

Philippines: A Year and a Half After Supertyphoon Yolanda/Haiyan

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A Year and a Half After Supertyphoon Yolanda: Survivors Still Decry Injustices in Government's Efforts on its Promised "Build Back Better" Program!

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A year and a half after Yolanda swept the Visayan Region, rehabilitation and recovery for the affected 171 municipalities and cities in Regions 4A, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Residents of the 12,222 barangays (in 44 provinces, from 591 municipalities and 57 cities) continue in struggling for survival as recovery and rehabilitation efforts remain slow and rigged with irregularities. The cries of the survivors over the neglect and outright marginalisation, prioritising private-sector in its rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts continue to hound President Aquino to this day.

Just months after the year of commemorating the climate change devastation, no less than Sec. Panfilo Lacson resigned from OPARR, with a soared frustration of the PNoy administration in the direction of the Yolanda recovery and rehabilitation efforts. Dissolving OPARR and instead delegated the reins to Sec. Balisacan of the National Development Authority (NEDA), to continue its private-sector led rehabilitation efforts, President Aquino dismissed the people's demand for a people-centered Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan (CRRP), wherein the NEDA convened Salubungan, with a public-private partnership model under the government's Accelerated and Sustainable Anti-Poverty Program (ASAPP). ASAPP aims to tap the skills and resources of the poor in enabling private enterprises to expand their production capacities and markets.

Meanwhile, stories of land-grabbing, displacements, rising hunger and human rights violations continued humming over the affected communities as they contend with the scarcity of meaningful governmental response - a more devastating disaster that dwarfs the fury unleashed by Yolanda.

"We continue to be worst off now, than when Yolanda hit us! A year and a half after, we struggle being forced to contend with un-livable housing, unsustainable livelihood programs, diminishing public services, while local and national government bicker against each other preparing for elections instead of our recovery, as large amounts of money are misused" says Genelyn Barzo, Sec. General of the Eastern Visayas Chapter of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, and a Yolanda survivor herself (from Tacloban, Leyte).

The PNoy government's post-Yolanda rehabilitation course supposedly purporting the "build back better, faster" principle, is in effect "building slower with survivors' lives becoming worse". Its Rehabilitation Assistance on Yolanda (RAY) and RAY 2 that pegged P360.9 B investment requirement for critical immediate actions, short-term interventions and medium-term needs within 2013 to 2017, only as of date released a budget of P2 billion for the repairs and rehabilitation of government-owned facilities that include city and municipal halls, civic centers and public markets. About 56 percent of the 144 projects in Region 8 have been completed under RAY 1, according to Sec. Mar Roxas of DILG, while the remaining 44 percent are in various stages of development. Promising at least 25 'big ticket' projects with changes in design are due for completion in September this year,

local governments of affected areas, likewise are not happy with these very slow, but much needed budget releases. The National Government is in fact just recently preparing to release another P2 billion for the rehabilitation projects for barangays under RAY 2, (government has allotted P973.51 million for various rehabilitation projects in Region 8 alone).

Being consistently slow, even as survivors' lives are at stake, PNoy had set his signature on the CRRPs only on October 31, 2014 with the total of Php 169 Billion budget. Also another reason for Sec. Lacson's frustration when he brought this to the President way back in August 2014, and only now but not even with substantial funding are being downloaded, that directly helped the poor survivors. Plagued with irregularities in the budget allocation and service delivery, local governments are witnesses to the political pressure the national government is forcing, as election season has become the context for these budget releases.

But more importantly, the RAY's proposition to "encourage and facilitate the active involvement of the private sector" that continue expanding public-private partnership arrangements for major investment programs in rehabilitation, government continue to perpetuate its privatization approach, detaching itself from its obligation to its citizens, and putting the burden on the private sector.

"There's the rub. Much of the investment will be ushered in by the corporate sector with the Government sidestepping in favor of big business. This explains for example why Nickel Asia Corporation, a big mining firm, is spearheading the rehabilitation efforts in Guiuan, Eastern Samar - an area rich in nickel and magnetite. In Salcedo, some civil society organizations are being used to pursue the interest of the corporations. All this dirty energy production, including mining and coal fired power plants, that has been proven to aggravate Climate Change, adds to heaping more disasters" says Sammy Gamboa, Sec. General of the Freedom from Debt Coalition. Even local governments are directly asking loans from the World Bank, to fund rehabilitation, in the case of the LGU in Cebu City, based on reports of survivor activists, Aaron Pedrosa of SANLAKAS.

"Sadly, the 'disaster capitalism' that was witnessed in other climate devastated countries is already being witnessed in the Philippines. Poor coastal communities that have lost everything are facing evictions to make way for tourism, shopping malls and industrial fishing," reiterates Sammy Gamboa. "It is not only the utter lack of disaster preparedness by the government when the Typhoon hit or when another typhoon of similar magnitude strikes but its (government's) willingness to lend itself accomplice, if not principal, to a business track by corporations that capitalizes on the vulnerability of millions, of building back businesses with better return of investment prospects. Like Yolanda, the rehabilitation and reconstruction program of the government continue to prey on the people.

But the survivors' say "No more to this incompetence and lack of genuine adherence to justice and human rights. "We are not beggars asking for short change. We are your citizens and demanding our basic rights to food, shelter, education and social services, most wanting because we are survivors of a tragedy that no one expected. But don't give us another tragedy, by not including us in decision making of OUR reconstruction and recovery programs!" adds Genelyn Brazos.

"We demand for the government to fulfill its obligation in promoting and ensuring the welfare of its people, thus spearheading a people-centered, rights-based rehabilitation process. People not corporations should be underlying inspiration in rebuilding the communities and local economies!", Sammy Gamboa reiterates. He also adds, "Stop getting loans, in our (Yolanda Survivor's) name, instead fast track the people-centered recovery and rehabilitation, no more excuses for the PNoy administration. It is an outright violation of the citizen's rights to rebuild their lives with dignity."

Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC)

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<http://www.fdc.ph/press-statements/women-and-gender/661-a-year-and-a-half-after-supertyphoon-yolanda-survivors-still-decry-injustices-in-government-s-efforts-on-its-promised-build-back-better-program>