

# TYPHOON BOPHA AND PEOPLE DISPLACEMENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

ULRIKE JULIA WENDT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Typhoon Bopha, locally known as Pablo, made landfall in the southern part of the Philippines on 4 December 2012. It was not only the sixteenth and strongest typhoon that hit the country in 2012, but it was also the most powerful and southern typhoon that was recorded in the Western Pacific in the past 100 years, a worrying indicator how climate change could affect the Philippines in severe ways (IOM Philippines, 2012). Considering that the Philippines is a country familiar with natural disasters and consequential people displacements, this paper examines the extent to which Typhoon Bopha has caused large-scale displacements of people and significantly contributed to decreased standards of living. In so doing, the paper will refer to “displaced people” as those who have been forced or obliged to leave their homes as a result of the threats or impacts of Typhoon Bopha.<sup>1</sup> This comprises of people who were evacuated or fled by themselves before or after the onset of the event. It also includes situations where people lost their homes or livelihoods and now stay in different sites (Yonetani 2013: 10).

The first section of the paper will provide a short background about the Philippines’ long history of environment-induced displacements. It then elaborates on Typhoon Bopha and its detrimental impacts, which forced many people to leave their homes before and after the storm. The next section examines these displacements in greater detail. Subsequently, a critical study of the major policy responses that have been implemented to address the particular needs of the displaced population

will follow. It is important to note that, at the time of writing in 2013, policy responses are still being implemented and are changing. Policy recommendations are discussed in the conclusion.

## 2. THE PHILIPPINES: A COUNTRY FAMILIAR WITH NATURAL DISASTERS AND CONSEQUENTIAL PEOPLE DISPLACEMENTS

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. According to the *World Risk Report 2012*, it was ranked third out of 173 countries, meaning the third most exposed and vulnerable country to disasters (Alliance Development Works, 2012: 18). Between 1990 and 2009, 237 natural disasters occurred in the country, which is nearly a third of the total number of disasters that occurred in the South-East Asian region in this period (GFDRR, 2011: 305). Typhoons are the most common and detrimental disasters. Between June and December, an average of 20 typhoons hit the country annually, usually accompanied by intense rainfall and flooding, causing the death of hundreds of people and damaging the country’s economy significantly (GFDRR, 2011: 306).

### 2.1. The Philippines geographical vulnerabilities

Natural disasters strike the Philippines due to various reasons. Its geographical situation contributes to the high vulnerability that is further exacerbated by the risks resulting from climate change. In fact, the Philippines have recorded its most detrimental, largest and deadliest typhoons in the past 17 years (GFDRR, 2011: 307). Furthermore, environmental degradation has increased the country’s risks of disasters. Poor land-use, planning and population growth contribute to the enormous damage of the environment and lead to the deforestation of large regions (GFDRR, 2011: 307). As a result, landslides and flash flooding have increased and some areas that have significantly lost their woodland have become more vulnerable to the damage caused by typhoons (GFDRR, 2011: 307).

1. The description used in this paper to identify “displaced people” is informed by the United Nations Guiding Principles Document that defines Internally Displaced People (IDPs) as “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border”. This paper refers to people that were displaced due to Typhoon Bopha without differentiating between those who have been displaced internally or across border. The available data suggests that the majority of people displaced due to Bopha have been displaced internally.

The high occurrence of natural disasters has caused the displacement of millions of people in the Philippines. Between 2008 and 2012, more than twelve million people were displaced due to natural disasters (Yonetani 2013: 31). After Typhoon Washi, locally known as Sendong, hit the country in December 2011, about 54 per cent of the population of the city Cagayan de Oro and about 34 per cent of the population of the city Iligan in the country's southern part were displaced (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 7). Clearly, these numbers help explain why the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) have identified the Philippines as one of the countries with the highest number of people displaced due to natural disasters. In 2009, they have ranked the country third; in 2010, seventh; and in 2012, fourth (Yonetani, 2011: 9, 12, 16; Yonetani 2013: 31).

A number of factors highly increase the risks of the displacement of people. For example, homes and buildings are often not built to the same standards as in developed countries (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 7). Consequently, the risk of them being destroyed is far greater and can lead to the people's displacement. Poor urban governance and weak political accountability are the underlying reasons for this because they often lead to unsuccessful and/or unenforced land planning and building standards (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 7). Furthermore, Ginnetti et al. (2013: 7) cite that a lack of understanding of the effects of climate change and unsatisfactory early-warning systems for natural disasters contribute to the country's high risk of people's displacement.

