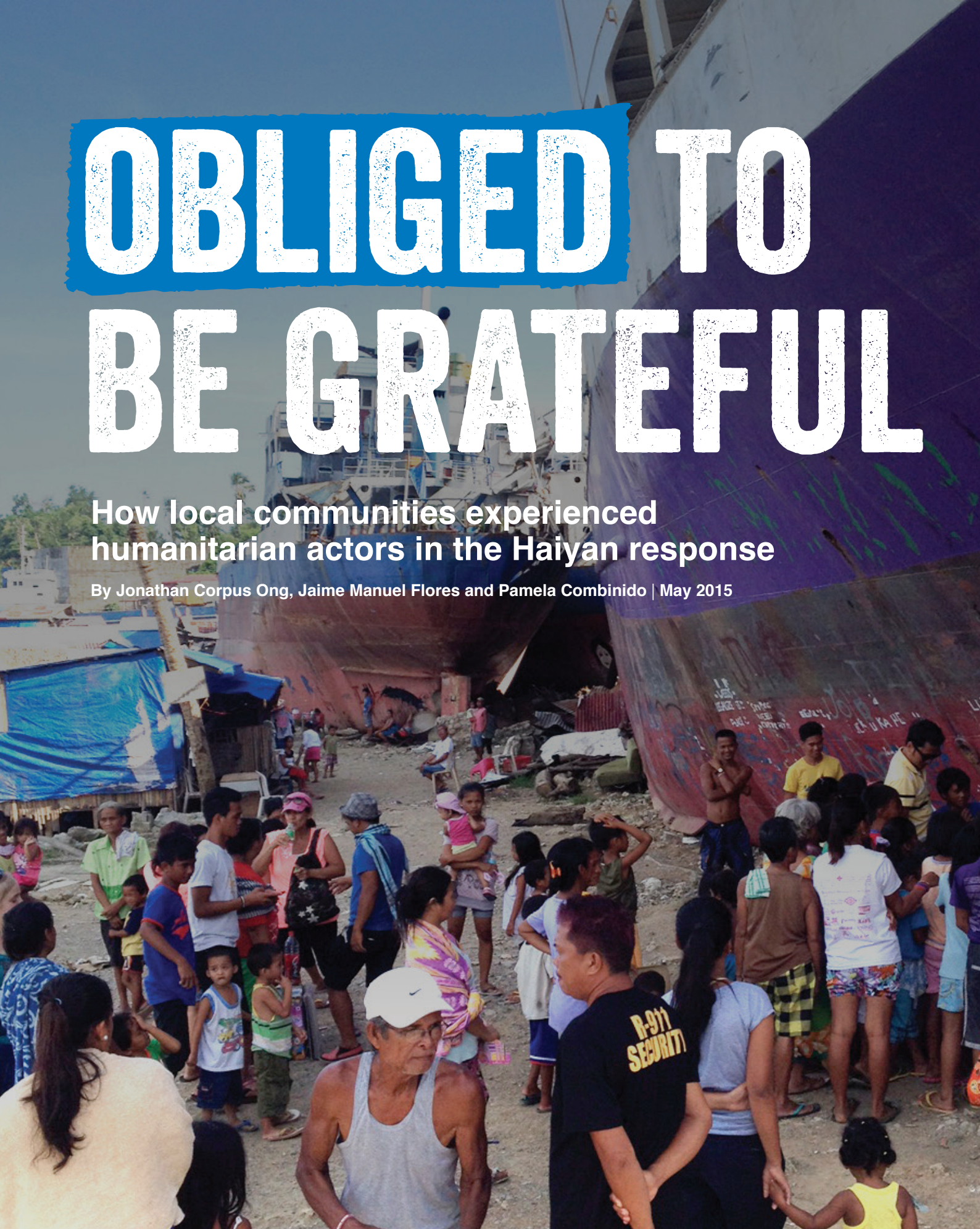


OBLIGED TO BE GRATEFUL

How local communities experienced humanitarian actors in the Haiyan response

By Jonathan Corpus Ong, Jaime Manuel Flores and Pamela Combinido | May 2015



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ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected People
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
BHW	<i>Barangay</i> Health Worker
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network
CwC	Communicating with Communities
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
IDV	International Disaster Volunteers
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization of Migration
JPIC	Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Development Centre
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OFWs	Overseas Filipino Workers
PBSP	Philippine Business for Social Progress
RAFI	Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc.
SMS	Standard Message Service (text messaging)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WVI	World Vision International

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and scope

The Typhoon Haiyan response has been noted for its investment and creativity on initiatives around accountability to affected people (AAP). As part of the learning and research component of Pamati Kita (“Let’s Listen Together”), this report discusses affected communities’ experiences with agencies’ AAP efforts and interventions at large. Adopting a qualitative approach in the spirit of listening projects, this study draws on three months of fieldwork with affected people in 22 villages in four areas affected by Haiyan. We interviewed over 221 respondents representing a cross-section of the population, including those who were excluded from agency interventions, in order to develop a bottom-up understanding of issues that mattered most to communities. This report should be read alongside the case study report, “Who’s Listening?”, which compares and contrasts agencies’ accounts of AAP interventions with those of affected communities. The aim of both reports is to contribute to current debates within the sector to improve efforts to be accountable to affected populations.

Foreign aid, local cultures

Reviewing the Philippines’ colonial history, political structures, and social and moral norms enables us to better understand the context in which foreign aid was received by local communities. Our research revealed how agencies’ “outsider” interventions and frameworks and mechanisms of accountability sometimes operated in tension with local cultural expectations.

Anthropological work on the Philippines has previously identified that *utang na loob*, or debt of gratitude, is the key moral principle that underpins social relations. People observe an *utang na loob* to those who have extended them help, especially to those who have gone beyond normal expectations of kin relationships. There is therefore a natural disincentive for many people to express criticism in agencies’ feedback mechanisms, as people observe that humanitarians have no “natural obligation” to help, especially as they come from overseas. This is compounded by local expectations to demonstrate hospitality to foreign workers, as shaped by the Philippines’ long history of colonialism and “white love.” Indeed, people’s gratitude to foreign agencies was often expressed in stark contrast with dissatisfaction with government agencies that people felt they could demand more from.

Communities’ relationships with agencies are also animated by the patron-client culture that pervades Filipino politics, especially at the local level. In the humanitarian response, agencies are regarded as patrons in a highly unequal power relationship, further constraining local people in expressing their views.

The moral norm of *kapwa*, or “consciousness of shared identities,” also shapes people’s perceptions of relief distribution practices, particularly targeted aid. *Kapwa* implies that people’s sense of self is most intensely relational, such that targeted interventions within tight-knit communities cause conflict and anxiety when people are excluded from aid. Neighbour anxiety and relief goods envy may manifest externally as interpersonal jealousies, but are also deep injuries to one’s sense of dignity.

This report then reflects on two central tensions with how foreign interventions were locally received: 1) How do people give feedback to agencies to whom they owe a “debt of gratitude”? and 2) To what extent is targeted aid culturally compatible with the Filipino context of having “relational selves” and “a consciousness of shared identities”?

Diverse relationships with agencies

Overall, our 221 respondents across four areas were grateful to agencies, but have also been critical of specific interventions and procedures of relief distribution. Factors of class, age, gender, sexuality, and geography shaped people’s experiences with aid.

Low-income women have had the highest frequency and deepest involvement with agencies, being the most active group during aid distributions and community consultations. Some agencies have also

facilitated women's participation, such as by having special queues for women during distributions. Men in low-income communities were preoccupied with earning a living for their families and so had more limited agency interactions.

Middle-class people have been excluded from aid. Some have been negatively affected by agencies' impact on local economies, where they competed with agencies' raised minimum wages for workers. Many said they hoped for agencies' assistance, especially during the emergency phase.

Young people (18-24) recognised that their age group was the lowest priority of agencies for their interventions. They hoped for livelihood assistance when school was suspended, and they had free time on their hands that they could have used to earn extra income.

Elderly people (60 and above) benefited from agency beneficiary selection procedures that gave priority to them.

LGBT people did not express a need for specific interventions for them, but many had benefited from the social impact of agency workers' presence in leisure spaces in these provincial areas, which contributed to a new open-mindedness in what was previously felt as rather inhibiting environments for LGBTs.

Our research also identified area-specific issues. As the hardest-hit city with over 2,000 casualties, Tacloban had more diverse issues in disaster recovery. Tacloban was exposed to a broader set of agencies and interventions.

In Bantayan Island, off the northern coast of Cebu, communities were exposed to fewer agencies but received plenty of targeted livelihood assistance for fisherfolk. Other livelihood sectors grew resentful of this targeting practice and used feedback mechanisms to request assistance, but with limited success.

Agencies used Roxas City as a hub for humanitarian operations in the Panay islands, but directed aid to poorer communities in rural areas. Urban poor communities in Roxas were resentful and confused about their exclusion as many lived near agency headquarters but had no communication from them.

Estancia is a two-hour drive from Roxas City and received aid from a number of agencies. Eighteen months after the disaster, people still lived in tents distributed right after Haiyan. Feedback mechanisms including SMS hotlines were active in Estancia.

Our research found that international agencies' branding strategies were generally successful in generating recognition. Thanks to branding on t-shirts, vehicles, and relief goods themselves, people attributed interventions to specific agencies, especially international agencies.

People had lay knowledge of inter-agency cooperation stemming from their observations that interventions were not duplicated. People assumed that agencies spoke with each other to assure the non-duplication of goods.

Communities were exposed to a variety of local NGOs and private philanthropy initiatives. Interventions ranged from local NGOs being immersed in communities to the more common one-off distributions.

Politics of aid in the local village

Local leadership and political culture in the *barangay* (*trans.* village, the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines) had a great impact on how people experienced agency interventions.

Across the 22 *barangays* we visited, agencies coordinated with *barangay* officials and often depended on them to draft beneficiary lists and distribute relief goods in their behalf. People were critical of practices where agencies were heavily dependent on *barangay* officials during interventions as the common perception is that *barangay* officials would naturally reward their family members and loyal constituents if given this kind of power. Beneficiary list anomalies of this kind were common in the *barangays* we visited, but larger-scale corruption scandals were not observed.

Communities evaluated interventions where agencies were minimally dependent (using external evaluators to verify *barangay* officials' drafted lists) or even independent (using external evaluators to draft lists) as fairer.

Targeted communities with agency workers embedded in the area reported more positive experiences with the relief process, as issues were more quickly resolved and relationships between communities and agency deepened through sustained face-to-face interactions.

Targeted aid as culturally incompatible in the local context?

Common to the communities we visited was resentment about agencies' procedures of targeting within *barangays*. Given the local context of Filipinos having "relational selves" and a "consciousness of shared identities," neighbour envy and status anxiety were outcomes of targeted aid that caused new material inequalities within the *barangay*.

In the local context, exclusion from aid created more than just an economic burden of having to find alternative means to secure shelter or a source of livelihood; it also left a deep emotional imprint in people that manifested as shame and jealousy in their neighbourly interactions. Being excluded, compounded by the dread of being "left behind" by neighbours considered to be their extended family, had a profound impact on people's self-confidence and civic and political connectedness. Some of our respondents reported withdrawing from the community in order to avoid neighbours' gossip. Some used anonymous feedback mechanisms such as SMS hotlines to squeal on those they perceived as undeserving of aid.

Social divisiveness and emotional harm were not easily captured in surveys, and may have only registered or been delegitimised as "petty jealousies" when logged by accountability mechanisms whose focus has been to seek feedback on existing programmes rather than for strategic reflection on the intervention at large.

Our team's interviews with CwC and AAP officials revealed that inter-agency cluster meetings in Tacloban during the early phase of the response discussed the issue of targeting and its appropriateness in the local context, but for various reasons no substantial change in targeting practice was proposed or attempted.

Feedback mechanisms and cultures

Our study confirms previous research findings that local communities preferred to give feedback face-to-face rather than using other, often more technological mechanisms. Not only does face-to-face potentially foster a more personalised relationship between individuals and agencies, it is also how communities have traditionally negotiated material resources with their local leaders.

Face-to-face referred to a variety of feedback mechanisms, including: a) house visits or "desk" interactions (used mostly for requesting resources); b) community consultations (used mostly for learning information and raising collective concerns); and c) office walk-ins (used typically for follow-up or confrontation after being ignored in other channels). Face-to-face communication was valued for *authentication*, as agency staff could bear witness to an individual and his/her claims for resources, and *dialogue*, as people also sought social recognition from agency workers and tried to tug at their heartstrings when requesting aid. People experienced community consultations as one-way rather than dialogical; "consultation fatigue" refers here not to people's dissatisfaction with high quantities of consultation but their weariness toward the quality of consultation.

People also made use of suggestions boxes and SMS hotlines. Their diverse uses varied in terms of demographical and geographical factors. Promotional materials on feedback mechanisms varied across the areas, and impacted on people's awareness and uses of these tools.

An important finding is that face-to-face interactions with agency workers amplified the uses of feedback mechanisms. Targeted communities where agency workers were embedded in the area reported more frequent use of feedback mechanisms, as people had developed a sense of trust with the agency. Embedded agency workers helped manage people's fears and clarified that sending critical feedback would not result in their future exclusion from interventions, contrary to popular expectations.

Feedback that pertained to an agency's existing programme was more often acknowledged and responded to, while feedback on issues that went beyond existing programmes often received only an acknowledgment with no satisfactory response. There is evidence that agencies used communities' feedback to tweak the delivery of existing programmes, such as in correcting beneficiary lists or switching distribution procedures. However, we found no evidence that communities' feedback was used for strategic planning to develop new programmes that target previously excluded sectors or areas, nor were explanations for this lack of responsiveness given.

Implications for agencies

Our research advocates for the need to consider communities' holistic relationship with agencies, exploring the experiences of direct beneficiaries and also sectors excluded from interventions. While we found demographic- and area-specific issues, we also argue that Filipino cultural norms mediated the experience of aid and uses of feedback mechanisms. Particularly, there is strong evidence that targeted aid procedures caused social divisiveness and undermined community solidarity, given local conceptions of self as "intensely relational" within tight-knit village communities. Feedback mechanisms were also taken up and appropriated following local norms of observing a debt of gratitude, or *utang na loob*, to charitable foreign workers.

We identified three areas for reflection and good practice.

First, the experiences of "targeted communities" with agency workers embedded in areas stood in contrast with most other *barangays*. People in these communities were more positive about their interventions that minimised bias and ensured transparency in beneficiary selection. People were also more active in their uses of feedback mechanisms because personal relationships with agency workers, developed over time, encouraged dialogue over technological platforms.

Second, while agencies' branding strategies were successful in helping people attribute interventions to agencies, agencies need to improve their promotion of the uses of feedback mechanisms. The non-use of feedback mechanisms was often the outcome of people's lack of awareness of feedback mechanisms or confusion as to their purpose.

Third, a key area for improvement is communication between agencies and people excluded from aid. Roxas City communities lived geographically proximal to agency headquarters but were denied an explanation of their exclusion. Bantayan transport workers, among the poorest residents in any *barangay*, were excluded from livelihood support while living in close proximity to neighbours with new fishing gear. Community engagement should involve a commitment to listening to communities' diverse issues in disaster recovery beyond beneficiaries' feedback on agencies' existing programmes. Agencies can be better accountable, and communities' social and emotional wellbeing valued, when agencies are able to situate individual cases of feedback in their broader cultural context.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Typhoon Haiyan¹ response has been noted for its investment and creativity on initiatives around accountability to affected people (AAP). Following the United Nations declaration of a Level 3 Emergency in the Philippines, an AAP coordinator was deployed for the first time in an emergency response, and the coordinator's efforts were sustained by various specialists, often in coordination with teams involved in "communicating with communities" (CwC) (Wigley, 2015).

Agency efforts to be accountable to affected people in the Haiyan response have attracted much attention within the sector and have been the subject of a number of reviews, for example the CDAC Learning Review (CDAC, 2014), and IOM's "Starting the Conversation" (Hartmann et al., 2014). This study builds on existing research by providing an in-depth exploration of affected communities' engagement with humanitarian agencies, their perspectives on their accountability efforts, and their actual uses of agencies' feedback mechanisms. Based on three months of fieldwork in 22 villages across four areas affected by Haiyan, this paper is written in the spirit of a listening project that records diverse voices in affected communities. We interviewed over 221 respondents representing a cross-section of the population including those who were excluded from agency interventions in order to develop a bottom-up understanding of issues that mattered most to communities.

This report is attentive to differences in people's experiences across place, age, class, gender, and sexuality--distinctions that were often missed in agencies' own AAP mechanisms. This report reflects on people's experiences with foreign aid and AAP interventions in the broader context of social and moral norms, political structures and colonial history of the Philippines.

This research is part of Pamati Kita ("Let's Listen Together"), a project designed to promote a more collaborative and collective approach to AAP, implemented jointly by Plan International, World Vision International (WVI) and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) (Jacobs, 2015). As well as promoting accountability through the provision of common services, the project included a learning and research component. Originally intended to capture the learning from delivering collective services, the scope of the learning and research component was subsequently expanded to capture wider learning from humanitarian agencies' efforts to be accountable to affected communities in the Haiyan response. It has been organised around three parts:

1. Exploring and capturing the affected population's perspectives of humanitarian agencies' efforts to be accountable to them
2. Reviewing agency approaches, mechanisms, and tools to be accountable
3. Investigating the organisational or systemic issues encouraging or hindering AAP.

