



Fish vendor and mother of four Felisa Abas hopes relocation in Pago, Leyte, will bring her a better life (2014). Caroline Gluck/Oxfam

THE RIGHT MOVE?

Ensuring durable relocation after typhoon Haiyan

Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda) left four million people homeless. Amid the transition from a largely successful relief effort to recovery, local authorities are preparing to relocate thousands of survivors to protect them from future disasters. This is an opportunity for the government to 'build back better'.

However, current plans ignore key elements of sustainable relocation processes, and lack technical guidance and support. The legal rights of thousands of people to be informed and consulted are not being met. This is likely to leave many survivors poorer and more vulnerable to disasters.

Similar flaws have occurred previously in the Philippines and led to failed relocation initiatives. For current relocation plans to succeed, the government should demonstrate increased political will to 'do it right' this time.

SUMMARY

Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda) hit central Philippines on 8 November 2013, killing more than 8,000 people and leaving 4 million homeless and displaced. Led by the Philippines government and backed by valuable international support, a strong relief operation helped to save thousands of lives.¹ Assistance is now focusing on helping communities recover from the disaster. The government has promised to 'build back better' in Haiyan-affected areas. In this context, prompted by a presidential announcement, local authorities have embarked on a major permanent relocation process to move people away from the seashore to safer areas.

Two hundred thousand typhoon Haiyan survivors are now targeted for relocation.² However, if they are not given a chance to voice their needs and participate in the planning, then relocation efforts are likely to fail and push survivors deeper into poverty.

Along with many other agencies, national and international, Oxfam is providing assistance, such as water, sanitation, livelihoods and shelter to more than 650,000 people, many of whom may be relocated in the near future. In February and March 2014, Oxfam conducted a survey in areas targeted for relocation, to understand the needs and perceptions of affected groups. Oxfam interviewed 453 individuals (243 women and 210 men), organized 14 focus groups, and spoke with more than 30 key informants across three provinces in Eastern Samar, Leyte, and Cebu.

This paper summarizes key findings from the survey, to help inform the relocation strategy of national and local government officials. **It urges decision makers to prioritize the suitability and sustainability of relocation processes, rather than to rush and risk wasting scarce resources and increasing the poverty of vulnerable groups.**

Of the 14 million people affected by Haiyan, 40 per cent were already living below the poverty line before the disaster.³ It is often the poorest people who are now targeted for relocation. These people do not formally own land and have little option but to live close to the seashore, often in flimsy shelters. Physical safety is the official argument to justify relocation and is indeed an important incentive.

However, for the process to be durable and successful, authorities need to integrate certain crucial elements into their planning. Livelihood was cited by 49 per cent of people surveyed as the most important criterion for the authorities to consider in site selection. Without effective livelihood opportunities in new areas, people relocated will either stay and become poorer and more vulnerable to disasters, or leave. Both outcomes undermine the official strategy to build back better. People interviewed also expect relocation to provide them with tenure security and many said they do not want to be relocated without such guarantees.

Engaging communities should be a vital element of relocation. Plans must integrate their needs and gain their support to ensure the

'The Government told us to relocate – we don't have any choice. Now I have a mini store. I want to tell the president that if we are relocated, we want a small business and capital to start it. The government told us to not build concrete homes because we will be relocated but they didn't say when.'

Man, Leyte

government's strategy succeeds. Previous relocation efforts in the Philippines have failed in part due to lack of consultation with communities. Informing and consulting affected groups is also required by Philippines' legislation⁴ as well as international standards. However, the results of Oxfam's survey show that the rights of affected communities to access information and participate in the planning and implementation of the relocation process are not being met.

Of the people interviewed, 81 per cent stated they are not aware of their rights regarding permanent relocation. Very few had received information about relocation, and only 7 per cent of individuals interviewed said they have been consulted by a government official – either at the government, municipal or district (or 'barangay'⁵) level – regarding the relocation process. Municipalities should empower people to make informed choices about relocation and involve them in the early stages of planning.

The Philippines has been a global leader in enacting legislation aimed at reducing the impact of hazards such as typhoons and earthquakes (part of an approach known as disaster risk reduction). However, this legislation is seldom implemented, due to lack of political will at the national and local levels, and a corresponding lack of prioritization of resources, including technical expertise. When failing to implement regulations, authorities fail to protect people from the impact of disasters, as demonstrated time and again in the Philippines. Typhoon Haiyan is just the latest occurrence. Government officials, who justify the relocation in Haiyan-affected areas on the imperative of public safety, should muster political will and translate this rhetoric into action. This would involve:

- using technical and scientific information – rather than arbitrary and random estimates – to determine hazard-prone areas in a process led by the Mines and Geo Science Bureau (MGB);
- passing national legislation on land use planning and implementing legislation related to zoning, local land use planning, and sustainable management of natural resources;
- supporting local authorities' capacity to implement disaster risk reduction measures;
- repairing or building evacuation centres urgently, as up to 92 per cent are no longer usable in some areas.⁶

The capacity of local government units (LGUs) has been severely disrupted by the impacts of typhoon Haiyan. The government announcement on relocation was made without prior consideration of its ramifications, of the potential number of people affected and of the lack of local capacity. Due to the decentralized government structure, the responsibility of implementing government statements falls on LGUs. Yet most LGUs do not have the financial and technical capacity, or the workforce, to address the challenges related to relocation. Challenges can include limited land availability, lengthy and expensive land acquisition processes, housing, land and property issues (including the question of compensation for property owners in 'unsafe areas'), and the complexity of having to plan various technical aspects concurrently, requiring sophisticated expertise.