## 2.2 Policy adaptation to the high level of risks

Given this high risk of natural disasters and its consequences on people's displacement, the Philippines have enacted a variety of policies and legislations on disaster risk reduction (DRR). In fact, similar efforts have a long history in the country. As a colonial power starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spain set up a record system to keep information on environmental events. Interestingly, the records of the environmental events that occurred between 1521 and 1898 have informed today's early warning systems (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 17). Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, laws on disasters associated with natural and human-induced hazards and institutions on disaster management have increasingly been enacted. In 1978, President Marcos issued Presidential Decree 1566 that remains the basis for the country's disaster management (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 17). Since

2005, the Philippines have supported the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which is a ten-year plan that aims to explain, illustrate and specify the work that is needed from different fields and stakeholders to better address issues related to disasters (NDRRMP, 2011: 10). In 2010, the Filipino Government signed the Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (PDRRM) that aims to reform the country's main laws and policies in line with the HFA (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 17). In order to specifically address issues related to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the country has formulated a number of laws and bills, such as a bill to protect the rights of IDPs that was passed in February 2013 (UNHCR, 2013). The PDRRM has since included a provision on IDPs as well (Ginnetti et al., 2013: 18).

Despite the governmental attention given to DRR and IDPs and the consequent adoption of domestic policies based on international standards, Typhoon Bopha has caused large-scale people displacements and significantly contributed to their decreased standard of living.

## 3. THE TYPHOON AND ITS DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS

### 3.1. Formation and path of Typhoon Bopha

The origins of Typhoon Bopha were first sighted around 26 November 2012 (Gutro, 2012). Bopha formed in an uncommon and distinctive manner because it developed fewer than five degrees north of the equator (Met Office, 2012). This is an area where tropical storms do not typically emerge due to the low Coriolis force that helps typhoons to form by causing their rotation (Haeseler, 2012). In the following weeks, Bopha steadily increased in its size and intensity. On 3 December, it hit the southern part of the Palau archipelago (around 1,000 km east of the Philippines) where it devastated several areas, caused power outages but no casualties (OCHA, 2012a).

On 4 December at 4.45 am, Bopha made landfall over Bagaga in Davao Oriental, which is in eastern Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines (NDRRMC, 2012). Bopha recorded wind strengths of about 185 km/h in its center, gusts of up to 220 km/h and rainfall of 15-30 mm per hour within its diameter of 700 km (IOM Philippines, 2012a). This was three times the wind strength and twice the rainfall than Tropical Storm Washi had brought to the Philippines in 2011 (OCHA, 2013: 11). In the following days, Bopha traversed the landmasses

Map 1. The path of Typhoon Bopha



Source: OCHA 2013: iv. Map provided courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

of Mindanao and turned north while it weakened (NDRRMC, 2012). As noted earlier, Bopha moved along the most southern course of a typhoon that has been recorded in the Western Pacific in the past 100 years. Bopha was downgraded to a tropical depression when it left the Philippine area on 9 December (NDRRMC, 2012). The typhoon's great strength and its uncommon trajectory was a major reason why it had a detrimental impact on the Mindanao region and its population.

### 3.2. Affected regions

With high winds along coastal areas, mudslides in highland villages and flash floods in low-lying areas, Bopha damaged vast regions during its course through Mindanao (Shelter Cluster, 2012). In particular, it affected the eastern part of the island, which is one of the poorest regions of the Philippines. About 6.9 million people live in this area that encompasses the Davao and Caraga region (OCHA, 2013: 9). Out of the country's 17 regions, these regions are respectively the 7<sup>th</sup> (113 persons per square meter) and 13<sup>th</sup> (220 persons per square meter) most populated areas (National Statistics Office 2012). Specifically, Bopha had detrimental effects on the provinces of Davao Oriental, Compostela Valley, Suriago del Sur and Agusan del Sur, each of which it destroyed and impacted in their particular way. For example, Davao Oriental especially suffered from the damages to its agricultural lands and Compostela Valley experienced a particularly high number of casualties.<sup>2</sup> The high level of deforestation that characterized Mindanao before Bopha may have contributed to the extent to which these effects were so damaging (Morrison, 2013).