This paper presents the findings of Part 1, while the main case study report "Who's Listening?" synthesizes findings of the three components of the learning and research component. The learning and research component of the Pamati Kita project has been guided by an Advisory Group (see Annex 1). The ultimate aim is to feed the findings from both reports into current debates and efforts within the sector, to improve and strengthen the ways in which humanitarian agencies engage with affected populations, especially in similar contexts, and to do this in advance of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

¹ Locally, Haiyan is referred to as Typhoon Yolanda.

1.1 Research Aims

This report is based on three months of fieldwork from December 2014 to February 2015 in four areas affected by Typhoon Haiyan: Tacloban City, Bantayan Island, Roxas City, and Estancia. It draws from group and individual interviews with 221 respondents representing a cross-section of the communities visited.

The research questions that inform our project are as follows:

- a) **COMMUNITIES' ENGAGEMENT WITH HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES:** How do different groups within the affected population describe and experience their relationships with humanitarian agencies, and how have these relationships evolved over time since the typhoon? How have different groups within the affected population engaged with different mechanisms and approaches used to promote AAP? What are similarities and differences in engagement across socio-economic categories? Are there groups that have not engaged at all/been excluded, and if so, why?
- b) **COMMUNITIES' EXPERIENCES WITH FEEDBACK PLATFORMS:** Which platforms have different groups within the affected communities chosen to use for different types of issues and why? Which kinds of issues have they felt most comfortable raising through the mechanisms available, and which least comfortable? How satisfied are they with the processes and outcomes of different feedback mechanisms?
- c) **COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTIONS ON INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION:** To what extent do affected communities differentiate between humanitarian agencies, or see them as one? To what extent do they feel the efforts of agencies to engage with them have been coordinated or fragmented—and with what consequences?
- d) **COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTIONS ON LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF INTERVENTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES:** What were the long-term consequences of interventions? To what extent do affected communities feel that AAP efforts influenced local government to be more accountable and consultative?

1.2 Methodology

Our methodological approach is informed by ethnography and its thrust for deep immersion into communities and holistic analysis, identifying patterns and common themes across a range of individual experiences in specific contexts. The principle of maximum diversity informed our sampling of respondents as we tried to capture the widest possible range of people's experiences with the humanitarian response. Beyond purposive sampling following socio-economic categories of age, class, gender, and sexuality, our second-level sampling involved talking with people who were not beneficiaries themselves, feedback platform users with both positive and negative experiences with feedback mechanisms, and communities with high and low exposure to interventions and feedback mechanisms. Our ethnographic approach enabled us to draw interrelationships among diverse factors to understand (often unintended) outcomes of interventions. This report is careful to identify trends as well as flag exceptions. Following our qualitative approach, our sample of 221 participants in interviews and participant observation across four sites does not make claims for representativeness. The strength of ethnographic methods lies instead in gleaning insight and analytical categories from the bottom up rather than top down. In allowing voices of participants to be heard, an approach similarly taken by other listening projects (Anderson, Brown & Jean, 2012), these methods enable researchers to derive meanings and interpretations from communities themselves and discover the issues that those communities find most significant. See Annex 2 or the infographic on page 20 for a description of the interview methodology and Annex 3 for a description of the communities visited.

Our research team was led by three Filipinos familiar with local language and customs and with prior experience of doing development research and evaluation work in other contexts, including prior experience of ethnographic fieldwork with Haiyan-affected communities for over six months. Prior experience in the areas and relationships with key informants helped the team cast a wide net in capturing diverse community perspectives during the fieldwork. The team introduced themselves to

communities using their primary identities as academics, rather than highlighting their affiliation with Pamati Kita organisations, in order to minimise social desirability in interview responses.

33 focus groups were conducted in 22 communities across the four field sites with a variety of groupings following different demographic categories (see Map, Infographic and Annex 3). Focus group interviews in each site included: all-female low-income, all-male low-income, elderly low-income, young low-income, mixed-gender and -age middle-class, and relevant livelihood sector groupings. Among the aspects considered for income groupings were occupation of respondents and type of dwelling. Low-income participants are usually domestic workers, manual labourers, factory workers, and unemployed. Middle-class participants are business owners, professionals, and families of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) (see Infographic). In total, we conducted focus group interviews in 22 villages in four field sites.

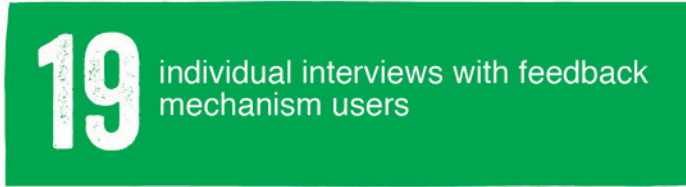
One key constraint in our research was our lack of access to agency feedback databases. Methodologically this made sampling for feedback user interviews difficult, as visits to communities were “hit or miss” when seeking out feedback platform users. Often, very few within a village have actually used feedback mechanisms. We were able to meet participants through identifying feedback users from our initial community visits and seeking help from humanitarian agencies, who drew out a list of names and contact information from their feedback databases for us to contact, or directed us to the location of their targeted communities. While we requested agency partners to provide contact details of people representing diverse sets of concerns and different outcomes, we often received a list of names and contact information with no information on how these names were actually selected from the database and what the nature of concern and outcome were. This meant that the team often had to do pre-interviews to determine a potential respondent’s suitability to be interviewed.

1.3 Description of Areas

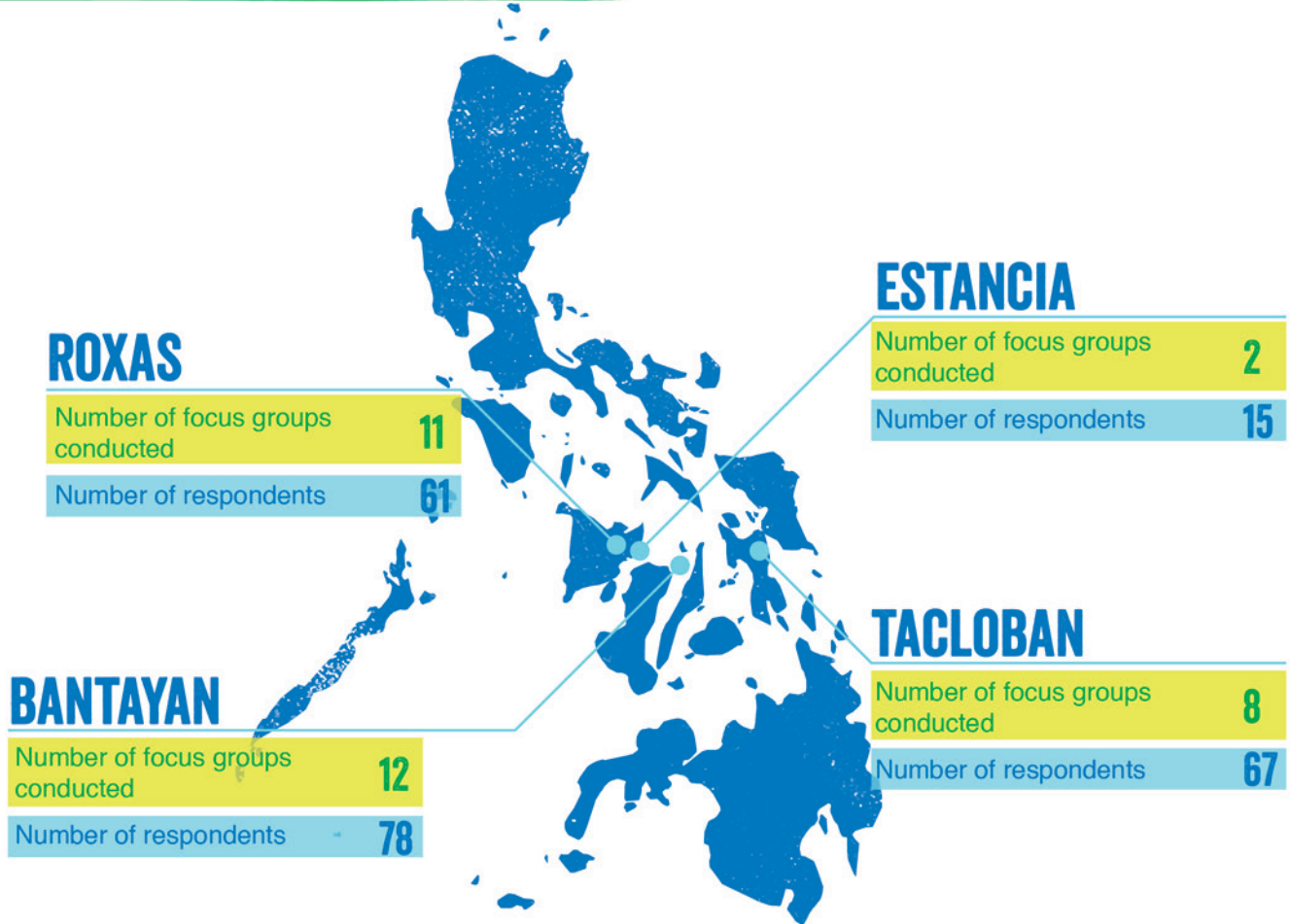
Our four areas are Tacloban City, Bantayan Island, Roxas City, and Estancia (see Maps 1 to 5). We selected the four areas to develop comparisons around their experiences with relief and recovery based on: the kind of devastation experienced (Tacloban being the hardest hit, with the highest number of casualties); geographical diversity (urban: Tacloban and Roxas; rural: Bantayan and Estancia); the breadth and nature of aid assistance available in the areas (people were exposed to different agencies in each area; Roxas was largely excluded from humanitarian relief as they were assessed as relatively better-off); and the availability of feedback platforms (e.g., World Vision and IOM hotlines in Tacloban; Oxfam and Islamic Relief Foundation hotlines in Bantayan; Plan, World Vision, and IOM hotlines in Roxas and Estancia).

Further details of the 22 communities we visited can be found on pages 15 to 20 where the communities we visited are identified on the infographic overleaf and on a map of the four areas, as well as in Annexes 3 and 4.

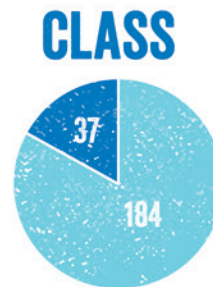
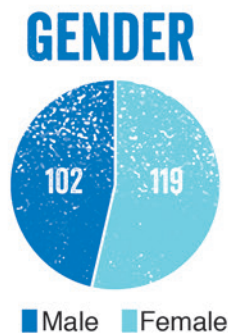
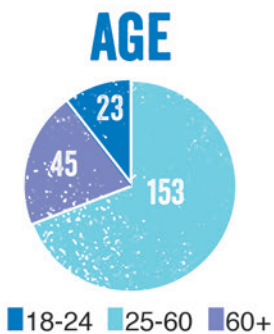
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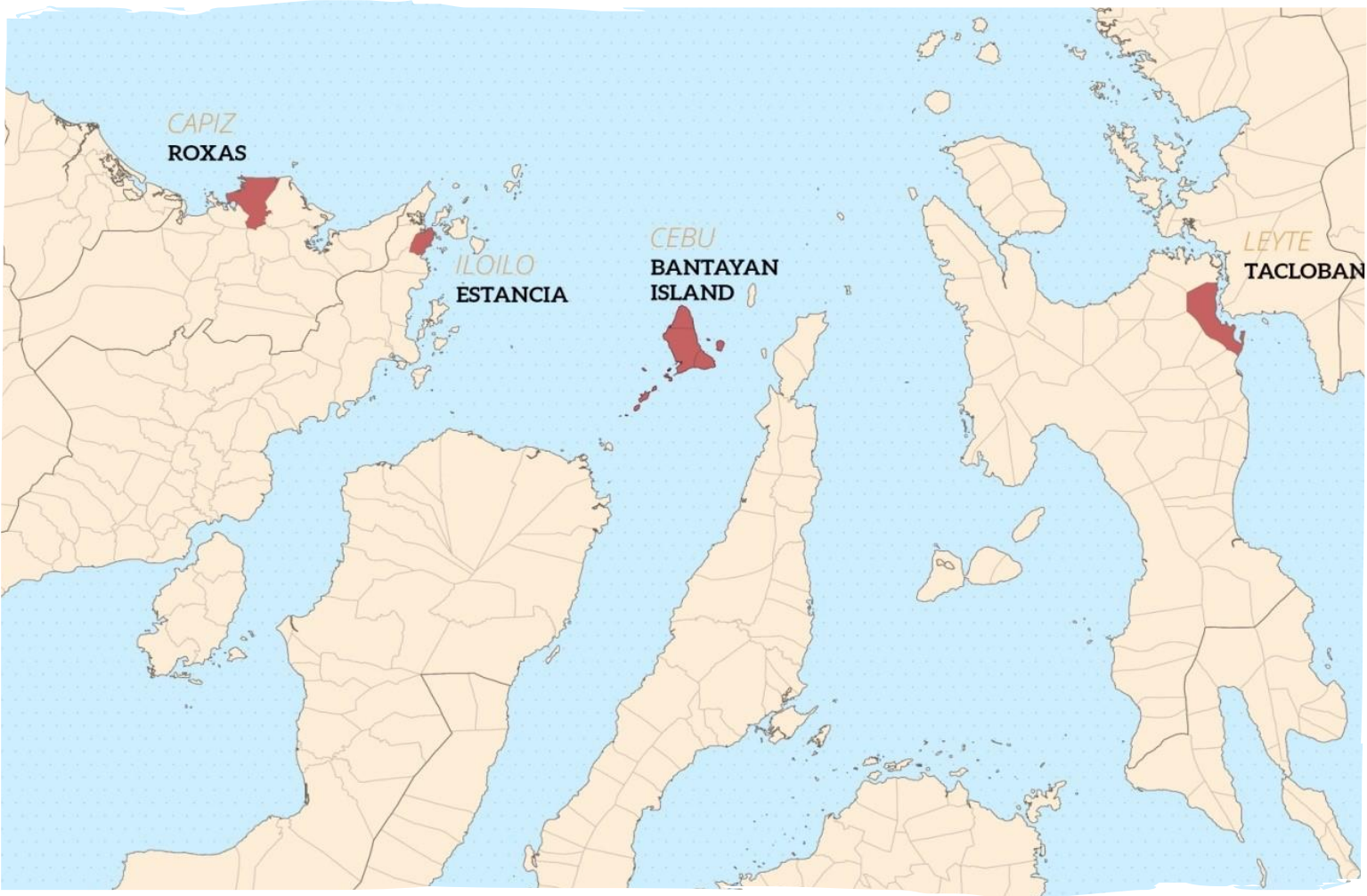
WHO RESPONDED



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



- Middle-class**
Local entrepreneurs, small shop owners, professionals, teachers, relatives of overseas Filipino workers
- Low-income**
Domestic workers, factory workers, janitors, fishermen, farmer, vendors, and unemployed



Map 1. Research Sites Located on a Map of Central Philippines

More detailed maps can be found in Annex 4.

2. FOREIGN AID, LOCAL CULTURES

Reviewing the Philippines' social and moral norms, political structures and colonial history enables us to understand better the context in which foreign aid was received by local communities. This section discusses the tensions that play out between agencies' "outsider" interventions, frameworks and mechanisms of accountability, with local cultural norms and practices.

2.1 Filipino Selfhood and Village Cultures

Filipino selfhood is traditionally described as relational. A classic text that aimed to explain the country to foreigners, *Culture Shock! Philippines* (Roces and Roces, 1992) used the metaphor of fried eggs to contrast Filipino and Western selves. Westerners are individual fried eggs whose edges do not touch; Filipinos are eggs fried together so that their whites blend, leaving a pattern of yolks embedded in a wider field. This metaphor resonates with anthropologist F. Landa Jocano's (1997: 61-67) explanation of the moral norm *kapwa*—the "consciousness of reciprocally shared identities"—that underpins social interactions. The Philippines therefore fits within broader categories of "collectivist" cultures.

Following the idea of *kapwa*, the Filipino family is traditionally very porous and extended, where the *barangay* or neighbourhood is seen as an extension of family. Seeing others as part of one's extended family implies a moral obligation to be consistently attendant to others' feelings. It places a premium on reciprocal exchange.

Utang na loob, or debt of gratitude, is the key moral principle that underpins social relations. People observe an *utang na loob* to those who have previously extended them help, especially to those who have gone beyond normal expectations of kin relationships. Refusing to give assistance to somebody who had extended past help, or having a general "mind-your-own-business" or "each-to-his-own" attitude would be violations of *utang na loob*. Those who violate norms of reciprocity are labelled as having no shame (*walang hiya*) and no debt of gratitude (*walang utang na loob*)—some of the most morally damaging statements one can make to a Filipino (Madianou & Miller, 2012). We also note here that negative aspects of *kapwa* include qualities of nosiness (*usyosero/a*) and being thin-skinned (*balat-sibuyas*) in light of others' criticism.

Implications for humanitarian relationships: *Will Filipinos give feedback to humanitarians to whom they owe a debt of gratitude?* Local communities may perceive agency workers as people who have no "natural obligations" to help them, having gone beyond traditional expectations of *kapwa*, especially as they are foreigners coming to their communities. Cultural norms would suggest that affected peoples are likely to develop an asymmetrical relationship of *utang na loob* with them, such that to voice critical feedback to "generous" and selfless humanitarians could be seen as having no shame (*walang hiya*).

