

After the storm: Rebuilding livelihoods in the Philippines

Natural disasters destroy livelihoods but the aftermath also offers opportunities to create jobs and revitalise the economy as there will be high demand for construction and other recovery works. For the last ten years, the ILO has engaged in post-disaster reconstruction in countries in Asia and the Pacific, including China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and beyond. So the Organization was also prepared to help when tropical storm Washi heavily affected villages and major cities in the Philippines last December. Minette Rimando from the ILO office in Manila reports.

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CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines (ILO Online) – Determined to give his family a better future, Joel Obsid saved his hard-earned money while working abroad. After his return to the Philippines he started his own business in Cagayan de Oro selling school supplies, producing plastic envelopes and laminating cards. His income varied, often increasing during school days, from US \$460 to \$700 for two weeks.

But what Joel saved over two years working abroad was swept away in seconds when tropical storm Washi hit the Philippines on the evening of 16 December last year.

“We were trapped overnight. The flood reached the second floor of our house. Suddenly, the flood flushed a snake into our house which attacked my wife and daughter. I told them not to move. I was so afraid. I asked my family to pray. Having survived the typhoon was a miracle,” Joel remembers.

The storm affected villages and major cities in the Philippines as it took an unusual path. Cagayan de Oro and Iligan in Mindanao and parts of Dumaguete in Visayas were the worst hit cities. More than 50,000 houses were damaged and the livelihoods of some 1.1 million people were affected.

“We lost our livelihood. As a sales clerk, my wife only earns the minimum wage (about US\$6 per day) but this is not enough to support our four children. At the age of 44, it will be hard for me to find a job. Even if I know some people who could help me, they still prefer younger workers with better education and experience,” Joel explains.

After the storm a public school where Joel's youngest daughter goes to kindergarten, served as one of the evacuation centres. Joel and his family temporarily stayed in the school gym where they spent the holiday and the New Year. Waiting in a long cue for relief goods, Joel received the equivalent of US\$12 from a volunteer to help him and his family.

“I thought of spending the money to buy food, but knowing that it will only last for a couple of days, I decided to use it to buy candies and cigarettes. I built my own store inside the evacuation centre using blankets and cardboards. Now I am earning up to US\$116 per day out of my makeshift store. Having my own livelihood inside the evacuation centre helped me to make a living,” Joel says.

However, Joel and his family will not be able to return to their house. The government declared the area as a no-build zone. “We will not go back to our house, but I hope we can soon find a place to stay where I can move my store. I pray that my children will also have the chance to get back to school.”

Unlike Joel, 62-year old Romanita Salilo is not yet ready to leave her place. “It took me three years to have my own house. I do not spend that much to go to my employer. Sometimes I can just walk to my working place. If I live too far, how can I find work?” Romanita says. Living on her own, Romanita has to find work: “Otherwise, I have nothing to eat.”

Romanita's son died barely two days after she lost her husband due to cancer. “How can I face all these tragedies? Why did God save me from the flood and not let me die?” Romanita cries.

Long-term solutions needed

Although significant progress has been made, much more needs to be done to help the victims of the storm. Concerted efforts are required to ensure that adequate temporary and long-term shelter solutions are provided with access to livelihoods and income-generating opportunities.

To this purpose, the ILO convened a Livelihood Cluster together with the [Department of Social Welfare and Development](#), in coordination with the [Department of Labor and Employment](#) of the Philippines, the [United Nations](#) and its sister agencies, the national government and the local government of Cagayan de Oro and Iligan cities, to help typhoon-affected families rebuild their lives through decent and productive work.

“Through the Livelihood Cluster, we will assist typhoon-affected families and vulnerable groups. The Cluster will facilitate provision of livelihood starter kits, emergency employment and cash-for-work programmes. Within the longer-term, we have to ensure access to sustainable livelihoods at the local or community-level to help them recover and to contribute to peace and security, while ensuring safety and health,” says Lawrence Jeff Johnson, Director of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines.

The Livelihood Cluster is bringing together agencies working on employment and income generating strategies. The livelihood recovery process cuts across the different stages of crisis response from relief through early recovery to sustainable development. Livelihood support started on day 1 with food and cash-for-work activities and business starter kits.

The Livelihood Cluster is now preparing a strategy for medium to longer term recovery which includes support to community contracting modalities to rehabilitate community assets such as infrastructure and productive land, skills development to support the construction of houses and support to small and medium enterprises to help the private sector recover. Many families have lost their livelihoods and alternative sources of livelihoods need to be found.

The ILO raised and contributed US\$280,000 to help rebuild livelihoods in the two affected cities. This will include support to cash for work and emergency employment programmes, an impact assessment, building a database and reaching out to the most vulnerable such as female-headed households. The ILO is also coordinating with the shelter cluster to ensure that livelihood recovery is integrated in the process of developing permanent relocation sites.

Meanwhile, the [Department of Labor and Employment](#) of the Philippines provided US\$20,000 to some 88 typhoon-affected families, most of them in vulnerable employment. Cluster members, including trade unions, are also working on profiles of affected families, both in and outside of the evacuation centres. The Cluster also supported an in-depth assessment of damages to livelihoods. Through the ILO, the Cluster will consolidate the livelihood database together with the [Department of Social Welfare and Development](#) and the [Department of Labor and Employment](#) of the Philippines.