### 3.3. Human cost of Bopha

Bopha affected over 6.2 million people (OCHA, 2013a: 35). According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (n.d.), this includes "all people whose lives have been affected in some way by the crisis" beyond those in need of humanitarian assistance. More specifically, the typhoon left 1,146 people dead, 834 missing and 2,967 injured (OCHA, 2013e, OCHA, 2013a: 35). These numbers have constantly and drastically risen since Bopha hit the country on 4 December. The reported number of affected people increased from about 60,000 on 4 December, to 5 million on 6 December, and to 6.2 million on 18 December. Similarly, the number of people killed increased from about 95

on 5 December, to 456 on 7 December and to 1,043 on 18 December (IOM Philippines, 2012; OCHA, 2012b; OCHA, 2012c; OCHA, 2012d; OCHA, 2012e). Many factors explain this increase in numbers: it took several days until Bopha completely left the country and thereby killed people in the days after 4 December. In addition, Bopha hit many remote communities where it was challenging to obtain comprehensive data on casualties.

Bopha affected various specifically vulnerable groups. Some reports revealed that up to 40 per cent of the affected population lived below the poverty line (Protection Cluster, 2013). Poor people were often dependent on income generating activities, such as subsistence farming, and lived in houses built with less robust materials (IFAD, 2009: 1). Given that Bopha particularly destroyed farmland and housing, which will be later explained in greater detail, poor people were exceptionally vulnerable to the typhoon. Other reports using different criteria to identify the most affected people disclosed that more than 60 per cent were indigenous people (Protection Cluster, 2013). Indigenous people frequently live in the isolated regions of Mindanao. Therefore, they may not have been informed early enough to evacuate before Bopha's landfall and were less likely to obtain humanitarian assistance in a relatively quick manner (Protection Cluster, 2013). Women and children also belonged to the most affected groups. UNICEF (2012) reported that about one third of all affected people were children. They often experienced profound stress due to the death or injury of their loved ones, which can have significant effects on their well-being and future development (UNICEF, 2012). Furthermore, many women were affected because they had become the main provider for their family. Their men had often left after the storm to look for employment elsewhere (Protection Cluster, 2013).

### 3.4. Agriculture damages

Bopha had devastating impacts on the agriculture of eastern Mindanao. National authorities reported that thousands of hectares of banana and coconut plantations were destroyed, mainly in the provinces of Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental (DSWD et al., 2013). Small growers were particularly affected and had lost between 30 and 50 per cent of their total farming areas (DSWD et al., 2013). The overall damage costs to agriculture were estimated to be at about USD 645 million (OCHA, 2012f).

Before the typhoon, the majority of the population of eastern Mindanao was dependent on subsistence farming of basic commodities, including coconuts, bananas and rice (OCHA, 2013: 9).

2. Interview with IOM Communications Specialist, conducted on 24 March 2013 via Skype.

**Picture 1.** Aftermath of Typhoon Pablo (Bopha)

Credits: Cateel, Davao Oriental, Creative Commons, Photo: Sonny M. Day, 5 December 2012. Available: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/89715795@N02/8289315117/in-photo-stream/>, Accessed: 27 August 2013., Accessed: 21.05.2013.

In addition to growing parts of their own food, households purchased food items from local markets (OCHA, 2013: 20). However, Bopha had damaging impacts on this mixed food economy. After its landfall, many people were no longer able to grow their own food and buy food from the markets. Not only was their agricultural land completely destroyed, but also market supply chains had been cut off (OCHA, 2013: 20). Furthermore, the damages to agricultural lands contributed to a loss of income for many people. People had to look for other jobs elsewhere to make their living; however, these coping strategies were often not sufficient to cover all food needs (OCHA, 2013: 20-21; DSWD et al., 2013). These detrimental impacts contributed to food insecurity and dramatically increased the need of food assistance. Additionally, given that crops like banana and coconut take years to grow, the gravity of the agricultural damages is tremendous (Shelter Cluster, 2012; OCHA, 2013: 21).