Implications for village relationships: *How will relationships with neighbours transform in light of "outsider" intervention?* Neighbours perceived as extended family are expected to offer mutual aid and assistance to each other especially during times of crises, following the norms of *kapwa*. At the same time, "attending to each other" may translate to heightened anxiety in post-disaster village cultures, as people keep close tabs on their neighbours interacting with outsider-benefactors. Strong community bonds might also mean that people can marshal a strong collective identity in the face of outsider-benefactors, asserting a united front when lobbying or negotiating for goods and services. At the same time, strong community bonds can mean that pain and jealousy could become especially acute when relationships are strained by neighbourly quarrelling and envy when community recovery is uneven.

2.2 Patronage Politics and Colonial Legacies

Filipino politics, especially at the local level, has been traditionally described through the framework of patron-client relationships (Kerkvliet, 1995; Rafael, 1988). This refers to how wealthier and more powerful individuals grant goods and services to protect and benefit their poorer clients, often in a direct and tangible way. While used to describe *caciquismo* in Latin America and warlordism in China, in the Philippines it is specifically informed by cultural norms of *utang na loob*, **where poorer clients are morally obliged in profound ways to find ways to reciprocate in their relationship by giving assistance, services, and general support within contexts of power asymmetries**. Patron-client ties have also been used to explain the dynamics of colonial relationships during Spanish and American rule. “White love” (Rafael, 2000) refers to how Filipinos desire and seek recognition from the foreigner, to whom they show deference.

Filipino political structures are regarded by scholars as stunted. Anderson (1988) describes the Philippines as a *cacique* democracy, which refers to the presence of seemingly functional democratic structures and institutions that are actually covertly controlled by a small group of elite families. Patronage today is seen in the continued influence of dynastic political clans and forms of corrupt favours exchanged between political leaders and constituents (Kerkvliet, 1995). Private charity and even development initiatives have also been studied using a patron-client framework, where poor clients are both strategic in the ways in which they glean resources by switching between patrons and also burdened to fulfill various debt obligations to the patron whom they chose (McKay, 2012).

While patron-client ties remain pervasive, local politics is also contested in many parts of the country (Quimpo, 2008). It is this contestatory dynamic that has transformed some cities to become progressive, making cities like Tacloban a particularly interesting case because it is still defined by clientelism, while other cities have shown more political maturity.

It is crucial to acknowledge the distinct power of the state based on its machinery. Patron-client ties can occur between non-state actors (citizens and landlords), but what distinguishes the state is its power to redistribute resources and enforce coercion. This is interesting to explore in how *barangay* officials are empowered to add or subtract names from beneficiary lists, as this is an example of state power and patron privileges, of selectively distributing aid and punishing “uncooperative” citizens.

Implications for humanitarian relationships: Benefactors such as humanitarian agencies are likely to be perceived by local communities as patrons, where power relationships are experienced as grossly asymmetrical, having a profound impact on the ways people may be constrained to hold back when expressing their views. As patron-client exchanges are traditionally done face-to-face, where sensitivities of asymmetrical relations can be more carefully managed, this could mean that feedback to patrons is more comfortably expressed through face-to-face. Affected communities should also be seen as savvy and strategic: they can navigate among many potential patrons in order to secure the best outcome for themselves as they secure resources for their family (McKay, 2012). This also means that local people are likely to be less invested in fixing organisational processes for the long term as the focus is on gleaning resources for their families within a context of everyday struggle and entrenched social inequality where low-income people remain dependent on few potential patrons for opportunities.

This discussion of Filipino village cultures draws attention to the diverse cultural norms and social factors that animate local communities’ interactions with humanitarian agencies. It also highlights practices and structures that may facilitate and constrain their adoption of new and “foreign” feedback platforms. The following sections thus serve to reflect on the key questions and tensions identified in this literature review, including: **a) How do affected communities give feedback to agencies to whom they may owe a “debt of gratitude”?**; and **b) To what extent is targeted aid culturally compatible with the Filipino context of having “relational selves” and “a consciousness of shared identities”?**

3. DIVERSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

Drawing from data gathered from our focus group interviews, this section discusses how local communities often expressed positive feedback of humanitarian interventions and have been grateful for agencies' assistance, but at the same time had specific criticisms about some agency practices and their long-term consequences to their neighbourhoods or regions. This is similar to findings from *Time to Listen*, where the authors noted that communities “express appreciation for the people who care enough to help, [h]owever, after this, a ‘but’ always follows” (Anderson, Brown & Jean: 2). This report explores this insight further by comparing and contrasting how different groups based on age, class, gender, and sexuality differently evaluated humanitarian agencies, and how area- and sectoral-specific contexts shaped peoples' experiences. We also pay particular attention to how communities perceived humanitarians in their various guises as: individual agencies, the sector as a whole, foreign workers, and local employees.

3.1 From Endearment to Resentment

In all 22 *barangays* we visited, people expressed both appreciation as well as critique of humanitarian agencies and their effects on their communities. Nearly all our focus group interviews involved people taking turns expressing first appreciation and then critique of different agency interventions.

3.1.1 Appreciation

Some of the most positive expressions of appreciation are of profound endearment to humanitarian workers. **Affected communities recognize that agencies have entered their communities bearing resources of vital and urgent need.**

“It was Caritas [that helped us the most]. It was the only organisation that helped us recover from our situation. They gave us houses, rice, kitchenware, sugar, cooking oil, blankets.”

(Low-income female, early 30s, Roxas City)

“For me, Plan International has been a blessing. I was not supposed to be given a new house. I had been classified in ‘house repair’ but then they personally saw my house. When they said that were willing to give me a full house, that was the best thing.”

(Low-income female, early 40s, Tacloban)

People were particularly **thankful toward humanitarians who were present in the immediate aftermath of the typhoon**. Tacloban communities cited that the first relief distributions they received came from foreign agencies. Tacloban and Bantayan communities remembered very fondly the agencies responsible for community clean-up in the aftermath of the typhoon. Tzu Chi Foundation in Tacloban and Oxfam on Bantayan were acknowledged for the cash-for-work programmes they initiated during the emergency phase that facilitated the clean-up of roads and public spaces. These initiatives were cited as important for people to gain a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives.

“Aside from the financial help given to us by Tzu Chi, they also offered cash-for-work. The help they have given made Tacloban organised and clean.”

(Low-income male, early 30s, Tacloban)

“While we cleared the mess of Yolanda, we were also given a source of income. [Oxfam] gave us work. They made it into a cash-for-work. So Bantayan became normal again.”

(Low-income female, early 30s, Bantayan)

Communities were also thankful toward agencies that have stayed long after the typhoon and well into the recovery phase.

“Even until now, Oxfam still helps us, even with small, little things.”

(Low-income male, mid 30s, Bantayan)

Communities also had a sense of endearment toward **foreign agency workers, as they were perceived as people with no direct obligation to help them.** Often these sentiments were expressed in relation to government agencies from whom they have expected help but have only been disappointed with. People’s recollections also related a sense of novelty and charm in their experiences of interacting with foreigners. Given cultural practices of “white love” shaped by the country’s colonial history, it was not surprising that communities expressed affinity to foreign workers who showed them kindness.

“This is my point of view: foreign NGOs visited us—they had the time to visit each one of us. But national government? No, they remained where they were.”

(Low-income female, mid 30s, Tacloban)

“Foreigners have no obligation to help us. The government yes, but foreigners no. Yet they are here and have stayed here.”

(Low-income female, late 30s, Bantayan)

“They interact with us, they like playing with the kids. They play basketball. Then they would bring food and feed the kids after they play.”

(Low-income female, mid 40s, Tacloban)

“Look, look! I still have a picture of me and the handsome French doctor who treated my wounds.” [shows picture to researchers]

(Low-income female, early 30s, Tacloban)

Communities said that they had expressed thanks to humanitarians in their face-to-face interactions as well as through official feedback channels such as SMS and suggestion boxes. On Bantayan, thanks is most publicly and visibly expressed through decorated gardens in their plazas or along main roads using the island’s indigenous materials such as seashells and coral. These are locally known as **Oxfam shrines** (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Sitio Mahayahay says thanks to Oxfam

3.1.2 Critique

Just as affected people expressed gratitude toward particular agencies and interventions, they were also specifically critical of agencies and some of their practices. People cited how some procedures have caused long-term impact on their community that agencies have been insensitive to. The main issues they resented humanitarians for related to issues around: a) beneficiary selection procedures; b) personal experience of exclusion from aid distribution; and c) particular agencies' disengagement from the community, which refers to agencies' lack of responsiveness or even basic knowledge of local cultures and preferences. We elaborate on these three points in Chapter 3, but it is important to raise here how several of our participants became deeply emotional in interviews, expressing deep anger or bitter disappointment with humanitarian agencies. **During fieldwork, the longest and most heated discussion point in our focus groups with low-income people were on targeted aid and the negative outcomes to their communities.**

“I wish they never came. Because of them, we have all ended up quarreling and fighting among ourselves. We’re better off without them.”

(Low-income female, late 20s, Tacloban)

“They don’t know what they’re doing to our communities. They don’t know how their employees actually act around us. They don’t know that they’re helping the wrong people while the really deserving are ignored.”

(Low-income male, late 20s, Bantayan)

“It’s actually much better if they all just leave!”

(Low-income female, early 30s, Roxas City)

Compared with messages of thanks, resentment to agencies was less likely to be expressed in official channels, but made up most of local community gossip.

To sum up, affected communities’ relationships with agencies is defined by ambivalence: while they were most thankful to international agencies whose early and sustained presence has been vital to their recovery, they were also deeply critical toward specific practices in relief distribution that have caused harm to individuals’ feelings and to community relations in the long term.

3.2 Demographic Differences in People’s Relationships with Humanitarians

This section elaborates on particular issues affecting different groups within communities according to class, age, gender, and sexuality. Please refer to page 20 for a more detailed breakdown of our respondents according to socio-economic categories.

3.2.1 Middle class

As we sought to explore agencies’ engagement with the broader community beyond beneficiaries of humanitarian relief, we also interviewed middle-class people, including local business owners and other professionals. In spite of not receiving aid, many middle-class respondents cited experiences of interacting with humanitarians in contexts of business transactions or leisure.

Middle-class people were similarly ambivalent about humanitarians and the work they have done following Typhoon Haiyan. Most of them were grateful for their help to the less privileged in their communities. Those with experiences as volunteers or contractual employees working for agencies mentioned the educational value of working for highly professionalised agencies, and some even described their experiences as “life-changing” and their work with them as “the best job they ever had in [their lives].”

However, some middle-class participants, particularly entrepreneurs, expressed bitterness about being excluded in relief distributions, particularly during the emergency phase. They raised their experiences of having difficulty restarting their modest business enterprises (e.g. convenience stores or beauty salons) in a post-disaster environment as there were no reliable safety nets from the government. These middle-class respondents mentioned having to rely on themselves and their social network to kick-start their businesses again. They cited fellow entrepreneurs who had left their communities permanently for other cities or countries when their situation became desperate. Some business owners attributed the reconfigured local economy to the humanitarian presence. “Yolanda price” is a term we heard that referred to the inflation of basic goods—but also of services and employee salaries that middle-class business owners found difficult to shoulder.

“All of us were affected—rich and poor. It would have been good had they at least checked up on us too. Had they given us like a business start-up package early on, it would have helped the local economy. We could have employed people. People would have had money to buy stuff and get the economy going.”

(Middle-class male, mid 30s, Tacloban)

“Ultimately, we [business owners] are responsible for rebuilding Bantayan. Instead, [agencies] became our competition. They raised minimum wages. How can we survive as a business when our employees start quitting and want to do cash-for-work for Oxfam instead?”

(Middle-class male, early 40s, Bantayan)

Some middle-class respondents criticised the fundamental premise of humanitarian relief, claiming that it perpetuates a “dole-out mentality” among the poor and often used traditional stereotypes of the “lazy poor” when speculating on how the poor have misspent the aid they have received. Middle-class respondents asserted discourses of resourcefulness and hard work—values that they claim were undermined by humanitarian relief.

“The poor have been extremely lucky after Yolanda. They wait for their cash grants—and where do they spend the money? To go to the beauty parlor and have their hair done.”

(Middle-class female, mid 30s, Bantayan)

We suspect that some of the middle-class critique of intervention stems from broader discourses of class distinction in Filipino society, where the middle class claims moral superiority over the poor by asserting values of independence and hard work (Ong 2015). But part of the scepticism of the middle class towards agencies may also stem from the lack of meaningful communication between agencies and people excluded from agency programmes.

3.2.2 Low-income women

Low-income women have had the highest frequency and deepest involvement with agencies, being the most active group during aid distributions and community consultations. Men in low-income communities were preoccupied with earning a living for their families and so had more limited agency interactions. The relief goods distributions we have personally observed in Tacloban and Bantayan involved a majority of women queuing and leaving with food packs, while men were the minority in the crowd. Some agencies have also facilitated women’s participation, such as by having special queues for women during these distributions.

Our focus group interviews with women revealed they had more familiarity with agencies’ selection procedures and distribution schedules than men. Because of their more intense involvement in interventions, women were thus more invested and were more likely to become emotional or articulate thoughtful opinions about the specific merits of agency procedures. It became evident in our focus groups that women have debated previously among themselves about procedures such as targeting and some have even made use of formal feedback mechanisms such as community consultations (discussed further in Chapter 6).

Sandra: **Yes, we would talk about these issues among ourselves (*usap-usap na lang*).**

Marly: **Yes, through conversation with each other.**

Sandra: **If we have opinions, we talk among my close neighbours.**

Susana: **If we have issues, we just talk through, or sometimes we joke about it.**

(Low-income females, Roxas City)

3.2.3 Young people (18-24 years old)

Young people recognised that their age group is the lowest priority of agencies for their interventions. They were gracious and understanding toward the conditions of their exclusion as they readily accepted that they were a less-vulnerable group than the elderly or the children in the community. They remarked about feeling embarrassed to demand attention from agencies to address their particular needs. Nevertheless, young people said that agencies could have also sought them out and listened to their specific problems after the typhoon.

The key issue they had after the typhoon was the extended suspension of classes in their schools, which meant that many of them had free time on their hands and wanted to supplement their family income with part-time work. They suggested that agencies could have developed livelihood programmes for them

during this period. On Bantayan, our respondents cited that Oxfam offered a part-time volunteer programme focused on building and cleanup projects, which a few of them joined while waiting for school to resume. We explored whether youth-only community consultations were conducted in our three field sites, but we found no evidence in the 22 *barangays* we visited.

“Sometimes our parents would go to meetings in the *barangay*, but for us [youth], we never have one for ourselves!”
(Low-income male, 20s, Bantayan Island)

“I hope they could give us livelihood or help us with school, something like [vocational schooling].”
(Low-income female, late teens, Roxas City)

3.2.4 Elderly people (60+ years)

We found that elderly people were generally knowledgeable about being the priority group of humanitarian and government agencies. Two days before Haiyan hit, elderly people on Bantayan were escorted by government officials to the evacuation centres. In the recovery phase, elderly people mentioned that their families had been prioritised by agencies for shelter and food relief distributions.

Nevertheless, elderly people expressed complaints about some beneficiary selection policies. Some elderly people we met had been excluded from aid by virtue of being pensioners, living in the household of one of their children, or by being the parents of children working overseas. Some agencies struck out elderly people from beneficiary lists using these qualifiers as they were assumed to have access to additional resources. However, excluded elderly people argued that agencies should not be inflexible about these exclusion criteria, which they argued should be reviewed by evaluators on a case-by-case basis.

“[Agencies] do not give [to old people] who live with their children. But they don’t know that our children have their own families to care for too! Some of us actually don’t receive money [from our children]!”
(Low-income female, 60s, Bantayan)

“They did not give to me because I have a daughter (working) in Saudi (Arabia)! But of course the money (she sends home) is not enough.”
(Low-income female, 60s, Estancia)

As we discuss in Chapter 6 we found some elderly people participating in formal feedback mechanisms. While they were not fully comfortable with technology such as mobile phones to send feedback, they attended community consultations or used “old school” suggestion boxes instead.

3.2.5 LGBTs

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people did not express a need for specific interventions for them, but many had benefited from the social impact of agency workers’ presence on the ground, which contributed to a new open-mindedness and acceptance in what was once a repressive environment for LGBTs.

The expansion of the nightlife economy due to the presence of humanitarian agencies meant that middle-class LGBTs have new local hangout options to choose from. Some middle-class LGBTs were thankful for humanitarians’ presence in these leisure spaces, as foreign aid workers have been experienced as accepting and unfussy about LGBTs. Growing up with great anxiety about the intense gossip cultures in these areas, which they recognize as still having a “small town mentality,” LGBTs have since remarked how they could finally “be themselves” in their hometown.

The experiences of middle-class LGBTs is an example of a “cumulative impact” of humanitarian intervention (Anderson, Brown & Jean: 30), where the presence of foreign workers has long-term effects on local cultures outside of their provision of economic assistance.

“A friend of mine actually came out as gay to humanitarian workers. My friends and I suspected for a long time, but we were too embarrassed to ask. But he came out as gay because he was asked point-blank whether he was gay. He said ‘yes’ and that was that... For foreigners, [being gay] is really no big deal!”
(Middle-class gay male, late 20s, Tacloban)

Low-income LGBTs however have not experienced the same opportunities for social acceptance and conviviality, as many of them have remained focused on earning a living. Low-income LGBTs have only interacted with humanitarians in the context of relief distributions. We met low-income *femme* gay men in hairdressing work who switched jobs to more lucrative macho construction work after Haiyan. Unlike middle-class LGBTs, this case demonstrates gender identity being more repressed after Haiyan.

