

BUILDING DISASTER-RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Cagayan de Oro, Philippines: - Tropical Storm Washi, like an inland tsunami, damaged thousands of homes, properties and livelihoods in the Philippines. Washi was the world's deadliest storm in 2011.

"The day the disaster hit the country, the ILO felt the need to reach out and to help families through cash-for-work. The main challenge was how to rebuild, but too often we overlook the fact that we need to provide livelihoods for individuals," said Lawrence Jeff Johnson, Director of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Office for the Philippines.

With AusAID's support, the ILO implemented an emergency employment project to rebuild lives and restore livelihoods. Working in partnership with the Department of Labor and Employment, a cash-for-work was created for survivors.

Initially, the work involved was mostly cleaning and clearing of tons of mud and debris brought by the flash flood. Working with the local governments of Cagayan de Oro and Iligan the ILO also worked on the construction of bunkhouses, as well as slope and riverbank protection to deal with environmental threats.

45-year-old Liza Dinagsao, was one of 102 workers hired for 30 days in Calaanan, Cagayan de Oro and trained to move 6,000 cubic meters of soil (equivalent to 600 truckloads) to help prevent erosion near the permanent shelters built for families and survivors of Tropical Storm Washi. She received P215 per day (US\$5) and was happy to be part of the cash-for-work scheme because, as well as earning, she also learned new skills.

"The cash-for-work helped me support my family financially. My husband only earns minimum wage as a driver. On average he earns, P7500 monthly (US\$178) which most of the time is not enough for the family" Lisa said.

A mother of three children, Liza felt that the cash for work helped not only her family but also her hometown. "Cagayan de Oro was badly hit and we never experienced such storm and flood before. Our city, Cagayan de Oro was really affected" she added.

United in the cause to uplift and help families get back on their feet, the Rotary Club of Cagayan de Oro also partnered with the ILO in the construction of permanent houses. The Rotary Club of Cagayan de Oro is Mindanao's biggest club of professionals, business and community leaders.

The Rotary Club identified survivors for training in masonry, carpentry, painting and building. The Club provided skills training, with their engineers mentoring unskilled storm survivors to build permanent houses in Barangay Indahag.

“We are not just constructing houses but rebuilding communities. The project will train 60 survivors and hire them as workers, while 40 survivor families will occupy the completed permanent shelters. We will also provide values formation (i.e. developing positive attitudes while recovering from the disaster) and livelihood training,” said Engineer Marillo Paano, President of the Rotary Club of Cagayan de Oro.

As well as the transfer of skills, workers will also earn cash and receive starter kits containing tools such as hammers and saws. The ILO is also working with the Rotary Club to explore the use of solar panels to improve energy efficiency.

“We also have to think about building houses and developing new skills in an environmentally sustainable way. We will look at livelihoods, how communities will thrive by producing goods and services. We know that people live where they can earn for a living. Businesses and communities have crucial role to play in rebuilding the society,” said Mr Johnson.

The ILO has implemented community contracting and cash-for-work schemes in several disaster-risk areas in the Philippines, to provide employment and to help survivors cope with the crisis. This has been done in partnership with local employers, workers' groups, community associations and the private sector. Through the use of skills, materials, and other available resources construction and infrastructure restoration has become more efficient and cheaper. Local people not only survived disasters but also learned new skills to help them rebuild their lives and restore their communities.

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