

# Tropical Storm Washi/Sendong

## Action Review Report

22-23 March 2012  
Cagayan de Oro City  
The Philippines



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### I. Background

#### **Context:**

Tropical Storm Washi, locally known as *Sendong*, made landfall on 16 December 2011 in Surigao del Sur province on the north-eastern coast of Mindanao. The tropical storm unleashed heavy rains, which caused flash floods and landslides across the region. The greatest impact was seen in the cities of Cagayan de Oro (CDO) and Iligan in Region X (Northern Mindanao), where the flash floods struck in the early hours of the morning, giving residents little warning and killing many people as they slept. The Government reported 1,470 people killed, 1,074 missing and 2,020 injured. An estimated 624,600 people were affected with still 283,000 persons displaced from their homes as of March 2012. Essential services including power, communications and transportation had been disrupted and extensive impact was also expected on local staple crops of rice and corn.

Three months after the disaster, the Government of the Philippines as well as national and international aid agencies continue to work together to respond to the needs of the affected people. (See Annexes 4 and 5 for a snapshot of the humanitarian situation and a timeline of key events.)

#### **Rationale and Objectives:**

The workshop aimed to provide the humanitarian actors with an opportunity to review the first three months of the humanitarian response, objectively and constructively, to facilitate learning and thereby improve the current response and inform future government planning at the national and regional level.

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- Identify best practices and challenges
- Formulate recommendations as inputs for policy development, advocacy, and response preparedness, in particular, the Government-led Lessons Learned and Contingency Planning workshop to be conducted later this year
- Contribute to the continuous enhancement of the humanitarian response in the Philippines

#### **Methodology:**

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) organized and facilitated the Washi/Sendong Action Review on 22 and 23 March in CDO. The Action Review involved more than 170 participants from the local, regional and national government, the civil society, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, international organizations and donors (see Annex 2 for a list of participants).

The two-day workshop was divided into plenary and cluster working group sessions that discussed the following themes (see Annex 3 for the programme):

- Preparedness
- Initial response, response and coordination
- Information management and assessments
- Appeals process and resource mobilisation
- Service delivery
- Reporting, communication and advocacy

During the working group sessions, the participants discussed the themes by cluster and summarised their findings in cluster matrices (see Annex 1). Key findings were presented at the plenary for discussion.

Whilst the review took place within 100 days of the crisis onset as per government practice, the majority of the first responders had already left the operations and did not participate. Efforts have been made to reflect the views of government counterparts at the national level, the UN Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator and partners who were absent from the exercise.

## II. Summary of the discussion<sup>1</sup>

### Session 1: Preparedness

#### *What went well?*

- The **cluster system** has been established and operational in central Mindanao and at the Manila level for several years, and the level of awareness of inter-cluster collaboration was high. The cluster members in central Mindanao responded immediately to the emergency in northern Mindanao, and together with cluster members in Manila, helped to quickly set up the cluster system in CDO and Iligan.
- The national authorities were familiar with the **international humanitarian response system** through a series of emergency preparedness and response activities jointly undertaken by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) and the Philippine Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) since mid 2010. This contributed to the Government's timely acceptance of international assistance offered by the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) on the fourth day into the emergency response.
- The presence of humanitarian agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations in the affected areas and neighbouring regions helped to jump start the response.
- The Government and the main humanitarian responders had complementing **stockpiles** of food and non-food items (NFIs) in-country that were considered to have been delivered promptly and were enough to meet the immediate needs of the affected communities. The stockpiling system can be further improved by pre-positioning non-perishable items in the Philippines' three main island groups (i.e. Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao).
- Some participants thought the **coordination** of national, regional and international preparedness actions went well, including pre-positioning of relief items led by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).
- Some government departments and humanitarian organizations conducted regular fire and earthquake drills and other emergency **training** events. The trainees were amongst the first responders to the emergency.