“Life is harder now. I hope people recover so they have time to beauty themselves up...I used to have long hair because I was a beautician. Now you see this.” [points to short hair]
(Low-income gay male, mid 20s, Tacloban)

3.3 Area Differences

Place is a significant factor in people’s experiences with interventions, as no two communities we visited were exposed to the same set of agencies and interventions. *Barangays* had different levels of exposure to agencies and access to feedback mechanisms.

This section discusses area-specific concerns related to agency interventions. We map out the agencies that were most visible to our respondents across the four research sites.

3.3.1 Tacloban

The city of Tacloban was the hardest-hit by Haiyan, with 2,474 registered deaths and 633 persons still reported missing (City Civil Registrar’s Office, 2014). People’s stories of recovery were often more emotional and fraught in our interviews in Tacloban than in other areas, as participants were able to name friends or acquaintances who lost loved ones in the typhoon. When asked to recall their experiences with the typhoon, as well as the extent of damage and suffering that they went through, the people we interviewed often reflected with a heavy heart.

“We picked all sorts of things on the street, anything we could eat. There were no poor or rich people. Even rich people were picking stuff on the street.”
(Low-income female, late 20s, Tacloban)

Box 1: Tzu Chi Foundation: Nontraditional Actor Emerged as “Most Loved” Agency in Tacloban

What stood out in our Tacloban fieldwork was the “universal” reach of the Taiwanese Buddhist organization, Tzu Chi Foundation, which participants in nearly all the Tacloban *barangays* we visited identified as being the most helpful agency. Almost all our Tacloban respondents received unconditional cash transfer assistance from Tzu Chi (of amounts varying between US\$270 to US\$400, depending on the beneficiary’s family size). These are large cash amounts for our participants, as they are up to four times the monthly salary of a supermarket clerk and up to six times that of a househelper.

The relative lack of conditions attached to this assistance is also highly unusual in the Filipino context, as material assistance is often accompanied by both explicit conditions and implicit obligations (as discussed in Chapter 2). Although Tzu Chi left communities with instructions of good behaviour (for instance, gambling was prohibited, and coin banks were left with beneficiaries as a way to encourage “paying-it-forward” to others), people never felt the agency was obliging or restrictive, and none of our participants felt pressured to convert to Buddhism.

People were thankful to Tzu Chi for facilitating the clean-up of their communities in the immediate aftermath of the typhoon through their cash-for-work programmes, which people felt was also more inclusive than other agencies’ cash-for-work programmes.

Tzu Chi’s beneficiary selection and relief distribution procedures were also evaluated by communities as fairer and more transparent than those of other agencies, since Tzu Chi was only minimally dependent on *barangay* officials in drafting beneficiary lists and took an active role in relief distribution, thus minimising bias in beneficiary selection and preventing corruption during distribution.

One final factor that distinguishes Tzu Chi’s engagement with beneficiaries is their organisational language of “love” and “care” rather than “accountability” and “feedback.” Participants reported that Tzu Chi volunteers encouraged use of family idioms of *ate* and *kuya* (“older sister” and “older brother,” respectively), which are more culturally familiar given local histories of patron-client relationships.

Tacloban low-income participants complained about insufficient aid, particularly from the national government, more so than in other areas. They knew the complicated history between their local political leaders and the incumbent Philippine President, and suspected that slow and inadequate aid was the result of political rivalries between local and national leaders.

Tacloban participants discussed many cases of corruption at the *barangay* level (discussed further in Chapter 4) and expressed resentment toward targeting procedures within communities (discussed further in Chapter 5).

Compared to other areas, Tacloban as a whole was exposed to a wider variety of agencies, as no two *barangays* were exposed to the same set of agencies. However, a good number of key international or local actors were identified (e.g., international organisations such as UNICEF and IOM; international NGOs such as World Vision, Plan International, Save the Children; faith-based organisations such as Catholic Relief Services and Tzu Chi Foundation; local NGOs like Sagip Kapamilya, Kapuso Foundation, and Gawad Kalinga), as well as some non-traditional actors (e.g., school-based volunteer groups, private groups, corporations), all of whom contributed to the relief and recovery efforts. As of October 2014, there was a total of US\$6.9M in financial assistance to Tacloban, which came from different sectors (City Accountant’s Office, 2014).

3.3.2 Bantayan Island

Bantayan is an island off the northern coast of Cebu province, a four-hour land and boat journey from Cebu City. It is best known for its white sand virgin beaches, rich saltwater resources, and the largest egg production in the central Philippines. Fishing and farming are the top two sources of livelihood here.

Bantayan's experience with Haiyan was less catastrophic compared to Tacloban and other areas, as the island tallied only 14 casualties (NDRRMC, 2014), but property damage was widespread as almost all our participants had totally or partially damaged houses. An additional challenge was the blockage of roads caused by fallen trees and debris, which posed a serious challenge to the timely delivery of relief goods to this relatively remote island in the immediate aftermath of Haiyan.

The island's residents received assistance of shelter and relief goods, similar to other areas. But Bantayan received plenty of livelihood assistance directed to the fishing community. Fishing equipment and cash grants were cited as common forms of aid in the communities we visited.

The targeting of Bantayan's fisherfolk community drew resentment of excluded livelihood sectors, most notably the transport sector. While the majority of island residents were in fact fishermen, people mentioned that transport workers were still a sizable group in their neighbourhoods.

“50 percent [in our community] are fishermen. 30 percent are drivers of pedicabs [non-motorised tricycles]. And 20 percent are farmers.”

(Low-income male, early 30s, Bantayan)

“Farmers and fishermen received help, but not the pedicab drivers. The private sector gave some assistance but it was not enough. They were only able to provide around 30 pedicabs [to the whole island].”

(Low-income male, late 20s, Bantayan)

Bantayan's middle-class residents were generally knowledgeable of agency interventions, given the “small town” feel of the island. Middle-class people's interactions with agencies included being volunteers or part-time staff members. Wealthier business owners (including restaurant and resort owners) were critical of aid agencies poaching their best employees as international agencies offered locals higher wages. Nevertheless, some business owners were able to capitalize on disaster tourism to the island, which became a popular destination for gap-year and other “voluntourists.”

As the organisation with the widest reach on Bantayan, Oxfam was cited by residents as the most helpful and visible humanitarian agency, though also received many criticisms, particularly from our interview respondents excluded from their interventions.

A few other agencies were identified by communities we visited. The Islamic Relief Foundation was active only in Bantayan Island, where they established a few shelter relocation communities for fisherfolk communities who had lived close to the sea. The nontraditional actor Young Pioneer Disaster Response also provided shelter relief to residents. Unlike Tacloban, which received relatively little assistance from locally-based organisations, we found that Cebu-based organisations and philanthropists were visible on Bantayan. The Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc. (RAFI) was cited by many of our participants as helpful in the emergency phase. Bantayan benefited from middle-class Filipinos' fundraising from nearby areas such as Cebu City, which were able to mobilize immediate relief in the aftermath of Haiyan as they had been spared from the typhoon's destruction.



Figure 2. Cleanup continues in Bantayan Island

3.3.3 Roxas

Roxas City is the capital of the province of Capiz. While 23 casualties were reported in the city, the damage to property and livelihoods were significantly lower in Roxas City than in Tacloban and Bantayan (NDRRMC, 2013). The city experienced a power outage for about one week, compromising communications and the ability to seek help from nearby regions.

“We had to sleep for three days in the [evacuation centre] because coconut trees fell and damaged our house. Until now it’s still there, it’s not that easy to remove.”

(Low-income female, late 30s, Roxas City)

As a semi-urban municipality, Roxas City was an ideal and safe space from which to conduct relief activities, and it was for this reason that it was chosen by agencies as a hub for relief operations in the Panay region. However, as agencies sought to provide relief to more devastated areas, the city itself was excluded from interventions.

Terry: **On my end, to be honest, I did not receive anything from anyone. I heard that in other barangays, they gave something. Sometimes money, sometimes goods, like tents. Here, I did not hear anything [regarding relief].**

INT: **So nobody came here?**

Terry: **None...no one.**

(Low-income male, early 40s, Roxas City)

"[I asked local staff] Why did you forget about our barangay? You passed by our barangay but you did not come here. They told me, 'We don't know. It was the foreigners who did the survey.'"

(Low-income female, late 30s, Roxas City)

In the absence of foreign aid efforts in the city, residents identified the government's Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as the main actor in local relief operations.

3.3.4 Estancia

While agencies' headquarters were in Roxas, interventions were directed to nearby areas such as Estancia. Estancia in Iloilo is a coastal community 63 kilometres southeast of, and a two-hour drive away from, Roxas City. Apart from World Vision and IOM, humanitarian agencies such as Save the Children also established satellite offices in Estancia. A particular feature of Estancia's experience with Haiyan was the resulting oil spill caused by Haiyan's heavy winds, which affected the town's fishing areas and coral reefs. Estancia also had the highest number of casualties among the towns in Iloilo, registering 75 deaths (Joven et al. 2013).

Aside from food relief interventions, shelter relocations in the form of a "tent city" were established by UNHCR to serve as temporary housing for displaced families. Over one year after Haiyan, our team discovered that many of these families continued to live in tents and have been unable to find permanent resettlement (see Figure 2).



Figure 3. Recovery at a snail's pace. An Estancia resident lives in a tent 18 months after Haiyan

The table below maps out the various agencies, both local and international, that people frequently identified throughout the course of our research. This table lists only the most frequently mentioned organisations that our interview participants identified during the time that this study was conducted. Many other organisations are not included here.

Table 1. Agencies frequently cited by research participants per area

Type of NGO	Tacloban	Bantayan	Roxas/Estancia
International/ Foreign	Catholic Relief Services ILO International Disaster Volunteers IOM Oxfam Plan International Red Cross Save the Children Save the Children Tzu Chi UNHCR UNICEF USAID World Vision	Bango (Barbados) Caritas Habitat for Humanity IOM JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Development Centre) Oxfam Red Cross Tzu Chi Foundation Young Pioneer Disaster Response	Canadian Army Ecowest International IOM Red Cross TEAR Fund UNHCR UNICEF World Vision
Local	ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya Gawad Kalinga GMA Kapuso Foundation San Miguel Foundation	ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya Ahon sa Hiras, Inc. Back to Sea Foundation Carmen Copper Cebu Doctors Hospital Day by Day Christian Ministries Gawad Kalinga GMA Kapuso Foundation Philippine Business for Social Progress Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc.	Bayan Muna National Council of Churches Rotary Club SM Foundation UP Mountaineers

3.4 Perceptions of Humanitarian Community and Agencies

In general, people were able to distinguish the different agencies and identify them correctly. People were thankful or resentful toward specific agencies for goods or services that were memorable in positive or negative ways.

Branding strategies of humanitarian agencies helped facilitate differentiation: people identified agencies through their logos emblazoned on vehicles, t-shirts, and relief goods.

“When the Red Cross gives us something, they would be wearing t-shirts [with the Red Cross name]. I forgot what colour it is. They came wearing uniforms.”
(Low-income male, mid 30s, Roxas City)

“We know who they are. Like Oxfam, we know their logo. Habitat [for Humanity] has a different logo. They have different logos. Even Islamic [Relief Foundation] and Oxfam, we can tell them apart by their names.”
(Low-income male, mid 40s, Bantayan)

It should be noted that people we interviewed occasionally made mistakes in identifying agencies, particularly those that were present only for short periods, especially in the highly volatile emergency phase of the disaster. The focus group context of interviews enabled people to correct each other as they collectively tried to recall all the agencies that helped them.

People also had lay knowledge of inter-agency cooperation in their everyday observations that relief goods were not duplicated per area, and how different agencies were responsible for distribution in different areas. They interpreted these practices as evidence of agencies' segregating areas and distributing responsibilities among themselves.

However, when probed further about the idea of coordination, communities could only articulate knowledge of interactions between agencies and *barangay* officials, while agencies' interactions with higher-level units (e.g., municipal office) and local implementers (e.g., local NGOs) went largely unnoticed. This meant that local NGO implementers were not always recalled correctly and projects were often solely attributed to foreign donors (See section 3.5 below).

Our interviews also probed people's perceptions beyond humanitarian agencies and asked about their interactions with humanitarian workers. Most of our respondents had limited interactions with foreign and local humanitarian workers, as they claimed that it was the *barangay* official who had most frequent interactions with them. Opportunities for closer interaction only took place when agency workers took the initiative to approach them, or were embedded in their community.

"They don't introduce themselves to us. They will just give us relief goods, and wave at us. They don't talk to us, because they go straight to our *barangay* captain."

(Low-income female, late 20s, Bantayan)

"They [humanitarians] would go to the *barangay* hall and talk to the captain to inform him that they want to help. The captain will call for us, and we will fall in line. Then they will give us things, like rice."

(Low-income female, mid 30s, Bantayan)

At the same time that people gave specific evaluations of individual agencies, they also made broad generalizations, particularly in their varying perceptions of white and foreign humanitarian workers versus local Filipino staff, which is occasionally informed by cultural stereotypes and legacies of "white love." Certain qualities, such as being more helpful, compassionate, but also potentially annoying, and with "strong personalities" were attributed by some respondents toward white humanitarians, compared to locals. "White people"-led relief distributions were also more memorable in people's recollection, likely due to the novelty factor of having foreigners in largely homogenous communities. Meanwhile, Filipino staff of humanitarian agencies were usually described and remembered in the context of more complicated contexts of negotiating beneficiary lists and exposing corruption in the *barangay*. Tacloban respondents were more exposed to white/foreign staff compared to respondents in other areas.

"Foreign workers are not fussy. I remember this American guy carrying huge sacks of rice into the *barangay* in the rain. The Filipino staff had his umbrella and was standing in the shade waiting for the rain to stop."

(Low-income female, early 30s, Tacloban)

3.5 Perceptions of Local NGOs

Experiences with local NGOs varied across the four field sites. They came up less frequently in discussions, particularly due to their limited or very targeted relief efforts as compared to international agencies that had broader reach.

Communities' recognition of local NGOs depended on the quantity and quality of exposure of communities with them. Local NGOs that extended one-off relief goods distribution were less memorable, while others involved in shelter or livelihood assistance, including shelter relocation projects that provided bunkhouses to communities, were more fondly discussed by the (small number of) people who benefited from them.

Branding also played a role in communities' (weaker) recognition of local NGOs, as some local NGOs had very minimal branding compared to international agencies. **Foreign interventions that had local partners were mostly attributed by communities to the foreign agency given the local agency's lack of branding.**

Local NGOs' diversity and their more selective and highly targeted relief efforts make it hard for us to pinpoint any local NGO as universally recognised by participants. GMA's Kapuso Foundation and ABS-CBN's Sagip Kapamilya (television networks' charity foundations) were perhaps the most recognised by communities, thanks in part to their visibility on television and efforts in both targeted community housing relocation and one-off distributions.

4. POLITICS OF AID IN THE FILIPINO VILLAGE

This section brings attention to the central role of the *barangay*, particularly *barangay* leaders, in shaping people's experiences with agency interventions. *Barangay* leaders took on key responsibilities of identifying communities' needs, drafting beneficiary lists and facilitating—or hindering—community feedback to aid agencies. We describe in this section the diverse kinds of agency-*barangay* interaction, people's preferred quality of agency-*barangay* leader interaction, and the different leadership styles of *barangay* officials that affected local communities' experiences of aid.

4.1 Kinds of Engagement between Agencies and Barangays

Agencies engage with *barangays* and their officials in diverse ways, and communities have a strong preference for an independent relation between agencies and their *barangay* leaders when drafting beneficiary lists and distributing aid.

The *barangay kapitan*, or captain, is the elected head of the local community, and with the assistance of other officials, played a crucial role in the relief process as they interacted with agencies, communicated their communities' needs, and often provided them with beneficiary lists.

Box 2: *Barangay* Leadership

Barangay is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, headed by a *barangay* captain (addressed as “*Kapitan*” or “*Kap*”) and the seven members of the *barangay* council (addressed as “*Kagawad*”). The *Barangay* Health Worker (BHW) is responsible for surveys that list households suffering from “total” or “partial” damage and informing people of relief distribution and community consultation schedules.

While it was common practice for agencies to coordinate with *barangay* officials prior to any distributions (see Box 2), we identified that agencies employed a range of practices when engaging with *barangay* officials. Emerging from our interview data, agency engagement with *barangay* officials can be classified as: (a) dependent; b) partially dependent; or (c) independent.

Agencies can be **dependent** on *barangay* officials when they are *fully reliant* on them in processes of beneficiary selection and relief distribution. For example, some agencies' interventions involved leaving behind relief goods with *barangay* officials, who would then take charge of distributing these to residents.

Second, agencies can be **partially dependent** on *barangay* leaders when agencies verify the beneficiary lists provided by *barangay* officials. During shelter relief distributions especially, many aid agencies found it necessary to verify “totally” versus “partially” damaged houses (as initially determined by the BHW), often due to critical feedback from “partially”-classified households. Agency-conducted validation surveys often used sampling methods and thus did not always cover all residents in an area.

Third, agencies can be **independent** from *barangay* officials when agencies employed an external evaluator to draft beneficiary lists. While agencies often followed the protocol of doing a “courtesy call” to *barangay* officials to inform them of their planned intervention, independent interventions were described as relief that “went direct to the community.”

