *Explaining Extreme Events of 2012 from a Climate Perspective*, Chapter 6, American Meteorological Society, September 2013; see also point 25 in the World Meteorological Organization's *Statement on Tropical Cyclones and Climate Change*.

3 WMO *Statement on Tropical Cyclones and Climate Change* – points 18 and 27. See also *IPCC SREX Summary for Policymakers* (2012, p29) and the *IPCC 5th Assessment Report Summary for Policymakers* (2013, p23).

4 EM-DAT The International Disaster Database – Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters.

5 bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-08/super-typhoon-slams-into-philippines-killing-3-as-power-fails.html

6 Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2007, alnap.org/ourwork/tec/synthesis

7 christianaid.org.uk/images/partnering-in-emergencies-report.pdf

8 pv-tech.org/news/iea_introduce_flexible_renewables_tariff_and_end_fossil_fuel_subsidies

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

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