### 3.5. Housing and infrastructure

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported that more than 233,000 shelters were affected by the typhoon (IOM Philippines, 2013). Given that many houses were built with wood and other vulnerable materials, numerous houses lost their roofs or were completely flattened. Yet, it was reported that

even iron roofs had been carried through the wind like "flying machetes" (Mullen, 2012). Damages to infrastructure were estimated to amount to over USD 186 million (OCHA, 2013). Power and electricity were only slowly restored in the following months, which may have contributed to communities being slowly informed of the current situation (OCHA, 2013: 10).

### 3.6. Education, health and safety impacts

Large numbers of schools were destroyed or used as evacuation centers, which made it impossible for many children to attend school (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2013). Indeed, the Government was able to re-establish the daily school routine within only one month. However, many challenges remained, such as the lack of electricity, school records and teaching material (OCHA, 2013). Many health care facilities were also destroyed, decreasing dramatically the number of available health care providers in the light of the high number of physically injured and psychologically distressed people (OCHA, 2013). Bopha had also detrimental impacts in regards to safety issues. An increased number of gender-based violence cases was reported (OCHA, 2013b). Additionally, many people, particularly indigenous people, living in the hinterlands were not able to access basic government services, such as

social welfare programs, because they had never possessed birth certificates (Protection Cluster, 2013).

## 4. THE VARIOUS FORMS AND IMPACTS OF PEOPLES' DISPLACEMENTS

### 4.1. Preventive evacuations

Before Bopha hit the country, many people had already left their homes to flee the threats of typhoon. Between 30 November and 4 December, national and international disaster authorities encouraged communities to take responsibility for their safety and ordered pre-emptive evacuations in areas that were expected to be hit the hardest (IFRC, 2012; Escalante, 2012; OCHA, 2013: 1). As a response, residents were evacuated or fled by themselves to safer grounds, which included evacuation centers set up in schools, bus terminals and gyms. People also fled to relatives who lived on higher ground to prevent being affected by flash floods and landslides that were expected to result from the typhoon (Escalante, 2012; NDRRMC, 2012a).

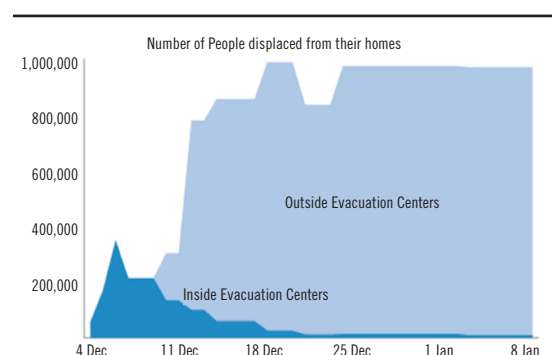
Officials have struggled to measure the scale of the pre-emptive evacuations and escapes. On the one hand, authorities stated that more people had been encouraged to leave typhoon-hazardous areas compared to the previous year when Typhoon Washi hit the country (Mullen, 2012). On the other hand, they emphasized that there were important differences between areas. In the more northern areas, where Washi hit Mindanao, the number of people who left their homes was much larger than in the southern areas, where Washi had not made landfall in 2011.<sup>3</sup> Ortigas (2012) reported that the population in the north had taken the warning signals more seriously because Bopha had been expected to hit this area strongly and people were still traumatized through Typhoon Washi. In contrast, the population in the south paid less attention to the warning signs because Bopha had been expected to hit this region less and people “didn’t even know what the warning signals meant (...)” because “typhoons always happen somewhere else, not here (...)” (Ortigas 2012). Eventually, Bopha hit the south stronger than anticipated, causing a higher number of deaths than in the north (Ortigas 2012).

3. Ibid.

### 4.2. Number and location of people displaced from their homes

The reported number of people displaced from their homes significantly increased after Bopha hit the Philippines on 4 December. Initially, news articles, international organizations and national authorities reported that tens of thousands of people had been evacuated or fled by themselves to various evacuation centers (The Telegraph, 2012). The peak was achieved shortly after Bopha’s landfall (OCHA 2012d). The reported number of people displaced from their homes further increased to about one million by taking into account people who were inside evacuation centers and outside evacuation centers as Bopha had, for instance, damaged their houses (OCHA 2013). The latest figures report that Bopha induced the displacement of more than 1.9 million people in total (Yonetani 2013: 43).