It must be noted that many *barangays* experienced all three modes of agency-*barangay* leader engagement. For instance, in Barangay Sillion in Bantayan Island, there were agencies that were dependent on *barangay* officials to distribute food aid on their behalf, just as there were agencies that were partially dependent and independent in facilitating cash-for-work and shelter interventions. Agency-*barangay* leader engagements varied based on the kind of intervention they provided: food distributions often involved dependent engagements, while shelter, livelihood, and cash assistance were either *independent* or *partially dependent* in their engagement.

Dependent kinds of engagement were criticised by our respondents for increasing possibilities of corruption in beneficiary selection, giving leaders the ability to include family members and reward their loyal constituents while sanctioning their rivals. Agencies being overly dependent on *barangay* officials in the aid process also led to communities’ self-censorship in agency feedback mechanisms as well, perceiving that *barangay* officials could exclude them from future distributions due to the power they wield (discussed further in Chapter 6).

“I hope that they [agencies] would not hire *barangay* workers [to do the survey]. I hope that they would do it personally. Our officials are good but they also have a family...Of course they would prioritize their families first before us!”

(Low-income female, early 30s, Estancia)

Communities we interviewed expressed preference for *independent* engagements between agencies and *barangay* officials, as these were perceived to minimise bias in beneficiary selection and ensure transparency. The phrases we often heard were “Don’t pass through the *barangay* hierarchy” (“*Huwag idaan sa barangay*”) and “Go direct to the community” (“*Idirekta sa tao*”), expressing scepticism toward the power given to the *barangay* leader in redistributing aid. Agencies independent of *barangay* officials also often meant that they were usually more physically present and active onground, which often led to more meaningful relationships with communities.

“[Agencies] should monitor the process. For example, they should be here during distribution so they would know if the ones who received the help are worthy of the help. Because there is really no system here, there is no NGO that monitors. It is the *barangay* that does it all.”

(Low-income male, mid 20s, Roxas City)

We also observed that agencies’ *independent* engagements were helpful in minimising social tensions among community members. Independent agency-led evaluations reduced communities’ anxieties and jealousies in beneficiary selection, as external surveyors with whom people had no existing relationships carried full responsibility for the often fraught process of selection.

In spite of communities’ expressed preference for independent engagements, they themselves stressed the importance for outsiders to pay due respect to their local authorities following local cultural norms. People stressed the importance of agencies showing courtesy to their leaders.

“NGOs would really go through the process of coordinating with the *barangay* because the *barangay* captain would feel bad, would feel embarrassed if the NGOs give the help directly through the residents. [The *barangay* captain] would feel embarrassed so they really have to coordinate with the *barangay* officials first.”

(Low-income female, late 30s, Bantayan)

Completely bypassing *barangay* officials in an intervention created social tensions between *barangay* officials and beneficiaries, as we discuss in Box 3.

Box 3: Social Tension as Outcome of Bypassing *Barangay* Officials

In one *barangay* in Roxas City, one agency directly coordinated with residents in the community, without informing the *barangay* leaders. These residents shared with us that their *barangay* leader felt personally offended and “shamed” in being left ignorant of the intervention. The leader retaliated by excluding them in other relief distributions. Respondents said that *barangay* officials deliberately struck their names off beneficiary lists and sabotaged communicating the schedules of distributions.

“The *barangay* officials said that we didn’t respect them by not courting the help through them. We did not direct the NGO to them when they were giving us housing materials.”

(Low-income female, late 20s, Roxas City)

“Sometimes we wouldn’t be told about distributions. No one’s informing us anymore so we never know when aid arrives. And sometimes, they even blame it on us! ‘Why did you just arrive now?’ She even cursed us. But no one really informed us so we did not know!”

(Low-income female, late 30s, Roxas City)

In spite of communities’ acknowledgment of *barangay* officials’ necessary role in interventions, they nevertheless expressed that agencies should take more active, independent, and watchdog roles—a sentiment shared by communities interviewed by Anderson, Brown & Jean (2012). Communities expressed more positive evaluations of agencies with deeper immersion in their area and acting independently from *barangay* officials than those with more dependent engagements. Our respondents shared that they developed relationships based on trust and dialogue with these agencies immersed in their communities, discussed further in Box 4.



Figure 4. Islamic Relief Foundation’s “adopted community”

Box 4: “Adopted Communities” – Relationships with Humanitarians

Four *barangays* stood out during fieldwork as expressing more positive sentiments about the relief process compared to others. What these *barangays* had in common was the immersed and sustained presence of one agency in the local community, where agencies have been physically present in the community and extending different forms of aid following Haiyan and into the recovery phase. In some cases, such as the World Vision community in Tacloban, the *barangay* has had an even longer relationship with the agency, as World Vision has had a number of sponsored children in the community well before Haiyan. Others, such as the Islamic Relief Foundation village on Bantayan Island, involved agencies providing permanent shelter and new forms of livelihood to relocated residents.

In these communities, the immersed agency employed an *independent* mode of interaction with *barangay* officials, as agencies took charge of beneficiary selection lists and relief distribution. Consistent with other non-immersed *barangays*, people welcomed this independent arrangement as it was perceived as fairer and transparent.

Noel: **[Plan]—they were really the ones who did house to house [survey].**

Ingrid: **They went personally.**

Rhea: **They hired someone from Palo.**

INT: **They hired someone who is not from here?**

Group: **Yes!**

Richard: **Yes, they're not from here.**

Lory: **But we, the residents, would just guide them.**

Ingrid: **It's better if that person does not know anyone in the community.**

Lory: **Because it avoids favouritism (*pabor pabor*).**

(Low-income FGD, Tacloban City)

It was evident that the physical presence of the agency workers on the ground was important in cultivating personal relationships with affected people. Communities cited the sense of friendship and family that they felt towards the immersed agency, as they came to interact with them outside of relief distributions and in everyday situations. When asked about their feelings toward the agency workers, people affectionately recalled their interactions and often used family idioms to describe their relationships with them. People fondly described their communities as being the “adopted communities” of agencies, and they evaluated these agencies more favourably than others that conduct one-off distributions.

“We frequently talked with them, or even if we just saw them in the streets, I would tell them, ‘Good evening, Madam.’ She would reply, ‘Oh, do you have a problem? What’s your problem?’”

(Low-income female, mid 40s, Tacloban City)

“Those we interacted with are really kind. That is that we will never forget. They treated us like we were just siblings.”

(Low-income female, late 30s, Tacloban City)

“Because whenever you address them as ‘Ma’am,’ they kind of feel embarrassed. They will tell you, ‘Don’t address us as “Ma’am.” Consider us as your siblings.’ They were the ones who even asked us not to address them as ‘Ma’am.’ ‘Don’t address us as Ma’am/Sir. Call us your *ate* or *kuya* (older sister/older brother).”

(Low-income male, early 40s, Tacloban City)

Indeed, the constant presence of agencies—either by way of desks (e.g., Plan) or frequent visits by local agency staff (e.g., Islamic Relief Foundation, World Vision)—created the impression that agencies were genuinely concerned about the community’s wellbeing. We discuss adopted communities’ distinct experiences with these feedback mechanisms in Box 8 on “Adopted Communities”—Feedback Cultures” in Chapter 6.

4.2 Barangay Leadership as Shaping People’s Experiences with Relief Process and Feedback Mechanisms

Barangay officials’ leadership qualities shaped the political culture in local communities and greatly affected *barangay* residents’ experiences with interventions and feedback mechanisms.

As previously mentioned, many of our participants across the 22 *barangays* were anxious about leaders being given control of beneficiary lists with minimal involvement of the agencies. Following traditional patron-client norms in Filipino society, people were resigned that those “*malapit sa sandok*” (close to the cook/close to the authority) would be rewarded more than others.

What our research also found is that *barangay* officials’ leadership qualities impacted greatly on recipients’ experiences. Some leaders’ qualities of persistence and courage led to favourable results for the community, such as receiving more aid, or adopting distribution procedures evaluated as fair by their community. The portraits below of a) “persistent leader” and b) “principled leader” are illustrations of exceptional *barangay* captains whom their constituents recognised as representing their priorities properly to aid agencies.

Box 5: Persistent Leader

Some *barangay* officials were able to glean more resources for their community by lobbying government or aid agencies for relief goods. In Bantayan Island, a community was proud to recall how their *barangay* leader was persistent in making sure that assistance was delivered to them.

Elaine: **Our *barangay* captain here is very active, and that is why many residents of other *barangays* are jealous of us because our captain is really active in finding more aid for the community.**

Rowena: **Yes, she is very active. Whatever kind of aid is given to the municipality, we are able to receive those kinds of help because she is active...Like she would insist whenever there is a rice to be distributed, she’ll say, “Our *barangay* should also receive this.”**

INT: **Who would she negotiate with?**

Rowena: **With the NGOs and with our mayor. She would really insist, “You should give it to our *barangay*.” She’s really feisty.**

(Low-income females, mid 20s to early 40s, Bantayan Island)

Box 6: Principled Leader Rejects Limited Aid

In order to avoid accusations of bias and instead uphold the community's preferences for equal/blanket distribution of aid, two *barangay* captains in communities we visited had refused targeted aid proposed by agencies. The leaders felt that targeted aid would only cause divisiveness in their communities and argued they were better off without targeted interventions.

BARANGAY IN ROXAS

Michael: **Most of the NGOs that coordinate with our *barangay* are rejected by our *barangay* captain because they would only give to a few residents and that would cause problems. What people want is for everyone to receive aid. So our *barangay* captain would just reject aid altogether.**

Mikay: **Because if aid is not evenly distributed, that would cause problems.**

Michael: **Because people demand for equal distribution. People would just accuse the captain of favouritism [if only a few would receive aid].**

Mikay: **People would only quarrel and end up being hurt.**

(Low-income LGBTs, early 20s to early 40s, Roxas City)

BARANGAY IN TACLOBAN

Ingrid: **There was an agency which gave us tarpaulin, but there was not enough for everyone. The *barangay* captain then refused the relief. It was not distributed to the *barangay*.**

INT: **Do you like it better that relief which won't reach everyone is returned [to the agencies]?**

Group: **Yes! Yes! Yes!**

Richard: **So there would be no conflict!**

Ingrid: **Because that would be dangerous! It would be dangerous if they would still distribute.**

(Low-income mix of male and female, 30s to 60s, Tacloban City)

These qualities of *barangay* leaders relate to the broader challenge for agencies to understand the context, histories, and experiences of people with their local leadership (Anderson, Brown & Jean 2012). **Indeed, what communities urge when they seek independent engagements between agencies and *barangay* is not to bypass or do away with existing structures, but to ensure qualities of fairness and transparency in material redistribution that would not cause social divisions in the community.** When expressing preference for embedded and immersed agency workers on the ground, people believed that these "outsiders" could then better understand and address their personal problems and community concerns.

SUMMARY

This chapter finds that there was strong community preference for agencies to act independently of local officials, in order to mitigate bias and ensure transparency in beneficiary selection. Even without hard evidence of large-scale corruption, communities have come to expect political loyalties and personal friendships rewarded in beneficiary selection, given local patron-client norms.

At the same time, some residents celebrated their *barangay* officials for championing their communities and representing their interests to agencies and government. *Barangay* officials' qualities of persistence and courage sometimes yielded rewards in the form of more resources gleaned for their communities or upholding principles they hold important.

5. TARGETED AID AS CULTURALLY INCOMPATIBLE WITH LOCAL CONTEXT?

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the issue that took up the most time in our interviews centred on beneficiary selection and exclusion from humanitarian relief. Underlying this of course is humanitarian agencies' traditional practice of targeting, which is the selective distribution of aid based "on the desire to concentrate on the worst affected areas and populations" as a function of agencies' limited resources (Borton & Shoham, 1989: 79). What we found was that communities in the Philippines had more negativity toward targeting of shelter and livelihood assistance over food targeting, which has received considerable attention in the literature (Ibid.; Taylor & Seaman, 2004).

Across the three sites, people have had experiences of targeting according to house damage ("totally" vs. "partially") and vulnerabilities (e.g. families with young children and people with disabilities). Some of our respondents expressed frustration with agencies that made mistakes in classification. For instance, "partially damaged" respondents claimed that they should have been classified as "totally" and argued that evaluators' judgments were often arbitrary.

Some agencies also enforced automatic exclusion criteria, such as having overseas worker relatives, or being a temporary resident in a household. Some people contested these criteria, as they claimed they were often based on faulty assumptions. For instance, being excluded by virtue of having overseas worker relatives generalizes that overseas workers were all dutiful in their remitting money and assistance to left-behind families at home.

For a majority of respondents, the general sentiment was to do away with targeted aid altogether. **People cited principles of equality when arguing their point. We repeatedly heard participants saying, "Everyone should get a little something" citing that "Yolanda had no selection criteria when it hit communities".**

"What they are doing to us is unjust...they shouldn't have to choose who to help, because all of us are victims here."

(Low-income female, late 40s, Bantayan)

"All should be equal. However small the pot is, it should be distributed evenly to all."

(Low-income male, late 40s, Roxas)

Middle-class participants, particularly small business owners, shared this sentiment and suggested that aid to the middle-class in the form of start-up business cash grants could have helped their families in particular and the local economy in general, especially in the immediate aftermath of Haiyan (see also: 3.2.1 Middle-class).

Curiously, **some respondents who were classified as among the neediest in the population and received most aid were themselves critics of targeting procedures. They expressed feeling "guilty" or "ashamed" receiving aid, especially in distributions when their next-door neighbour or best friend was excluded.** This suggests that the norm of *kapwa* or "consciousness of shared identities" translated to guilt among the included and empathy for the excluded: the included often recognised a moral obligation to share what they had received with their excluded friends and neighbours, while some

of the included felt social pressure from the excluded, whom they observed as surveilling or “guilt-tripping” them. **We also encountered a few people who withdrew from the community so as not to incur the envy of friends.**

“That’s why after the typhoon, I would rarely hang out with my friends in the plaza. Seldom do I go out and gossip with them. Because we’d be asking each other who received what. I don’t want to tell them anymore! They’d just be jealous of me!”

(Low-income female, mid 30s, Tacloban)

“After claiming relief goods from the aid worker, my neighbour immediately spotted me and asked me after, ‘Hey, why did you go there? What did they give you?’ They were so curious. They wanted to know!”

(Low-income female, early 40s, Bantayan)

“I would say to the ‘partially’ [damaged], ‘The next time there’s a typhoon, I wish it would be your turn to be “totally.” So YOU would receive the help!”

(Low-income female, mid 30s, Bantayan)

“These NGOs have only caused conflict among my neighbours...Whenever I receive help and my neighbour does not, they’ll stare me down and look me at me from head to toe like it is all my fault!”

(Low-income female, early 40s, Estancia)

Tacloban communities were familiar with targeting according to family size, given that this was the criterion used by Tzu Chi Foundation, the agency that had the widest reach in their relief efforts in the city (See Box 3.1). However, given that Tzu Chi distributed cash to all families, although with varying amounts between US\$270 to US\$400, this was universally evaluated as fair by our respondents. Given that cash is a flexible commodity, people likely felt that they had options as to how they could make best use of their cash grants. Tacloban communities had the most resentment toward targeting of shelter distributions, as all of the focus groups mentioned complaints around targeted shelter distribution.

Bantayan experienced targeting according to livelihood sector, where humanitarian agencies, local NGOs, and local private companies poured the most resources into helping fisherfolk, given Bantayan’s reputation as an island with a sizable fishing community. **Transport sector people, such as *trisikad* and pedicab (non-motorised tricycle) drivers who earn a mere US\$2.25/day, expressed confusion, resentment, anger, and shame about their exclusion from livelihood programmes.** Our interviews with transport sector workers revealed that some tried to give feedback to agencies. Some of our participants were acknowledged by agencies and were told that there were unfortunately no interventions dedicated to transport sector workers. In a follow-up interview with an agency that communities criticised for their bias towards fisherfolk, we learned that the agency did not advocate for a change in their livelihood programme strategy in spite of feedback from communities. The agency claimed they developed their interventions focusing on livelihood groups they had assessed as more “sustainable” than transport work, which they had classified as only an “alternative livelihood” that was dependent on tourist season activity. Additionally, we learned that some of the agency’s livelihood support was conducted in partnership with existing organised groups: fishermen and farmers had organised groups while transport people had no organised groups, and so the agency found no implementing partners for transport sector interventions. Our research suggests that the focus of the agency’s accountability initiatives was to seek feedback on existing programmes rather than use feedback for more strategic decision-making to develop future programmes—confirming findings in other research on accountability (Wigley, 2015). Visiting communities and entering the houses of *trisikad* drivers on Bantayan, we found them to be among the neediest people we have met in our fieldwork. *Trisikad* drivers told us how they are buried in loans from relatives or small lending agencies given the lack of assistance and viable livelihood opportunities on the island.

Roxas experienced targeting according to geographic area, where aid and assistance were extended to rural communities outside of the city and to nearby towns such as Estancia. **This resulted in resentment among city-dwellers in Roxas, who shared with us their heartbreak when aid workers waved at them while driving their trucks carrying relief goods intended for other areas.** Because they had

received no explanation from aid workers about their exclusion, rumours circulated in Roxas about their exclusion. Our participants shared with us a widely shared belief that a national government secretary's statement to the media that Roxas City had been coping with the aftermath of Haiyan better than other areas was to blame for their exclusion from interventions. Many participants in Roxas City were resentful of the fact that agency workers were their neighbours yet none had bothered to check up on them.