Several mayors in affected areas requested government-issued guidelines on various aspects of the relocation process – including selection criteria for recipients of permanent housing and tenure security arrangements.⁷ This guidance and technical support are urgently required to ensure that the relocation process is equitable, gender responsive,⁸ safety- and rights-based, and meets minimum standards.

Other actors can play their part too to ensure that safer and more resilient communities emerge from the destruction caused by typhoon Haiyan. International donors can build on their collectively generous support for the humanitarian response by supporting the provision of technical assistance to LGUs and backing crucial disaster risk reduction measures (such as evacuation centres and early warning systems).

Additionally, local and international NGOs can help affected communities understand and assert their rights and become constructively involved in the relocation planning, thereby helping to ensure that the process delivers successful and lasting results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Philippines government should:

- **Provide policy guidelines to local authorities** on: compensation for land or house owners in ‘unsafe’ areas, tenure security in permanent relocation sites and selection criteria for recipients of permanent housing.
- **Provide the necessary financial support** – through clear and transparent procedures, and backed up with strong accountability measures – to local authorities to ensure they can complete the relocation process in line with international and national standards.
- **Fast track the determination of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ zones** and the production of more detailed geo hazard maps by the MGB.
- **Pass the national land use policy in the 16th Congress** to institutionalize coherent land planning.

LGUs should:

- **Delay the transfer of people to permanent relocation sites** until the ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ zones have been determined through a scientific process led by the MGB and until **people are selected through a fair and transparent process.**
- Where relocation is justifiable, **conduct information campaigns and organize meaningful consultations with affected communities to develop durable relocation plans.**
- **Make livelihoods an integral part of relocation planning.** This should include conducting socio economic studies in the early stages of planning, and developing livelihood opportunities for men and women before relocating people.
- **Ensure robust evacuation centres are available as a matter of urgency.**

- **Update or adopt local land use plans** based on comprehensive hazard and vulnerability mapping.

International donors should:

- **Support the provision of technical expertise to LGUs.**
- **Urgently support risk reduction measures such as the construction of safe evacuation centres** and the installation of early warning systems in cities and municipalities not equipped with these.

National and local NGOs and civil society organizations should:

- **Empower affected communities to learn and invoke their rights concerning relocation.** This should include information campaigns, awareness-raising activities, community organizing, advocacy capacity building, and supporting grievance mechanisms.

NOTES

¹ For more information about the initial humanitarian response, its success and challenges, see Oxfam's report (December 2013) 'Typhoon Haiyan, The response so far and vital lessons for the Philippines recovery', <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/typhoon-haiyan-one-month-lessons>

² There is no official figure on the estimated caseload of people targeted for relocation, but officials use a working figure of 200,000 people. See "Lacson eyes P106-B 'Yolanda' rehab masterplan", Philippines Daily Inquirer (24 April 2014) <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/596953/lacson-eyes-p106-b-yolanda-rehab-masterplan>. With the revised policy based on hazard mapping announced in March 2014, Oxfam assumes that such zones will need to be identified before a final figure can be derived

³ For instance, Eastern Samar poverty incidence rate among families is 59.4 per cent. See NCSB: http://www.nscb.gov.ph/poverty/data/1stsem_2012/tab1.xls and Family Income and Expenditure Survey, National Statistics Office, <http://www.census.gov.ph/content/2012-fies-statistical-tables>

⁴ Including the Constitution of the Philippines, the Urban development and Housing Act and the Magna Carta of Women.

⁵ A Barangay is the smallest administrative division in the Philippines and is the native Filipino term for a village, district or ward.

⁶ International Office for Migration, Damage assessment of designated evacuation centres in Typhoon affected areas, Eastern Samar (April 2014), <https://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2014/pbn-listing/iom-report-shows-coastal-populat.html>

⁷ Statement of principle, Cebu, 11 April 2014. Copy on file with the author.

⁸ For instance, the Philippine Risk Reduction Management Act of 2010 requires the government to 'ensure that disaster risk reduction and climate change measures are gender responsive' (Section 2 (j)). It also makes gender analysis mandatory for post-disaster and early recovery needs assessments (Section 9 (m)). The Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710) requires the state to address the particular needs of women from a gender perspective in the context of disasters.

© Oxfam International April 2014.

This paper was written by Caroline Baudot. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Laura Eldon, Golda Hilario and Lou Lasap in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-593-7 in April 2014. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)
Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)
Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)
Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)
Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)
Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)
Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)
Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)
Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)
Oxfam Intermón (Spain) (www.oxfamintermon.org)
Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)
Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)
Oxfam Japan (www.oxfam.jp)
Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfamMexico.org)
Oxfam New Zealand (www.oxfam.org.nz)
Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) (www.oxfamnovib.nl)
Oxfam Québec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org.