

# Guiding Principle 27 and Philippine typhoon response

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**Oxfam GB's response to the devastation and displacement caused by Typhoon Durian included advocacy with Philippine state, NGO, community and private sector actors to raise awareness of Principle 27 – obliging providers of humanitarian assistance to "give due regard to the protection needs and human rights" of IDPs.**

Residents of Amore resettlement site (a transitional housing project) near Legazpi city.

On 30 November 2006 Typhoon Durian affected over 2.5 million people in 13 provinces of the island of Luzon. In Albay province the heavy rain loosened volcanic ash from Mount. Mayon, which cascaded into densely populated communities in

displaced people to allow education to resume, the government decided to build 'transitional sites' for IDPs and families that were to be relocated.

The two initial transitional sites were grossly sub-standard. It was clear that government authorities had no awareness of minimum standards of assistance or of the obligations to, and rights of, displaced communities. Sites lacked adequate shelter, water supplies, sanitation facilities, health services, livelihood opportunities and food and non-food distributions. Residents

camps were not primarily due to ill will but to lack of awareness and resources, and so the programme aimed to raise awareness of Sphere Minimum Standards<sup>1</sup> and the Guiding Principles. We hoped that improved understanding of principles of humanitarian response would both raise the standards of the current response and enable local actors to better respond to future crises in the highly disaster-prone Bicol region.

Oxfam partnered with RedR India for Sphere training, the Balay Rehabilitation Centre for Guiding Principles training and an Albay-based NGO, Social Action Centre (SAC). The government/NGO coordination mechanism, called Ayuda Albay, was a key facilitator of this process.

An initial Sphere training in Legazpi for local government officials, UN, NGOs, private sector and community leaders was followed by one in Manila for federal government officials, including senior officials from the National Disaster Coordinating Council and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), key private sector contributors to humanitarian responses, NGOs and the UN.

The impact of the training was a rapid shift towards increasingly coordinated and objective-oriented provision of assistance. The government and

NGOs were given a tangible goal to aim for – such as one toilet per 20 people – and a framework against which to measure activities and identify gaps. Communities became more confident in expressing and articulating their needs. Sphere principles have been integrated into the work of the PDCC and the DSWD.

Guiding Principle training in Legazpi involved enabling



and around the provincial capital, Legazpi.

Mt Mayon volcano, near Legazpi city.

The Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) reported that 541 people were killed and over 164,180 homes partially or completely destroyed. The government judged that in view of the risk of further landslides it would have to relocate 11,000 families, some 55,000 people, from the slopes of the volcano. Most of these had lost their homes and were living in schools and churches being used as emergency evacuation centres that were not equipped to support the number of people in need; some classrooms housed up to 150 people. As schools needed to be cleared of



could not live without risk of disease, let alone live in dignity. There were disturbing reports of discrimination and abrupt relocations.

Oxfam GB responded by introducing a humanitarian standards component into its emergency programme, targeting key figures in the government, NGOs, private sector and communities. Oxfam assessed that the conditions in the transitional

government, NGOs, the private sector and community leaders to understand the basic concepts of the Principles and the national responsibility framework:

- identifying protection issues related to return, resettlement and reintegration
- developing an action plan to address IDP issues in Albay
- distributing copies of the Principles in Tagalog, the national language, and the local language, Bicolano
- convening whole-community orientation sessions on the Principles and IDPs' rights.

Partnership with SAC Legazpi led IDPs to organise themselves into 300 Core Groups to represent those living in evacuation centres, transitional sites and within the 'unsafe' zone. Forty per cent of them have continued to function following closure of the project. Core Groups have:

- improved distribution of goods/services and ensured they are based on community-identified need
- improved information flow by establishing direct lines of communication with government officials and NGOs

- established regulations within evacuation centres
- changed government policies – ensuring that vulnerable people living outside evacuation centres are also eligible for assistance
- assisted with assessments, targeting, encouragement of volunteerism and distribution of assistance
- launched a grass-roots IDP advocacy newsletter to promote flow of information
- worked with government officials to organise a General Assembly for all IDPs, establishing a common focal point for liaison with Ayuda Albay.

### **Impact of raising awareness**

When the project was first discussed, the government was apprehensive, fearing that providing communities with information about Sphere and the Principles would incite them to make unmeetable demands at a sensitive time in the Philippine electoral cycle. Oxfam built confidence by underscoring that community participation, regular flow of information and dialogue would lead to a more effective response and allow all those concerned space for discussion, compromise and mutual understanding.

Government authorities have acknowledged that without the training and the improvements in standards of response they would have been faced with significant unrest amongst evacuees. A key contributor to the success of this project was the eventual commitment and buy-in of the government.

Training community leaders has given them the tools to articulate their needs and to use an internationally recognised framework to hold state and non-state actors to account. Whether displaced by violence, development or natural disaster, communities are protected both by international law and national obligations. The Typhoon Durian response has demonstrated that a key factor contributing to the application of these laws and principles is that government, NGOs and communities must be aware of their obligations and rights. This can create a dialogue that is ultimately beneficial for all.

*Sara McHattie was Oxfam GB's Programme Manager for the Typhoon Durian Emergency Response. For more information, please email [rhastie@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:rhastie@oxfam.org.uk) While the European Commission supported components of the project, the views expressed here should not be regarded as reflecting those of the European Community.*