Across the four sites, we heard more women express resentment about targeting than men. We analyse this as a function of women being much more invested in relief distribution procedures and more familiar with the range of distributions over time than men, who were less active in relief distribution events and more occupied with their day jobs (see Chapter 3.2.2 Low-income women). Elderly and young people both had criticisms about targeting, particularly about inflexible criteria for exclusion. LGBT respondents curiously did not articulate that humanitarian agencies should have developed targeted programmes specifically for them, though other research such as in post-Katrina New Orleans have suggested that interventions were necessary for sexual minorities such as transgenders (Schippers, 2015). In spite of these sectoral and socio-demographic nuances, social divisiveness was widespread and deeply felt in almost all 22 *barangays* we visited.

Our findings on social divisiveness as an unintended outcome of targeted aid share similarities with research in other contexts (Borton & Shoham, 1989; Taylor & Seaman, 2004). But whereas in multi-ethnic and -religious contexts, targeted aid resulted in heightened conflict and even violence among groups (Anderson, Brown & Jean: 24), in the Philippine case the outcome is less immediately obvious or externalised but is instead observed in micro-interactions and personal demeanour in the private sphere. Social divisiveness here is not physical violence or confrontation but is often about the invisible: unfriending the best friend, incurring debt from family members to keep up with the neighbour, and retreating from community gatherings.



Figure 5. New iron roofs for (most) residents in a Tacloban village

Box 7: Social Divisiveness and Status Anxiety after Haiyan?

Social divisiveness, especially at the level of the *barangay*, is one significant if not always apparent consequence of targeting. The intimacy of the neighbourhood intensifies the pain of post-disaster inequalities. Neighbours with houses sheathed in plastic over a year after the disaster envy those whose shanties fare relatively better with their new iron roofs donated by humanitarians.

The excluded feel resentful, if unsure who exactly they are angry at: the agency that defined the criteria, the *barangay* official who wrote the list, or their neighbour who enjoys a better social standing post-Haiyan. For a few of our participants, they confront all of the above and give their neighbours a public lashing.

Cando, a tricycle driver in an urban poor community in Tacloban, shared with us his frustration at having been deliberately excluded from shelter kit distribution due to his small family size. “Look at my house—it’s like a pigsty! My neighbours are lucky. They get to live as human beings, while this—this is for pigs.”

In his community, where shanties display identical wooden walls and shiny white iron roofs, his house sticks out, looking askew and incomplete. His walls are sheets of corrugated iron tied together with a plastic tarpaulin as a makeshift roof, making the interiors stiflingly hot under the punishing sun.

Cando’s as well as other respondents’ experiences suggest that targeting sparks status anxiety. Intensified by traditional Filipino village relations where neighbours are regarded as extended family and people’s sense of dignity is defined by their status in the community (McKay, 2012), status differences marked by small luxuries hit the have-nots hard. Those excluded from livelihood project income borrow money from relatives and incur debt in efforts to keep up with neighbours’ vegetable gardens.

We have found that feedback channels such as SMS hotlines are used to squeal on neighbours perceived to be undeserving of humanitarian aid. Some agencies use this feedback to correct their future distribution lists. This would lead the newly excluded to conduct a “witch hunt” to try to figure out which neighbour had ratted them out to the agencies, setting off paranoia within friendship groups.

What we find is that being excluded from humanitarian aid creates more than just an economic burden of having to find alternative means to secure shelter or a source of livelihood. It also leaves a deep emotional imprint in people that may manifest as shame and jealousy in neighbourly interactions. While humanitarians aim to serve the needs of the most vulnerable, each community is transformed as their actions cause new material inequalities that are lived and felt in everyday life.

While other studies such as *Time to Listen* have drawn attention to extreme conflict as a possible outcome of targeted relief, this study has found that it is equally crucial to attend to the ways in which interventions can wear down solidarity within largely homogeneous communities. Though it is easy to interpret social divisiveness through its most externally obvious manifestation as “interpersonal jealousies” (Anderson, Brown & Jean: 25), it also goes much deeper than that. Underlying these quarrels and resentments are internalised “hidden injuries” dealt to individuals’ sense of dignity, given how exclusion impacts on the people’s sense of self, accentuated by the relational nature of Filipino selfhood (Jocano 1997). Being excluded, compounded by the dread of being “left behind” by neighbours considered to be their extended family, had a profound impact on people’s self-confidence and civic and political connectedness. This raises a concern about how excluded individuals who have cut ties from the community could become further marginalised in economic terms, given that social capital is crucial to recovering from the impact of disaster.

Social divisiveness and emotional harm were not easily captured in surveys, and may have only registered or been delegitimised as “petty jealousies” when logged by accountability mechanisms whose focus has been to seek feedback on existing programmes rather than for strategic reflection on the intervention at large.

Our team's interviews with CwC and AAP officials revealed that inter-agency cluster meetings in Tacloban during the early phase of the response discussed the issue of targeting and its appropriateness in the local context, but for various reasons no substantial change in targeting practice was proposed or attempted. The agencies' perspective on problems with targeted aid is discussed in greater detail in “Who's Listening?”

6. FEEDBACK MECHANISMS AND CULTURES

This section reports on affected communities' engagement with different feedback mechanisms. Drawing on our focus groups as well as one-to-one interviews with feedback mechanism users across four sites, we describe here people's general perceptions of and direct experiences with different tools for feedback.

6.1 Diverse Feedback Mechanisms

We begin this section by identifying each feedback mechanism and the opportunities and challenges they posed in soliciting particular kinds of feedback. We pay specific attention to how different socio-demographic groups have engaged with each mechanism, given that agencies had very little disaggregated data as to how AAP mechanisms were used according to social categories of gender, age, or class (Buchanan-Smith et al., 2015). We also reflect on how certain types of issues tend to be raised in one medium over another, given how each mechanism had different qualities of anonymity, interactivity, and level of detail.

In section 6.2 Closing the Feedback Loop, we discuss our respondents' varied experiences with the feedback loop. **We find that experiences with feedback acknowledgment and follow-ups were not consistent and often depended greatly on the kind of issue raised rather than the feedback mechanism used.** Feedback that pertained to agencies' existing programmes were more likely to be acknowledged and addressed. We found no evidence that feedback on issues beyond agencies' existing programmes led to strategic development for a new intervention.

6.1.1 Face-to-face communication

Our study confirms previous research findings that people preferred to give feedback face-to-face rather than using other, often more technological mechanisms (CDAC 2014; Hartman et al 2014). Not only does face-to-face potentially foster a more personalised relationship between individuals and agencies, it is also how communities have traditionally negotiated material resources from local leaders.

The emergence of face-to-face as the preferred method of feedback is related then to how beneficiary selection has been the main issue of concern for affected communities. Communities preferred to request their inclusion in beneficiary lists in the familiar setting of the face-to-face.

Face-to-face referred to a variety of feedback mechanisms, including: a) house visits or *barangay* "desk" interactions (used mostly for requesting resources and providing evidence to substantiate claims for eligibility or assistance); b) community consultations (used mostly for clarifying general information and raising collective concerns); and c) office walk-ins (used mostly for direct confrontation, typically as a last resort, having been ignored in other channels).

The following sections also expand on our finding that **face-to-face interactions have an amplifying effect to the use of other feedback mechanisms.**

Face-to-face (1): Interpersonal communication during house visits or desk interactions in the barangay

When discussing face-to-face communication with our respondents, people often referred to interactions during house visits, desk visits, and their informal chats with agency personnel. These kinds of face-to-face communication involved an individual and agency personnel in one-to-one interaction, often in the context of discussing beneficiary selection issues.

Face-to-face communication was valued for *authentication*, as agency staff could bear witness to an individual and his/her claims for resources, especially during house visits.

“It’s much better if you can raise your concerns directly to their face, instead of text [messaging]. It’s better if it’s personal. They can even see if you’re beautiful, handsome, kind-hearted...everything, because you are talking face-to-face.”

(Low-income female, early 40s, Tacloban)

In this context, face-to-face interaction involves agency workers bearing witness to people’s material realities. It allows experts to see for themselves affected people’s very own bodies and their material possessions, which are assumed here to be expressive of their vulnerabilities and to convey deservedness.

“If you speak face-to-face, you can show who you really are, whether you’re really deserving, or whether you’re only faking it with artificial tears. That’s why agencies should visit our houses so they can see for themselves. I’m not hiding anything. I’m not hiding an extra shelter kit.”

(Low-income male, early 30s, Tacloban)

Face-to-face communication also facilitates *dialogue*, as people also sought social recognition from agency workers and tried to find ways to tug at their heartstrings when requesting aid.

During house visits and one-to-one meetings in the *barangay*, people said that they were able to connect with humanitarian workers at a personal level and draw out their empathy as their “older sister” (*ate*) or “older brother” (*kuya*). Participants also cited that face-to-face provides them the chance to tailor fit their communication in response to visual cues given by benefactors and present their arguments in diverse ways.

“Face-to-face is good. Because you get to see how they’re reacting. You can see in their eyes if they’d be open to give some assistance or if they’d be hard and inflexible. You know better how to argue than through text. You don’t know what they’ll think!”

(Low-income female, mid 30s, Tacloban)

People also said that face-to-face communication gave community members quick resolution and a sense of closure as complaints are sometimes addressed on the spot.

Local communities have been familiar with face-to-face interactions through community visits from their local leaders, and so this is presumably why they hoped for similar ways of engagement from humanitarian workers.

Face-to-face communication in these one-to-one contexts also offered a sense of privacy, which is important in communities that value face-saving and the building of a positive image in relation to neighbours. Desk interactions allowed people to express their concerns freely and privately, which is something that they could not do in more public venues such as community consultations.

Face to-face (2): Community consultations

Community consultations were perceived to be a more public form of face-to-face feedback mechanism. While some people in the communities expected community consultations to be an opportunity to open discussions on shared concerns, our participants instead recalled these as occasions for them to be on the receiving end of agencies’ announcements. Most of our participants experienced consultations as one-way, where conveying information was the agency’s primary aim and collecting feedback was secondary.

“They just asked us to list our names and explained the criteria to us. We were not given the chance to suggest.”

(Low-income female, late 60s, Bantayan)

The “consultation fatigue” we found in our research thus applied to people’s weariness toward the one-way nature of consultations rather than a sense of being overwhelmed by the high quantities of consultation, as discussed in previous research (CDAC 2014). Some participants also mentioned that consultations often prioritised the voices of the selected beneficiaries, rather than engaging with those excluded from interventions.

“Yes, they will call us if there are meetings. However, you can only attend the meeting if your name is in the list [of beneficiaries]. If your name isn’t there, you’re ignored...”
(Low-income female, early 60s, Estancia)

There was also a tendency for people to be anxious of the public nature of such events. Some of our participants recalled succumbing to shyness and hesitating to air grievances in public, though there were some who felt empowered through the idea of “strength in numbers” that a community consultation provided. One of our respondents was one of those who organised a consultation meeting to settle an issue on land ownership between beneficiaries, land-owners, and an agency. It was originally planned to be a small group meeting but people affected by the issue went to the meeting and came to participate.

There were also comments that consultations were held during the day, which meant that most of the concerned individuals were busy with work. Some participants said that they wished that consultations were scheduled at a time when most people could attend, though other participants welcomed that attendance to consultations were not mandatory given their other pressing concerns.



Figure 6. “Consultation fatigue”? People felt that community consultations were one-way rather than dialogical

Face-to-face (3): Walk-ins

Walk-ins referred to practices where residents visited agency headquarters to report their concerns and air their grievances. This kind of face-to-face communication is usually done at the moment of frustration and as a “last resort,” after being ignored in other feedback mechanisms.

Bon: **When Oxfam was choosing [beneficiaries] for the livelihood [programme], that’s when things got messy.**

INT: **People would argue with each other?**

Ricky: **Yes. Others went to the Oxfam office.**

Bon: **They would really complain.**

Rey: **They would even go to the Oxfam office first thing in the morning.**

(Low-income residents, Bantayan)

Some participants identified that a challenge during these walk-ins is when local staff at the headquarters would refuse them entry or just ask them to send their concerns via SMS hotline, thus adding to feelings of frustration.

Another hindrance to this approach was the distance of agency offices, which was a disincentive for people living far away from headquarters to give feedback or follow up on their request. However, despite this, we found that some elderly participants were more likely to use this method compared to other approaches such as SMS hotlines and suggestion boxes. Elderly people felt they could more confidently express their views and elaborate in greater detail during face-to-face one-to-one interactions rather than SMS, which they also had less access to.

6.1.2 Suggestion boxes

Suggestion boxes were typically located in *barangay* halls, agency offices, or common areas in the relocation sites. Residents’ letters were usually collected once a week by agency staff. Participants shared that suggestion boxes were used to send both messages of gratitude and complaints. One elderly participant mentioned that writing a suggestion and dropping it in the box was akin to writing a love letter. Indeed, the long-form composition encouraged by this medium enables honest and deep expression of thoughts and feelings.

Renato: **It’s like writing a love letter. You write what you know, what your concerns are, so that they will understand you.**

INT: **Like a love letter?**

Renato: **Yes. It will tug at their heartstrings, and make them think that what you’re saying is true.**

(Low-income male, late 60s, Bantayan)

He added that more often than not, suggestion boxes were used by local *barangay* authorities and health workers, instead of the residents. **Because of the placement of the suggestion boxes in the barangay hall, access to boxes was restricted to community members in greater social and/or geographical proximity to the barangay captain.** Community members in good favour with the *barangay* captain were more likely to hang out in *barangay* halls. For members of the community more distant from *barangay* leadership, the suggestion box placement constrained them from sending feedback, as there was a fear that boxes could be opened by *barangay* officials.

6.1.3 SMS/mobile phone

Given the Philippines’ unique claim of being the “text messaging capital of the world,” with more mobile phones than people, it was not a surprise that SMS hotlines became a key accountability platform for agencies.

Our fieldwork found that the implementation of SMS hotlines was variable across the 22 *barangays* we visited. **We also found differences in terms of the promotion of these hotlines: Tacloban, Roxas, and Estancia had very little promotional material on hotlines in outdoor spaces, and some communities we visited expressed confusion as to what they were for.** Given that people were not used to government agencies seeking feedback from ordinary people on procedures, this process was considered strange by some respondents.

Minda: **They gave us posters before. There were contact numbers on them.**

INT: **Just contact numbers? Did it mention what the numbers were for?**

Minda: **No. It didn't say that we can text those numbers if we have problems.**

(Low-income female, mid 40s, Tacloban)

On Bantayan, however, agencies actively promoted their SMS hotlines through posters and word-of-mouth, and people were generally aware of their availability and purpose. **We also found that the “adopted communities” reported higher use of SMS hotlines, as agency workers had solicited feedback from communities, confirming previous research that people often needed to be “given permission” to give feedback** (CDAC, 2014).

Community members had a variety of reasons for using SMS hotlines. While most of our participants used SMS hotlines to send complaints and inquiries related to exclusion from beneficiary lists, in some cases these mechanisms were also used as a follow-up to previous inquiries.

In some cases, SMS hotlines were used to squeal on neighbours perceived to be unfair beneficiaries of targeted aid (see Chapter 5, particularly Box 7). Indeed, the anonymity afforded by the medium was one reason participants made use of it as a feedback platform.

“I used SMS to tell World Vision that my neighbour should not be on the list. He should not be on the list [because he has an overseas worker relative]...Of course he didn't know it was me who texted when his name was erased from the list.”

(Low-income female, early 40s, Tacloban)

However, some participants, particularly older people, had a degree of scepticism on the use of mobile phones for feedback. A few people questioned the effectiveness of this medium as a feedback mechanism because of the impression that these did not generate meaningful responses from the agencies involved. The uncertainty of whether or not messages were actually received, much less acted upon, was expressed by some people.

“We can always text, but the problem is, we don't know who is on the other line. I'm not sure whether they really read it or if they even take it seriously.”

(Low-income female, mid 40s, Tacloban)

It should be noted, however, that these perceptions were not always grounded on actual experiences with the mechanism.

Some respondents also claimed that agency staff instructed them to send text messages instead of voicing their concerns face-to-face, such as during a house visit or a walk-in. **While agencies seemed to prefer this method as it gave them an opportunity to officially document the feedback and assign the appropriate team in the organisation to respond, a few residents perceived this to be dismissive and slow.** Additionally, some people (mis)interpreted this as a form of distancing: some had felt that agency workers wanted to avoid dealing with community concerns on the spot, failing also to recognize that ground staff could not always act on all issues on the spot.

“The IOM staff was listening to me explain my concern, but she just told me to just send a text message.”

(Low-income male, mid 20s, Tacloban)



Figure 7. Oxfam’s ubiquitous SMS hotline poster in Bantayan

6.1.4 Local media

Radio and television were popular and accessible media for local communities prior to Haiyan. Though access became a problem for some of our respondents who suffered property damage from the typhoon, many of them prioritised regaining access to these media not only for informational needs but also for entertainment and recreation crucial to peoples’ wellbeing.

Provincial media, especially radio, are historically known for their watchdog or adversarial stance toward authorities (Ong 2015) and were presumably well-placed to become a mouthpiece for affected peoples requiring aid and assistance. Among our 221 respondents, however, only one reported visiting a radio station to make a complaint against an agency. Affected people felt that their concerns would not merit broadcast in local media, as they assumed that others had bigger or more urgent issues more likely to gain visibility in local media. Given too the public nature of these broadcasts, people often felt hesitant about airing frustrations to the entire community as it could be seen as a sign of ingratitude (*walang utang na loob*) to benefactors.