#### *Challenges: What can be improved?*

- Prior to the disaster, Iligan and CDO had not been struck by tropical storms and floods of this magnitude for a number of years. **Risk awareness campaigns** and activities had been limited, particularly at the local level. As in many such cases, the people lacked awareness of geo-hazard risks and did not readily comply with no-build zones and pre-emptive evacuation orders. Early warning signals often failed to trigger a response from local governments and the people.
- The Government's response capacity was **overwhelmed** by the unprecedented scale of the emergency.
- The Philippines Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration's (PAGASA) **early warnings** appeared to have underestimated the scale and impact of the hazard due to an analysis based on wind velocity rather than rainfall, and did not provide clear directives as action points.
- The establishment of local government unit (LGU) operation centres (manned and equipped with generators) or focal points who are on standby 24 hours/7 days a week could facilitate early warning to local communities, and strengthen coordination among LGUs and with line ministries.
- **Contingency plans** and evacuation plans were not fully in place or used.
- Disaster risks could be reduced through long-term mitigation measures that address issues such as siltation of rivers, mining and deforestation,

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<sup>1</sup> The summary of the Action Review is based on matrices filled out by cluster working groups during the workshop. The matrices are attached in Annex 1 for specific analysis by the partners.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Support the full implementation of the Republic Act 10121, also known as the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, which has clear provisions for disaster preparedness. For example, organize and strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Councils at all levels.**
2. **Enhance early warning systems and take into account predicted rainfall. Communication channels from the national to the local level should be clarified and endorsed by relevant authorities.**
3. **Conduct simulation exercises and drills to achieve greater familiarity with response mechanisms and to strengthen the overall community preparedness.**
4. **Support the authorities to develop its National Response Plan based on the NDRRM Plan. The planning should involve local communities and take into consideration hazard mapping, (pre-emptive) evacuation procedures, strategic locations for stockpiling and guidelines, communication channels, coordination, data preparedness, etc.**

**Session 2: Initial response, response and coordination*****What went well?***

- The **Government responded quickly** at all levels (i.e. national, regional and local). The response of the international community was also very quick as evidenced by the support it provided to the Government-led initial rapid needs assessment on Day 2 and 3 of the emergency.
- The unprecedented magnitude of the disaster compromised the response capacity of affected government units. Rapid surge deployments from government units in other provinces and a quick mobilization of community volunteers supported the initial response and the continuity of service delivery. Local NGOs also quickly took action and skilled IDPs contributed to the response effort.
- **Coordination** between the Government at the national and regional level, and between national/regional authorities and the international community was very good.
- A **Government-led joint initial rapid needs assessment** was conducted in a timely manner and informed response planning. Individual agencies also conducted assessments.
- Key clusters were quickly established in the affected areas or scaled up, with good **intra-cluster coordination** that resulted in sharing of resources and good team spirit (e.g. Nutrition, WASH). In Iligan City, however, clusters took time to set up due to its location (i.e. farther afield than CDO) and the general impressions held by the humanitarian community that the initial response was being well managed.
- **Government cluster leads took strong leadership roles** with the support of HCT cluster co-leads. The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) effectively led inter-cluster coordination at the regional level. DSWD and the Department of Health (DOH), each leading multiple clusters, held quadri- and tri-cluster meetings that enhanced inter-cluster coordination and saved time.
- Some clusters commended OCHA's leadership for effective **inter-cluster coordination**.
- Overall, the **cluster system** was found to be very useful in coordinating humanitarian response.
- Where appropriate, the RC/HC proposed changes in cluster leadership in consultation with relevant agencies according to changing needs and the levels of agency capacity.

***Challenges: What can be improved?***

- The **incident command system** was in place yet the rigour of its implementation varied, depending on personalities.
- There was a **coordination gap** between the national/regional and the local level due to the administrative systems in place in the Philippines which allows autonomy of LGUs and decentralized authority. International humanitarian actors were also encouraged to reach out to local actors to strengthen coordination.

- Some local government units were not well equipped to respond to a disaster of this magnitude.
- The **cluster system**, while quickly set up and found useful, was a new concept for the majority of the local and regional humanitarian actors. The system needed fine-tuning, such as clarification on the division of labour among key clusters and better definition of roles and responsibilities of the cluster leads and co-leads. For example, the division of labour between Shelter and CCCM clusters was unclear in the early stages of the response. Some clusters felt that humanitarian actors lacked appreciation and understanding of the **political dynamics** within the government at various levels, civil society and faith-based organizations. This was considered to be an impediment to an effective humanitarian response.
- Assistance from the **private sector and the civil society**, although generous and overwhelming, was not well coordinated, leading to duplicate and inequitable direct distribution. A familiarisation campaign should be conducted to strengthen awareness of existing coordination mechanisms.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Sensitize all actors about the Republic Act 10121 and promote the implementation of the law with the view to enhance the capacity of local DRRM Councils. Orient regional and local authorities and local humanitarian actors on the cluster system, international humanitarian tools, services and standards as a preparedness measure.**
2. **Promote the cluster system to ensure coordination and clear communication between national, regional and local actors as well as amongst the Government, international organizations, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, the private sector and civil society organizations. The cluster system could be supported by the establishment of common operations centres.**
3. **If an emergency of this magnitude strikes across a large geographic area, coordination hubs should be strategically established in multiple locations at the early stage of the emergency in order to fully engage the LGUs within the cluster response system.**
4. **Clusters to develop terms of reference (TOR).**

