

# **Philippines - Reclaiming rights, Rebuilding Lives: A Consultation with Sendong Survivors in Iligan City**

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## **Rationale**

Typhoon Sendong (internationally known as “Washi”) has gravely affected the western areas of Northern Mindanao late on Friday night with high winds and heavy rains. It was early on Saturday morning while most people were asleep that the worst devastation happened with flash floods ripping through large areas including Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City. Seemingly, the water that rushed down from the mountains that brought along trees and other debris, logs (including uprooted coconut trees, banana trees, etc.) crashed through the densely populated areas and washed out thousands of houses, consequently causing tragic results. Many people simply had no chance. The scenes of devastation speak for themselves. People living in the small islet called Bayug island were simply swept away as the whole islet disappeared. A similar fate had happened to those islet and houses settled at the mouth of Mandulog River in Iligan City where almost all of the houses were crashed down by big logs and debris. At least 30 barangays were affected in Iligan City with more than 25,000 families and 60,821 individuals affected. Many families settled in various evacuation centers while others opted to stay in their houses hoping to salvaged things and properties left behind by the deluge and some were fostered in the houses of their relatives.

The consequences and magnitude of the deluge served as magnet that attracts people from all walks of life and from all corners of the country to offer whatever maybe is available and possible to give and share. Relief and immediate assistance poured out that came from various organizations, individuals, international NGOs, neighboring towns and provinces, other LGUs as well as from the Iliganons themselves. The spirit of oneness and solidarity with the survivors was indeed very strong and overwhelming.

## **Various Support and Assistance Poured Out Like Rain**

Relief goods and immediate assistance to survivors had poured out like rain. At the onset, schools, multi-purpose buildings, gymnasiums, covered courts and even churches turned out into evacuation centers that served as immediate refuge for the survivors. Indeed, it was a very chaotic situation in the very beginnings since almost everybody needed to be treated for first aid especially those wounded and injured. Basic food such as rice, noodles, canned goods, and clothing were immediately provided to survivors in the evacuation centers. After couple of days, more and more relief goods, used clothing, potable water, kitchen utensils, hygiene kits, medicines, and any other kind of assistance came in from various organizations, donors, individuals and LGUs from other parts of the country. The national government also put their share where allocation for relocation and housing assistance was handed over through DSWD.

Meanwhile, civil society organizations, church-based organizations, academe and private institutions had also responded immediately to the survivors’ needs. In fact, a week after the disaster wherein around 31 evacuation centers were declared and relatively in placed, an “adopt an evacuation

center” scheme was agreed and carried out among the responding organizations. This was aimed to augment and help systematize the operation and management of the different evacuation centers to be able to efficiently and effectively address the survivors’ needs.

### **Do Survivors’ Needs Addressed Appropriately?**

Iligan City constituents much more with the affected communities were immensely surprised and shocked at the onset of the disaster, hence, responding organizations and government agencies tasked to address the immediacy of the issue was also overwhelmed with the phenomenon. Without a doubt, this was the first time Iligan City had ever experienced of such big deluge, thus, it was truly chaotic and unsystematic in the first couple of weeks. Moreover, it took time for the City to establish its command center, installed appropriate systems and procedures to be able to address the immense and immediate needs of the survivors.

Relief distribution to the different evacuation centers came after the other and even in some cases evacuation centers have had overlapping and conflicting relief distribution schedules. This just manifested that indeed absence of coordination system among responders and service providers was evident. Oftentimes, responders and service providers just automatically assumed the needs of the survivors. Meanwhile, it’s true that basic food items (FI) and non food items (NFI) and other needs such as hygiene kits were pre-determined by responding organizations based and set out by international standards. Nevertheless, there were peculiar cases where goods (NFI) distributed by other organization included unusual items e.g. packs of condoms, such that it came as surprise to survivors. Though, this was not meant to be culturally insensitive, however, created misconceptions. Moreover, no proper information was given to the survivors such that children thought this was a toy thing or could be eaten.

Pre-determined relief goods food items and non-food items alike left no room for consultation from the survivors of their other needs which responders definitely consider as trivial needs, yet, significant needs for the survivors. The process adopted and utilized by most of the responding organizations definitely ruled out one of the most important role of the survivors or IDPs - participation. This process is indeed very significant especially in the early recovery and rehabilitation up to the reconstruction stage of the survivors as they themselves know what is best and appropriate for them.

### **Survivors as Partners, Not Victims**

Various civil society organizations (CSOs), church-based organizations, academe and private institutions that immediately address the needs of the survivors swarmed in. Center-based as well as home-based survivors were both served by these organizations. Meanwhile, few of these organizations had adopted evacuation centers. The once chaotic evacuation center had now been in order with respective rules and policies. This was realized through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders such as local barangay officials, DSWD, CHO, CVOs and the evacuees themselves. From then on, the evacuation center had been orderly managed and policies were implemented. This only proved that if victims themselves are consulted and voices are heard, they won’t hesitate to participate and work along with other stakeholders.

These processes is indeed empowering on the part of the evacuees and at the same time transcend their feelings of being a “victim” to a “resource” and a “partner” in redefining their future and reshaping after the deluge wrecked their lives.

### **Consultations with the IDPs as a Process**

It is within this framework that the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Planning and Development (OVCPD) in partnership with Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDRRAC) wants to launch series of consultations with the survivors/IDPs to be able to hear issues that concerns their lives especially in the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction. Consultation is a process and an end result in itself. It means that participation of survivors in redefining and reshaping their future is a significant process to surpass and go beyond the “victims” thinking level.

The consultation aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify current and specific needs of the IDPs both center-based and home-based;
- To determine their priority issues and concerns especially in the process of early recovery and rehabilitation up to reconstruction stage of interventions;
- To promote the well-being of the IDPs through participation and engaging them in all processes concerning their future; and
- To create an Iligan-wide IDP/survivor’s interim group that will banner and put forward their issues and demands geared towards sustaining their initiatives
- To invoke and challenge different government agencies regarding their role and functions as mandated by their respective agencies

The said City-wide IDP Consultative Forum will be launched come January 26, 2012 which will be done at the College of Education Amphi Theater, MSU-IIT. The activity will be a whole day affair.

## **RDRRAC**

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\* <http://rdrrac.wordpress.com/>