Other research has effectively drawn attention to successful humanitarian radio initiatives such as Radyo Abante in Tacloban (CDAC, 2014) and Radyo Bakdaw in Guiuan (Fluck, 2014), which encouraged community participation using various creative and interactive formats. However, we found that Radyo Abante had very limited reach outside of nearby areas of its broadcast. None of our Tacloban participants were familiar with Radyo Abante.

6.1.5 Social media

Many of our low-income and middle-class participants below 60 reported having Facebook accounts, though with varying degrees of access and use: many low-income participants accessed Facebook once a week via internet cafes, while middle-class participants were constantly connected on Facebook through their smartphones.

Social media were used by our participants to share news about the typhoon and issues related to recovery within their existing networks. Few middle-class participants reported using Facebook for fundraising initiatives directed to the community. Very few among all our participants used social media to check on agencies' websites, much less to give them feedback about their interventions on the ground. We suspect that this is likely due to agencies' social media accounts being largely donor-oriented, with very few cases of agencies communicating with beneficiaries using their social media profiles (one such case is the Young Pioneer Disaster Response on Bantayan).

Our fieldwork found one exceptional case of a low-income woman in Tacloban who used Facebook to comment on an agency's livelihood project directed at small business owners. She had seen photographs of livelihood packages donated to convenience store owners in Tacloban. Being a store owner herself, she commented on the agency's Facebook page several times asking to be included in future distributions. The agency quickly and publicly acknowledged her comment and sent follow-up private messages promising her inclusion in future distributions.

Box 8: "Adopted Communities" – Feedback Cultures

Following from Box 4 (Chapter 4) on "Adopted Communities"—Relationships with Humanitarians, it is crucial to discuss the particular experiences of adopted communities with feedback mechanisms. In the four "adopted communities" of 22 *barangays* we visited, we found both higher quantity and quality of feedback mechanism experiences. We also observed that feedback loops were more likely to be closed in these adopted communities, as comments were acknowledged, evaluated and resolved in a more timely manner than in other *barangays* we visited.

"I think the suggestion boxes work, because within two days after putting my concern in the box, they would come for an inspection."

(Low-income male, 30s, Bantayan Island)

What is clear is that feedback cultures in "adopted communities" were more robust than in other *barangays*. The physical presence of agency staff seemed to guarantee to the communities accountability in humanitarian procedures, as they felt more assured that their voices would be listened to and concerns addressed with efficiency and even care as they could hold accountable a person they had gotten to know and who has come to live in their community.

In these adopted communities, people recognised that agency workers made themselves available for face-to-face interactions in a variety of ways. In Plan's adopted community in Tacloban, agency workers set up a help desk at the *barangay* hall open six days in a week. Residents in this community remarked how their inquiries were given swift resolution by visiting the help desk or talking with the Community Development Facilitator. Communities also expressed learning a lot from capacity-building seminars on disaster management and women's and children's rights that Plan offered them.

"Sometimes when they have complaints like, 'Why did she receive help already while me, I haven't?' I will tell my neighbour, 'Come with me. Let's go there [to the desk] and talk with them."

(Low-income female, early 40s, Tacloban City)

Residents in these "adopted communities" also had the option to approach their neighbours whom agencies had assigned as "monitors" to relay feedback to agencies in their behalf. In the World Vision community in Tacloban, some women had been assigned as "child monitors" to the sponsored children well before Typhoon Haiyan; following the typhoon, their responsibility increased to collecting feedback from their neighbours and relaying this to agency workers. In the Plan community in Tacloban, the agency established a Neighborhood Improvement Team (NIT) tasked for feedback collection and information dissemination.

Box 8 (continued)

In the Islamic Relief Foundation village on Bantayan, community liaisons independent of official barangay leadership helped facilitate needs assessments and were identified as improving the quality of aid distribution. For some people too busy or embarrassed to approach agency workers themselves, these more active and confident monitors that people considered as their friends have been helpful in raising their concerns to officials. Given that there was more than one community monitor in barangays, people felt they could be strategic in approaching the person they trusted best among the different monitors.

SMS hotlines and suggestion boxes in these “adopted communities” were also noted for their frequent use. Agency personnel and community monitors often referred residents’ more complex complaints that could not immediately be acted upon to the SMS hotline. Sending feedback to hotlines or boxes then led to more face-to-face interactions in the form of house visits from agency personnel.

6.1.6 Other methods

One common way of giving feedback among communities was using more confident “liaisons” to relay feedback to agencies. Some community liaisons were appointed by agencies, at least among the “adopted communities”, such as World Vision’s “child monitors” and Plan’s “Neighbourhood Information Team” (see Box 8). Some were in formal positions of authority such as the *barangay* captain or councillors whom people hoped would represent their community well when negotiating with agencies (see Box 6). Other liaisons were volunteers from the community, whom people thought were fair and impartial, and able to communicate their preferences to agencies.

In communities we visited that had active “liaisons” for community feedback, people were less cynical of interventions and fearful of corruption, believing that they had a trustworthy individual representing their concerns fairly to agencies.

Miro: **[The liaison is] the only one here who can confront them...so he receives all the complaints from people who have not received any [aid]. He’s a town councillor.**

David: **He’s the one who can debate with the foreigners and [lobby for] those who didn’t receive anything.**

Jose: **He’s the one who helped us get housing here at the Islamic [Relief Foundation village].**

(Low-income male, mid 30s, Bantayan)

We have also found that some middle-class individuals had a direct line to aid workers, as they had more opportunities to engage with them on a more personal level when interacting with them in leisure spaces. However, our middle-class respondents mentioned that they rarely used these occasions to give feedback on behalf of communities as they felt this was an inappropriate time and place for such serious discussions. Nonetheless, the potential of tapping into middle-class community leaders as possible liaisons for feedback might be worth reflecting upon.

6.2 Closing the Feedback Loop?

ALNAP defines effective feedback as a process that “supports the collection, acknowledgment, analysis, and response to the feedback received, thus forming a closed feedback loop” (Bonino et al. 2014). This section examines this process of closing the feedback loop based on the 19 respondents of our one-on-one in-depth interviews. It reflects on patterns pertaining to how feedback loops were closed, and whether these related to a number of factors, namely, the type of issue and the feedback mechanism used. We also evaluate how participants themselves assessed the process and whether they thought the outcomes of their feedback mechanism use was desirable or not.

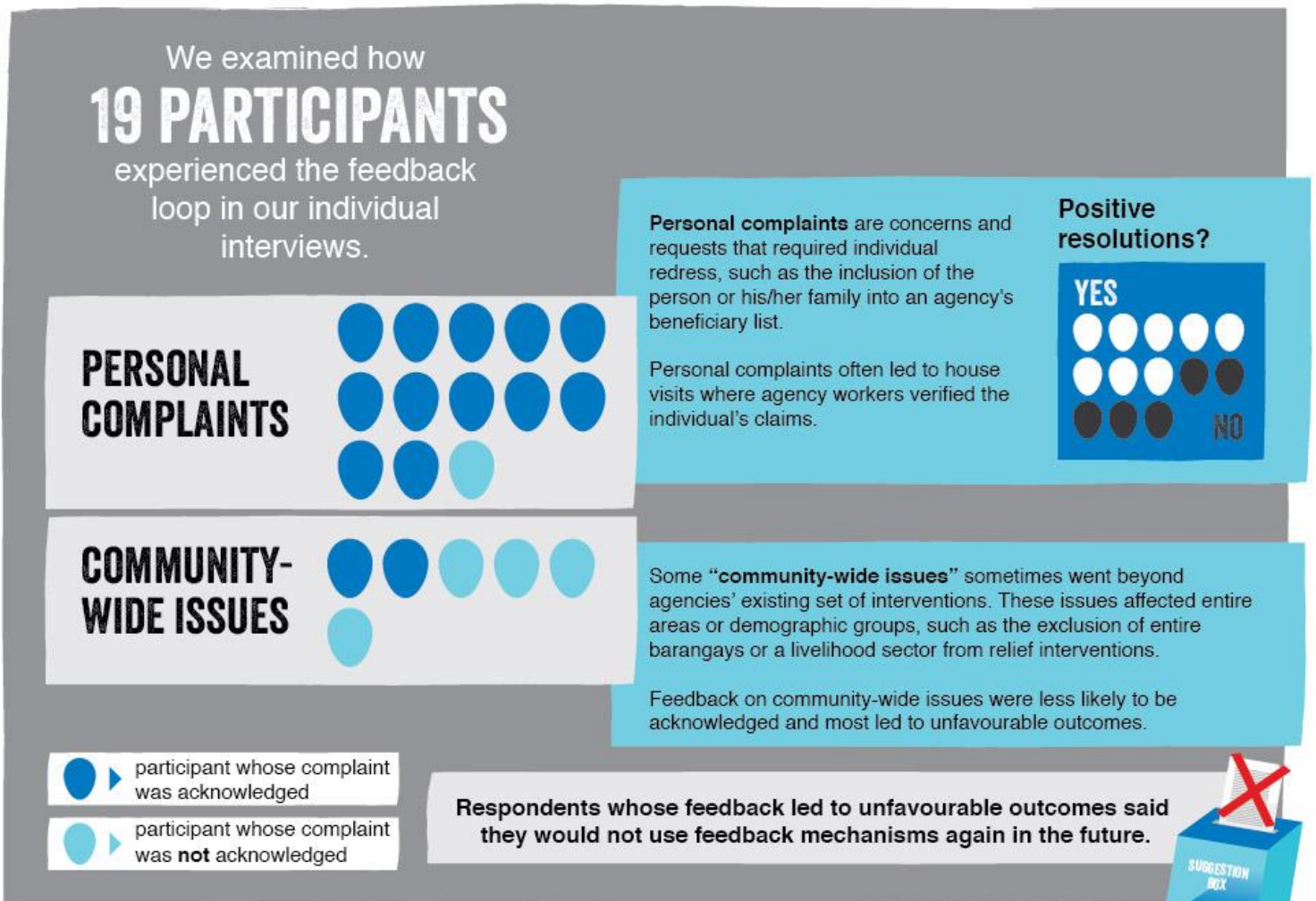
6.2.1 Acknowledgement of feedback and agency response

Most of our interviewees across the four areas shared that agencies were prompt in acknowledging receipt of feedback. For SMS hotlines, our participants reported a two- to three-day response time, while suggestion box users received acknowledgments after one week. Desks and walk-in feedback users were often given immediate acknowledgment, but several respondents with complex and hard-to-resolve issues mentioned being redirected by agency workers to their SMS hotlines.

Out of the 19 one-on-one interviews with feedback users, five respondents claimed that their feedback was never acknowledged by agencies. Among them, two used suggestion boxes, two used Facebook, and one used SMS. In all these cases, our interviewees mentioned that their feedback pertained to issues and concerns that went beyond the agency’s existing programmes. For instance, the SMS hotline user we interviewed was the wife of a *trisikad* driver on Bantayan. She had sent an SMS to the agency asking for livelihood assistance to their family, as she saw that the fisherfolk in their neighbourhood had benefited from boats and fishing equipment from the agency. She never received an acknowledgment from the agency about her concern.

Agencies’ acknowledgment of feedback often came in the form of standardised messages, though usually communicated in the local language with cultural expressions that convey respect (e.g., “Thank you for your message. We will see what we can do”/ “We cannot promise anything...”). Out of the 14 respondents who received acknowledgments, however, only seven received a follow-up response. Some feedback mechanism users were visited for shelter reassessment and were reclassified from “partially” to “totally” damaged housing, thus qualifying for higher quality of relief assistance.

For those who did not receive follow-up visits, we found that their complaints were once again related to issues and concerns beyond the agency’s existing programmes. This lack of closure led to feelings of resentment and frustration among participants.



Our findings suggest that, where complaints from community members were not addressed or even acknowledged, this had less to do with agencies’ ability to respond but more to do with structural limitations in agencies’ delivery of programmes. We found no evidence that feedback from communities led to the development of a new intervention, but only evidence of tweaks to existing agency programmes.

6.2.2 Outcomes of feedback

We classified the type of feedback into two: 1) personal feedback refers to individual requests, such as a request to be included in beneficiary lists, and 2) community feedback, which refers to complaints that affected an area or a sector of beneficiaries (or potential beneficiaries).

The feedback we gathered that pertained to personal concerns led to variable outcomes. We found cases of feedback mechanism users that were both successful and unsuccessful in their requests to be included in beneficiary lists, often depending on the outcomes of evaluations during house visits.

Community feedback also led to different outcomes. One example of community feedback that led to a tweak of an existing programme was in Bantayan. During a community consultation, people informed an agency about the illegal fishing equipment that some beneficiaries purchased out of the cash assistance support the agency provided. Some fishermen purchased cyanide, air compressors (used in “skin dive fishing”, which damages coral reefs), and nets with fine holes (which catch smaller fish, compromising the sustainable supply of fish for future harvest). The agency quickly responded to the complaint by revising their livelihood assistance: instead of giving cash, they distributed stubs that could be exchanged for legal fishing gear from a designated supplier.



Figure 8. Agencies tweaked their delivery of a livelihood programme for fisherfolk based on community feedback

However, as previously discussed in Chapter 3, in the case of Bantayan’s transport sector workers, their community-wide complaints about their exclusion from livelihood interventions did not result in agencies responding by developing a new programme for them.

In terms of factors such as gender and age, we found no evidence that these factors relate in any way to the closure of feedback loops and desired outcomes. Both male and female respondents, as well as young and old, reported varying cases of feedback being acknowledged and responded to, and leading to positive outcomes. The choice of feedback mechanism also did not have much impact on outcomes of feedback.

Our data suggests that geographical location and whether the community is an “adopted” community or not made an impact on closing the feedback loop. Smaller areas such as Bantayan and Estancia seemed to have higher incidences of closed feedback loops (likely due to fewer and more homogenous feedback being received than in more diverse areas such as Tacloban). “Adopted communities” feedback were closed more frequently and led to desirable outcomes, in spite of the higher quantities of feedback sent from those areas.

Although respondents whose feedback did not lead to desirable outcomes still expressed resentment toward agencies, they nevertheless expressed a sense of “closure” in the process. Those that did not receive any acknowledgments expressed greater frustration, which may lead to civic disengagement, as other research has also found (CDAC, 2014). Our respondents who did not receive acknowledgments said that they would “never again” use feedback mechanisms, having felt they had been burned by their experience.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

This learning and research project explored affected communities' relationships with humanitarian agencies and experiences with their efforts to be accountable. Our findings highlight diversity in affected communities' interactions with agencies, where no two *barangays* were exposed to the same set of aid actors and interventions following the same processes of distribution. *Barangays*, as the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, played a central role in shaping communities' experiences with interventions. *Barangays* received more or less aid and experienced more or less social divisiveness based on the kind of agency-*barangay* leader engagement and local political cultures.

Along with this diversity, many common themes and patterns also emerged from our research. Demographic groups shared similar concerns with the aid process and had similar patterns of agency interactions. Nearly all participants expressed frustration toward targeted aid, especially when it comes to shelter and livelihood assistance. Communities all desperately wanted agencies to take on more responsibility for beneficiary selection in order to minimise social tensions in *barangays*, where redistribution of material resources created inequalities that led to deep resentment.

The "adopted communities" we visited, which had longer and deeper engagement with frequently available and approachable humanitarian workers, all conveyed more positive experiences with the aid process. Community tensions were less prominent, as issues and complaints were more quickly addressed across a variety of available feedback mechanisms.

All communities we visited placed a premium on face-to-face communication, not only as an opportunity for discussing issues, but for being afforded social recognition. It was a chance to make a claim, provide evidence, and make people see them as they were.

Finally, we found that agencies acted on communities' feedback in a limited manner: agencies were able to acknowledge and address issues when they directly pertained to existing programmes, but we found no evidence that feedback was used for more deliberate and strategic planning of a new intervention.

These findings allow us to briefly highlight points for reflection and further implications for humanitarian agencies.

7.1 The Importance of Presence

Indeed, best practice meant building respectful relationships at a personal level. Some agencies did that by maintaining a sustained and active presence within a small number of communities; others did it by having a much broader philosophy of "caring."

Beyond the more immediate redress of concerns through face-to-face mechanisms, agencies' physical presence on the ground in their selected communities was perceived by people as the strongest evidence of agencies' sincere concern for their wellbeing. In the "adopted communities," agency workers' involvement in community affairs meant more immediate resolutions to aid-related concerns and encouragement to make use of feedback processes, including civic practices of attending community consultations. Agencies' deep immersion in a targeted community, combined with independent engagement with *barangay* officials in procedures of beneficiary selection, helped minimise bias and ensure transparency in interventions, thus safeguarding too community solidarity.

For other actors such as Tzu Chi Foundation, a philosophy of love and care for their beneficiaries was communicated through early and sustained presence on the ground, flexibility and inclusivity in all interventions, and cultivation of personal relationships through minimally obliging exchanges. Their

practices stood out in Tacloban, where affected communities were exposed to agencies with highly targeted and inflexible interventions.