### **Session 3: Information management and assessments**

#### ***What went well?***

- A Government-led **joint initial rapid needs assessment** was conducted within the first 72 hours of the disaster onset with qualified assessors mobilised from governmental agencies, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, international organizations and a donor. The results of the assessment prompted the Government to accept international assistance offered by the RC/HC, and informed the Flash Appeal and the CERF request. Given the urgency to establish an understanding of the overall priority needs, the assessment focused on sectors that required life-saving, time-critical response in the accessible areas known to be the most severely affected at that time.
- The **second phase joint rapid needs assessment (multi-cluster initial rapid needs assessment, MIRA)** led by the Government reached remote areas that had been affected yet under-assessed due to access constraints. Along with the results of various assessments and monitoring undertaken over the first four weeks of the response, MIRA provided the evidence base for the revision of the Flash Appeal.
- **Maps and 3W** (Who-does What Where) prepared by OCHA and MapAction in collaboration with clusters were much appreciated as it provided a picture of what agencies are working on in each cluster. These products can be further improved to provide more analysis on needs and gaps of humanitarian assistance, and tailored to cluster specific information management (IM) requirements.
- **Information management products** such as contact directories, meeting schedules, 3W database, assessment reports, situation reports, and mapping products enhanced coordination, and supported advocacy and fundraising efforts.
- Several clusters maintained their own **information systems** that effectively supported cluster specific response (e.g. CCCM, Education, Health, Logistics, Protection, WASH) as well as

inter-cluster response (e.g. CCCM and Food through collaboration on the Displacement Tracking Matrix).

- Requests for IM products were straightforward and well received by the clusters.

### **Challenges: What can be improved?**

- The **information management capabilities** of the Government and humanitarian actors need further strengthening to ensure the systematic and standardized collection, processing and dissemination of information. Cluster members faced challenges in harmonizing data gathered by various agencies; agreeing on standard forms; maintaining relevant, accurate and timely information; and sharing information in a timely and an inclusive manner. Several clusters also raised the need for a common dataset. Some people took advantage of the gap in information, and made untruthful claims of housing damage in order to benefit from shelter assistance.
- The majority of the clusters acknowledged that their **information management expertise and information technology** were limited to meet the IM needs of the Washi response.
- Assessment teams were not able to obtain a precise picture of the needs in some remote communities outside of CDO and Iligan due to **access constraints**.
- Some assessments were uncoordinated, and the assessment data was insufficiently shared or used.
- The **second phase needs assessment** could have been better managed with greater forward planning and time. While noting that the use of the MIRA to inform the revised Flash Appeal was a “global first,” a more successful MIRA process would require a better process to share results from needs assessments already undertaken; promote partnerships with the authorities at all levels (e.g. local, regional and national); jointly design and plan the assessment, including pre-testing assessment forms and training the assessors; jointly collect, analyze and interpret assessment data; ensure the clearing of assessment results; and a shared communication strategy. The MIRA process for the Washi response, from the planning of the assessment to the presentation of initial assessment results by clusters, took place over 12 days.
- High staff turn-over hampered institutional and inter-agency learning on needs assessments.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Enhance local capacity for IM and needs assessments, including technical mapping capabilities, data preparedness and management, and reporting. Target IM training to local government units, government cluster lead agencies, and cluster members.**
2. **Strengthen IM systems, such as standards and protocols that support inter-operability of data.**
3. **Clusters and cluster members to allocate necessary human and financial resources for IM (e.g. include a designation of an IM focal point in the cluster TOR, establish Cluster IM Working Group), with OCHA providing technical IM advice. This requires donor support.**
4. **Further explore the possibility of utilising existing technology, e.g. using mobile phone software for real-time information gathering.**
5. **Promote coordinated needs assessments in which assessments are planned and carried out in partnership by humanitarian actors and contributes to wider geographical and sectoral coverage, better analysis, response planning and use of resources.**
6. **Invest in key measures for conducting a successful MIRA noted above.**