Box 10: SUMMARY: Social and Cultural Constraints to Feedback

Some of the most salient constraints to feedback we uncovered in our study are as follows:

1. local cultural norm of “debt of gratitude,” which people owe to others who have extended help, especially to those who go beyond expectations of kin relations. To violate this norm is to be labelled as “having no shame” (walang hiya).
2. political culture of low expectations and engagement with official bureaucracies, traditionally experienced as unresponsive, corrupt, and requiring powerful intermediaries to be properly heard
3. traditional practices of seeking help from elite patrons only in face-to-face contexts, where idioms of pity are expressed in personalised ways, reactions are gauged, and messages are creatively revised in negotiation process
4. barangay leaders assert cohesive community identity in the face of the outsider, typically wanting to manage complaints internally in order to maintain a positive impression of her/his community to outsiders
5. following patronage political system, barangay leaders traditionally reward their loyal constituents with material benefits and resources
6. lack of confidence among poor people
7. technological scepticism among older people
8. very few middle-class champions of low-income communities

7.2 Communicating Exclusion

Being excluded sometimes meant being dealt with the blow of a second indignity: the absence of explanation of one’s exclusion. Roxas City communities lived geographically proximal to agency headquarters but were denied an explanation of their exclusion. Bantayan transport workers, among the poorest residents in any *barangay*, were excluded from livelihood support while living in close proximity to neighbours with new fishing gear. **This highlights that optimal community engagement requires proactive communication of activities and agencies’ approaches to targeting in order to prevent resentment.** Sustained interaction with excluded communities could also deepen agencies’ insight to possible “hidden injuries” of their interventions. There is the possibility that complaints around beneficiary selection might be tallied or delegitimised as “petty jealousies” when collected via mechanistic accountability tools without sufficient and sustained interaction with communities on the ground. Given the local context where people’s selfhood is most intensely relational, community solidarity is at stake when agencies seek feedback only to improve existing programmes and the resentment of the excluded is allowed to reach boiling point, sometimes recreating SMS hotlines as channels for squealing on their neighbours.

7.3 Branding and Promotions

One successful communications strategy in the Haiyan intervention was agency branding. People recognised agencies based on logos emblazoned on vehicles, t-shirts, and relief packs, and were thus either profusely thankful to, or deeply resentful of specific agencies. Less successful was the advertising of agency feedback mechanisms, such as SMS hotlines, except for Oxfam’s SMS hotline in Bantayan, which was widely visible through flyers and posters in public spaces. **Active feedback cultures are fostered by promotions of feedback mechanisms through information materials and agency workers encouraging their use.** Hotline numbers can be better incorporated into agency branding

platforms (such as the aforementioned vehicles and t-shirts) in order to attain wider reach and convey openness to dialogue, just as agency workers on the ground can better explain their aims.

7.4 Cultivating Communities of Leaders

Low-income people have traditionally acted as “clients” to patrons and interacted with them in face-to-face settings. Complicated by the convergence of traditional patronage politics, colonial histories of deference and hospitality, and agencies’ modern language of accountability in the context of a cacique democracy, feedback mechanisms perhaps did not achieve their promises in a context thought to have ideal technological and educational infrastructures for their successful implementation. While ordinary people were exposed to a greater number of civic events thanks to agency-led community consultations, this did not easily translate into increased trust in government officials. However, we also found that community leaders both official (barangay captains), agency-supported (World Vision’s “child monitors” and Plan’s “Neighbourhood Information Team”), and unofficial (emergent volunteers) played important roles in the aid process, as they were crucial in amplifying (or silencing) the voices of affected communities to agencies. Some persistent and brave captains have gleaned resources successfully for their barangay or negotiated procedures of distribution consistent with local norms and preferences. Many people however remained fearful of their officials. **A good practice here stems again from experiences in the “adopted communities,” where multiple leaders in the barangay worked together to ensure checks and balances. People then found they had multiple access points to give feedback and seek help to get their voices heard.**

7.5 Valuing Cultural Norms and Community Solidarity

Interventions often have a cumulative effect on people’s quality of relationships with friends, community, and the wider world. Though emergency situations require a quick response to address people’s most urgent needs, agencies should also be guided by research into local customs and practices that could facilitate interventions that would not undermine community solidarity. Community solidarity is crucial in disaster recovery as affected people depend on social capital to improve their economic situation and require the support of family and friends to regain a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives. Our research prompts reflection on how AAP efforts on Haiyan have recorded much critical feedback on targeted interventions yet little was done to change established procedures. Though individual feedback on interventions may have registered as “petty jealousies”, collectively they suggested that targeted aid was dissonant with cultural norms, given that local conceptions of self are “intensely relational” within tight-knit village communities.

We hope that this qualitative research, in attending to what is not easily measured and what is often left unsaid, helps in deepening understanding of the immediate and cumulative impacts of humanitarian interventions and contributes to reflection about best practices in community engagement.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 ADVISORY GROUP

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ANNEX 2 INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

Using a semi-structured interview schedule, the two-hour audio-recorded group interviews began with questions about respondents’ basic demographic information, followed by questions about their experience with Typhoon Haiyan from emergency to recovery stages. We then asked more specific questions about the quality and quantity of their interactions with agencies, paying attention to their assessments of individual agency programmes and general perceptions of humanitarian workers. We then asked specific questions about their experiences with: a) beneficiary selection; b) relief distribution; c) quality of goods and services; d) personnel; and e) community consultations. We then explored their experiences with available feedback platforms in their areas, probing their awareness of feedback mechanisms, and the conditions in which people made use of such platforms. We also asked how they assessed humanitarian initiatives in comparison to national and local government efforts, local NGOs, and actors from the private sector.

The second method used was the individual in-depth interview. We recruited 19 feedback platform users across the four sites to take us through their experiences with the different stages of “the feedback loop,” whether and how the loop was closed, and their reflections on the entire process. Our interviews explored respondents’ backgrounds and prior experiences, as we tried to reflect on the social and personal conditions that encouraged users to give feedback using these tools. We also followed maximum diversity sampling using this method, as we attended to differences of feedback platforms (SMS, suggestion box, community consultation, desk, walk-in), types of feedback (beneficiary selection complaint, quality of goods issue, etc.), outcomes of feedback (successful or unsuccessful), frequency of feedback (one-off or sustained), and feedback user demographics (specifically age and gender).

ANNEX 3 DESCRIPTION OF AREAS

This section provides a brief description of *barangays* visited for focus group discussions and individual interviews with feedback mechanism users.

Tacloban City

Table A1. *Barangays* visited in Tacloban City

Barangay	Brief Description
Barangay 67	This <i>barangay</i> is located near the coast, currently identified as a “no dwelling zone” by the local government unit. It was badly hit by the storm surge.
Kaibaan Bunkhouse	This is a temporary shelter relocation site provided by private donors and government to communities with totally damaged houses. Residents are mostly from coastal communities of Barangay 88 and Barangay 90.
Barangay 59	The <i>barangay</i> is near the downtown area, where some of the residents are informal settlers. The land where residents’ houses were built is privately owned and was in dispute during time of fieldwork.
Barangay 62B	This is an urban poor community located inland and near the downtown area.
Barangay 62A	This <i>barangay</i> in the downtown areas is where Plan International had an immersed presence in the community.
Transitional Shelter in Cabalawan	This community is 40 minutes away from downtown and is a temporary relocation site for communities with totally damaged houses.
Barangay 12	This is a rural community in the outskirts of Tacloban with long-term interaction with World Vision from even before Typhoon Haiyan. World Vision has many sponsored children in this <i>barangay</i> .

Bantayan Island, Cebu

Table A2. *Barangays* visited in Bantayan

<i>Barangay</i>	Brief Description
Barangay Baligbid	A <i>barangay</i> in the municipality of Sta. Fe. The community is located inland, where most of the residents' main source of income is farming.
Barangay Poblacion	Located in Santa Fe, this <i>barangay</i> is in a touristy area near the ferry port, with many nearby restaurants and beach resorts.
Barangay Sillion	Located in the municipality of Bantayan, this <i>barangay</i> is home to an "Islamic Relief Foundation village", with many beneficiaries of shelter relief.
Barangay Ticad	An urban <i>barangay</i> in the municipality of Bantayan, it is located in the downtown area with a busy trading and merchandise spot.
Barangay Kaungkod	A <i>barangay</i> in the municipality of Madridejos, it is a rural community.
Barangay Poblacion	A <i>barangay</i> in the municipality of Madridejos, it is a semi-urban community.
Barangay Talangnan	A <i>barangay</i> in the municipality of Madridejos, it is a semi-urban community near the coast.

Roxas City

Table A3. *Barangays* visited in Roxas

<i>Barangay</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Barangay 5	A <i>barangay</i> located inland. Some of the residents of this <i>barangay</i> are informal settlers, living beside a creek.
Barangay Culasi	One of the biggest <i>barangays</i> in Roxas City. It is also near the port and a few minutes away from restaurants where some agency workers hang out.
Barangay Loctugan	A <i>barangay</i> located inland. This community is near the highway where trucks of agencies headed for other districts pass by.
Barangay Dumulog	This is a <i>barangay</i> near the coast, and a few minutes away from restaurants and resorts that cater to tourists and agency workers.
Barangay 3	This <i>barangay</i> is located in the downtown proper and near the market. It is an urban community.

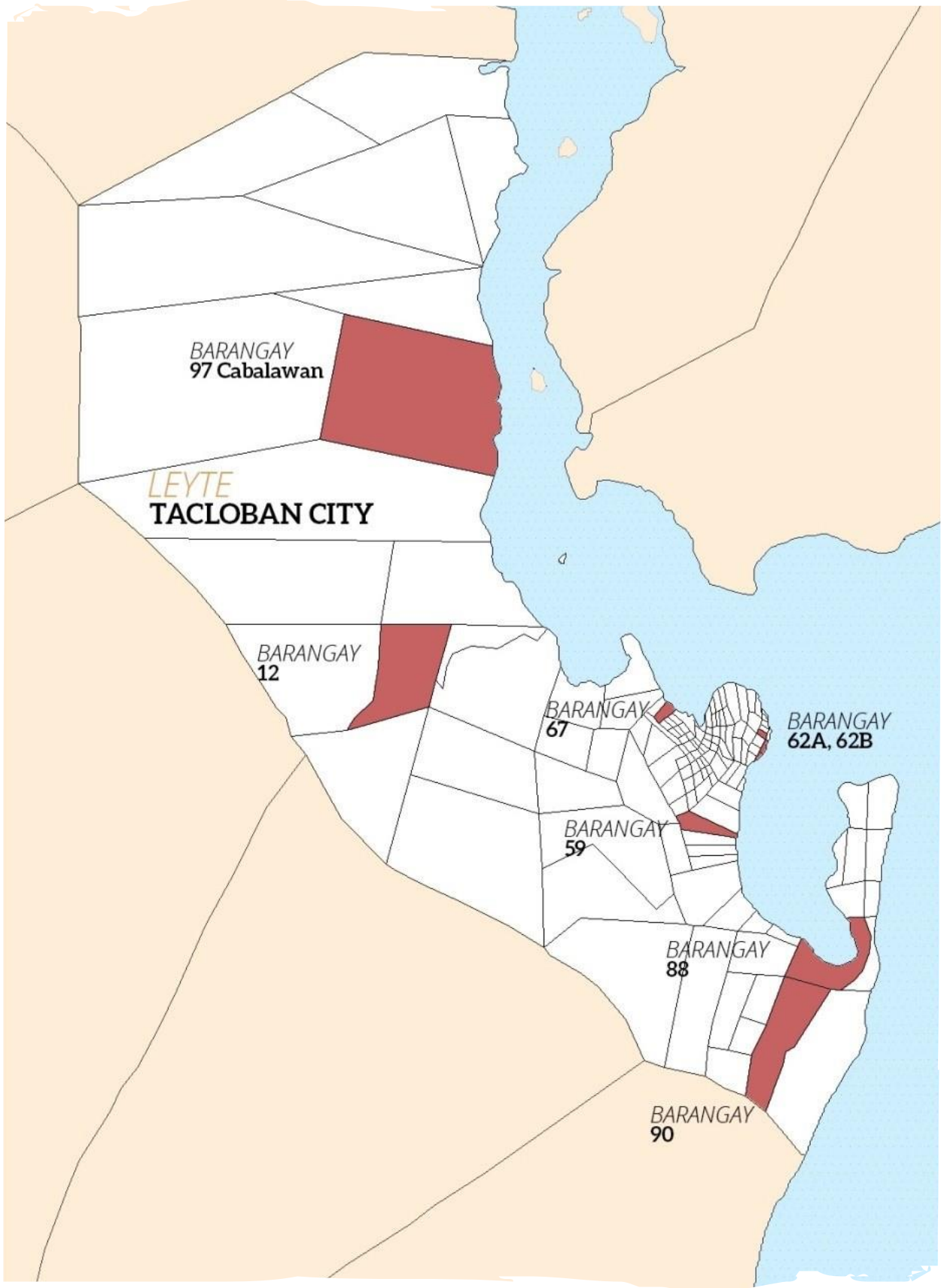
Estancia

Table A4. *Barangay* visited in Estancia.

<i>Barangay</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
Barangay Botongon	This is a <i>barangay</i> in Estancia, Iloilo near the coast. The community was severely affected by an oil spill triggered during Typhoon Haiyan. World Vision has a strong presence in this community, have extended shelter and livelihood assistance.

Note: Estancia was not included as research site in the original research plan. The team decided to visit Estancia in order to compare the area's experience with agency interventions from Roxas, where agency headquarters were located.

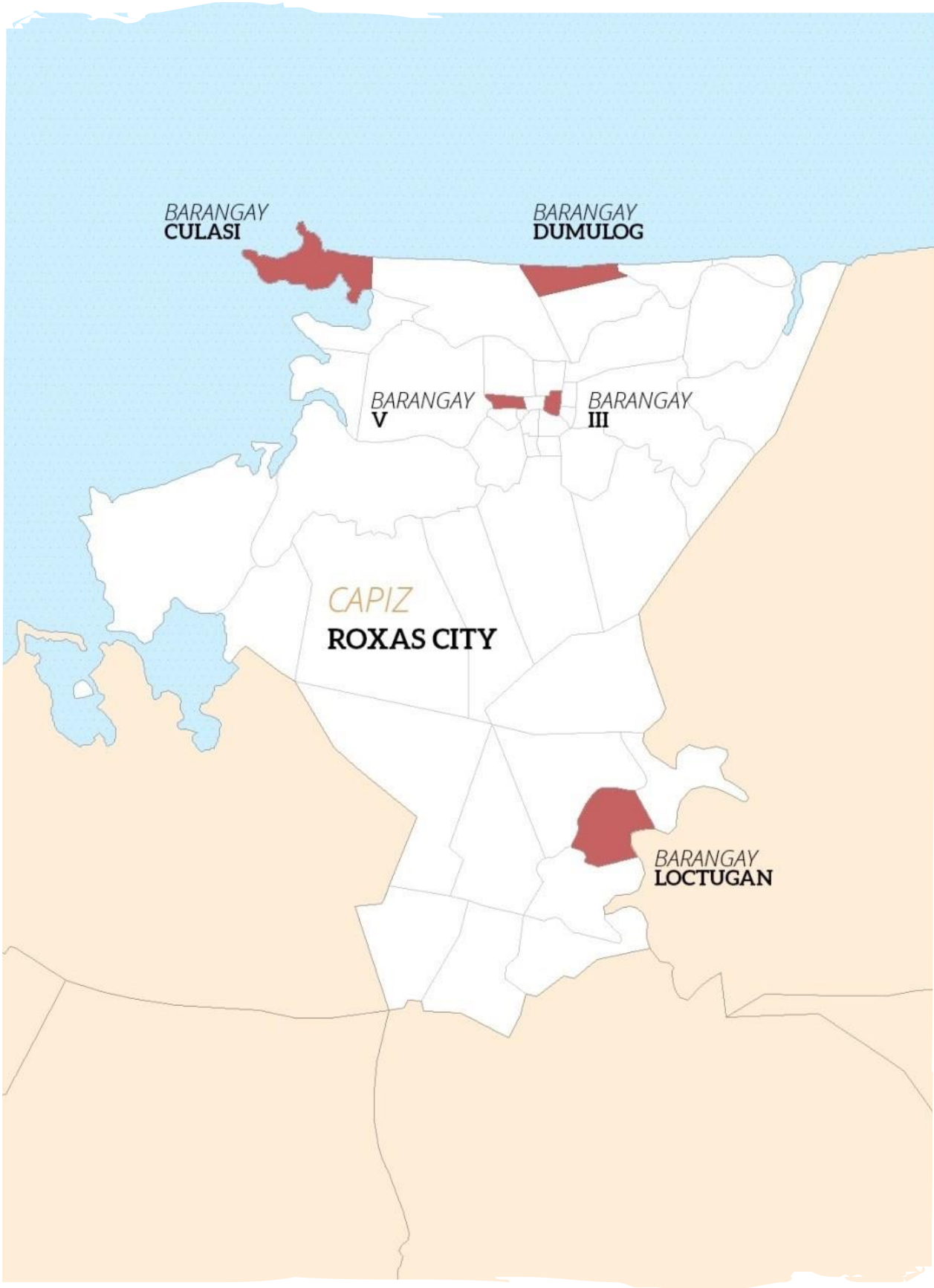
ANNEX 4: MAPS



Map 2. Communities Visited in Tacloban



Map 3. Communities Visited in Bantayan



Map 4. Communities Visited in Roxas



Map 5. Community Visited in Estancia

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is an independent global child rights organisation committed to supporting vulnerable and marginalised children and their communities to be free from poverty. By actively connecting committed people with powerful ideas, we work together to make positive, deep-rooted and lasting changes in children and young people's lives. For over 75 years, we have supported girls and boys and their communities around the world to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to claim their rights, free themselves from poverty and live positive fulfilling lives.

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