## **Session 4: Appeals process and resource mobilisation**

### **What went well?**

- The **Flash Appeal** was promptly produced under enormous time pressure following Government’s quick acceptance of international assistance offered by the RC/HC. The Appeal was based on joint Government-HCT initial rapid needs assessments undertaken on the second and third days of the crisis onset, and launched in Manila on the sixth day, which attracted extensive media coverage (22 December). A quick launch was particularly important

given that donors requested to receive the appeal before their capitals closed for the Christmas holiday. Due to the very tight timeframe, the process was not as participatory as it could have been and only covered accessible areas known to be most severely affected at that time. Recognising this limitation, efforts were made to engage more local partners and cover remote, under-assessed areas in the Flash Appeal revision process.

- Proposals for the **Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)** grants (US\$3 million) were prepared by the HCT on fourth and fifth days into the emergency, which were quickly approved by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on the day of the submission (Day 5 and ahead of the Flash Appeal launch). The RC/HC a.i. set the overall priorities based on the findings of the joint initial rapid needs assessment. These priorities were in line with those of the Government, which were Emergency Shelter, WASH, Food and Logistics.
- The Government and a number of humanitarian agencies utilised **internal emergency funding mechanisms** to draw resources to kick start response activities at the initial stages of the emergency, e.g. Government's DRRM Fund (or the 5 per cent Calamity Fund).
- Donations from the **private sector** were generous, and some government departments and humanitarian agencies initiated partnerships with private organizations to collaborate on response activities.

### **Challenges: What can be improved?**

- Government counterparts, national NGOs and some cluster members were not familiar with **tools and services** offered by the international humanitarian response system, such as the Consolidated Appeal Process and the CERF. Lack of understanding and the time constraint for the revised Flash Appeal put pressure on the whole process.
- The revised **Flash Appeal** is poorly funded at 36 per cent (\$14 million received out of the total revised requirement of \$39 million as of mid March), and donor support is not commensurate to the needs.
- Some agencies felt that the process for the Flash Appeal revision was a 'box-ticking' exercise.
- The **CERF** was perceived as exclusive to UN agencies. Several agencies also advocated for the inclusion of preparedness and early recovery activities in the 'life-saving criteria'.
- **Preparedness** and **early recovery**, including livelihoods, are traditionally poorly funded, and continuity of operations from preparedness, relief, early recovery and recovery remains a challenge.
- Fundraising efforts independently carried out by agencies caused some duplication within and across the clusters.
- The **overall funding landscape** was difficult to grasp with a lack of a mechanism to track contributions made by various government entities, donors, humanitarian agencies, the private sector and the civil society.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Intensify efforts to orient the Government, cluster members and local partners on the Flash Appeal and CERF processes for greater engagement, joint planning, and transparency.**
2. **Streamline and link the CERF and the Flash Appeal processes to reduce the burden of cluster members at the critical time of the emergency.**
3. **Establish a pooled fund at the country level to improve humanitarian financing during the early phases of the crisis.**
4. **Encourage private sector responders and non-traditional donors to collaborate with the clusters and the wider donor community to ensure a coordinated response.**
5. **Encourage the wider and consistent use of the UN-managed Financial Tracking Service to tracking all types of funding (from the government, UN agencies, donors, private sector, civil society organizations) to ensure equitable appropriation of resources.**
6. **Develop a resource mobilisation strategy for inter-cluster collaboration on fundraising (e.g. promoting psycho-social support through hygiene promotion) and link it with contingency planning.**

## **Session 5: Service delivery**

### ***What went well?***

- Government agencies (e.g. DSWD, City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD)), supported by cluster members, developed a **master beneficiary list** using Family Access Cards, which was a complex undertaking. IDP data was disaggregated by sex and age.
- Several clusters managed to **prioritize needs and select target beneficiaries** based on agreed criteria, existing database and recent sectoral assessments, with the involvement of *barangay* officials and beneficiaries.
- Good coordination with local actors facilitated the **optimal use of local resources**, which is critical to ensure the sustainability of programmes. Local partners were extensively involved in the implementation of activities.
- The Shelter Cluster explored and utilized **green technology** for permanent housing.
- For the Logistics Cluster, response was made easier by the existence of a developed commercial transportation network and the fact that no public infrastructure was critically damaged. Close collaboration with the authorities enabled maximum use of assets of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The Protection Cluster also reported successes in civil-military coordination.
- No deaths were recorded from malnutrition or water-borne diseases, and epidemics were prevented.

### ***Challenges: What can be improved?***

- Addressing the needs of the **IDPs living with host communities or in makeshift shelters** was a major challenge: IDPs were fluid and hard to locate; it was difficult to differentiate IDPs who were affected by the storm and those who were not affected yet in need of assistance due to poor living conditions; assistance focused on IDPs in evacuation centers, which caused jealousy amongst IDPs outside the evacuation centers.
- The relief operation focused on CDO and Iligan, which is where the majority of the affected populations was located, and more **remote and hard to reach areas** were underserved.
- As in most emergency situations, **aid delivery** was delayed and duplicated at the initial stages of the emergency. Some IDPs received more than enough assistance while others none at all. Assistance provided was not recorded and tracked in a coordinated manner.
- Some clusters felt that relief was not enough in terms of both quantity and quality, and limited by lack of human resources and funding. With respect to quality, some donors and service providers did not meet standards. For example, there were reports of the violation of the milk code.
- The Shelter Cluster was challenged by complex political and legal issues in trying to address **transitional and permanent shelter needs** of the IDPs, such as the demarcation of no-build zones; securing land for the construction of shelters; and advocacy for safe, informed and dignified relocations.
- Local NGOs and government agencies had a limited knowledge of the **Sphere standards**. Few clusters had reviewed and contextualized the Sphere standards or harmonized various sets of standards issued by the government, Inter-Agency Standing Committee and humanitarian agencies. Others are encouraged to do the same as appropriate.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. **Greater coordination and collaboration amongst all actors to improve assistance for IDPs inside and outside of evacuation centers, and in remote areas. Designate cluster focal points in every IDP site to enhance coordination.**
2. **Improve the Family Access Card system managed by DSWD and CSWD as a common beneficiary card to be used by the Government and the humanitarian community. Information relevant to humanitarian response can be collected in advance of a disaster.**
3. **Establish a common tracking system to monitor assistance that has been provided. This will help avoid duplications, enable efficient use of resources, and enhance accountability to beneficiaries.**



4. **Advocate for transitional shelters instead of emergency tents, which are not appropriate for the climate of the Philippines.**
5. **Orient the Government and cluster members on the Sphere standards. Initiate a process to harmonize existing standards, adjust to the local context and agree to uphold those standards.**

### **Session 6: Reporting, communication and advocacy**

#### ***What went well?***

- **OCHA Situation Reports** and **government reports** gave a useful overview of the ongoing humanitarian operations and helped keep key actors informed about the developments in the field. Some agencies suggested that OCHA sitreps could phase to weekly reporting instead of every two days as soon as the situation begins to stabilise and the information changes less frequently.
- The authorities disseminated **key humanitarian data**, which enabled relevant actors to work with the same information and baseline data.
- The first phase of the response benefited from a high level of local and international **media coverage**, which helped highlight the needs on the ground.

#### ***Challenges: What can be improved?***

- Situational understanding of the **affected people in remote areas and those living with host families** was limited due to access constraints and the complexity of gathering reliable data on IDPs taking shelter in unregistered locations.
- Dealing with the **local media** was perceived as a challenge, resulting in some inaccurate and sensational reporting that affected resource mobilisation. Having a communications plan and a dedicated public relations officer for each cluster will support accurate, unbiased and responsible reporting.

#### ***Recommendations:***

1. **Develop an inter-agency communications strategy and a plan in order to engage the media in a united and comprehensive manner in support of the humanitarian response. This may include creating an emergency media centre and organizing regular inter-agency press conferences to disseminate clearer information on the humanitarian situation and relief work. Agencies should adopt a pro-active stance to highlight success stories under the coordination of the RC/HC.**

### **Beyond the Action Review**

There was a general agreement that further cluster and inter-cluster reflection should be made, particularly with respect to the interaction between key clusters (e.g. CCCM/Shelter/WASH), to ensure better response to future emergencies. Building on the outputs of the inter-agency Action Review, clusters such as Education and WASH held its lessons learned exercise.

### **III. Annexes**

1. **Cluster matrices**
2. **List of participants**
3. **Programme of the event**
4. **Tropical Storm Washi – Humanitarian snapshot**
5. **Tropical Storm Washi – Timeline of key events**
6. **Results of the Action Review Feedback Survey**