**Figure 2.** Displaced People inside and outside Evacuation Centers



Source: OCHA, 2013: 3. Map provided with the courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

More specifically, in January 2013, the Philippines’ Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) estimated that, at the height of the disaster, about 150,000 families, or 750,000 people, stayed in about 1,150 evacuation centers (OCHA, 2013: 15). Indeed, these numbers exceed those that the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported and are illustrated in figure 2. OCHA (2012d) estimated a peak of 348,394 evacuees staying in 541 evacuation centers on 6 December 2012. Many reasons could explain this significant difference in data, such as that the DSWD may have used additional sources that were not known to OCHA in December 2012.<sup>4</sup>

4. Personal communication with OCHA Head of Office, conducted on 30 June 2013 via email.

Evacuation centers were increasingly established in different locations, including local government buildings, gyms and stadiums (OCHA, 2013: 15). Soon after Bopha had hit the country, the number of people who stayed in these evacuation centers started decreasing (IOM, 2012a). By February 2013, less than 9,000 people remained in about one hundred evacuation centers (OCHA, 2013e).

Many factors explain why these numbers started declining quickly. First, numerous families wanted to return to their homes to start rebuilding their houses and save whatever they could (IOM, 2012a). Second, many people left because of the bad conditions that often prevailed in evacuation centers. Many centers were overcrowded and could not provide adequate protection that people required, such as material for emergency shelters, adequate sanitation and potable water (IOM, 2012a). Several evacuation centers were also roofless after having been hit by the typhoon and some evacuation centers in Compostela Valley were badly flooded (IOM, 2012). These conditions also led some people to move to other places, such as to transitional sites (IOM, 2013).

Transitional sites included tent cities and bunkhouses that were set up immediately after the typhoon in order to provide a sanctuary for displaced people. By March 2013, IOM Philippines (2013) reported that 190 bunkhouses were built in Davao Oriental and Compostela Valley. The construction of bunkhouses mainly happened under the control of national authorities, with the financial and technical support of international and national humanitarian organizations and the assistance of local people who were hired to build these houses (IOM, 2013; OCHA, 2013: 49; OCHA, 2012d).

However, transitional sites were a highly controversial topic. Similar to many evacuation centers, transitional sites were often in bad conditions and lacked, for instance, adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities (IOM, 2013). In addition, newspapers criticized the construction of bunkhouses and accused the government of managing this process in a corrupt manner (Escalante, 2013). For instance, local newspapers reported that the payments of those who were hired to build bunkhouses were dubious because some workers had received more money than they were entitled (Romero, 2013). Furthermore, the construction of transitional sites had often not been regarded as a best practice. Specialists on post crises and emergency issues noted that efforts should have been directed toward making people stay in their trusted environment so that they can recover as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup> Transitional sites would disconnect

people from their familiar environment, which would make it difficult for them to get back into their normal life once they have left these temporary solutions.<sup>6</sup>

While many people were displaced in evacuation centers and transitional sites, the overwhelming majority, numbering about 925,412 people as of February 2013, remained with host families and in so-called “spontaneous settlements”, where people have set up their own makeshift shelters (OCHA, 2013e; IOM Philippines 2013a). This number had stayed relatively consistent from mid-December 2012, as shown in figure 2. However, one may observe a significant drop in the number of people staying outside evacuation centers around 21 December. OCHA had used only data that was available at the time. However, data from some municipalities had not arrived, which explains the sudden drop in numbers.<sup>7</sup> The non-supply of the data could have been due to numerous reasons, such as logistical challenges to obtain data. Spontaneous settlements were mainly found along roadsides, near the original houses of displaced people and in affected communities after the floodwater receded (IOM Philippines, 2013a). While people received similar assistance as those who remained in registered sites, providing the necessary aid to them was more challenging (IOM Philippines, 2013a).

### 4.3 Migration and trafficking

After 4 December, an increasing number of people left their homes to better deal with the impacts of Typhoon Bopha. In order to cope with the financial difficulties, for example, several people, particularly men, migrated to other areas to look for work. Although this implied that many were separated from their families and usual environments, they saw this as their duty. As noted earlier, women who stayed home consequently emerged as the main provider for their families (Protection Cluster, 2013; UNICEF, 2013). Similarly, adolescent boys and girls started going to cities to look for jobs. Given the high incidence of child labor in the Philippines, this was not considered an unusual phenomenon. However, travelling as child laborers to other regions made children more vulnerable to violence, abuse and trafficking (Protection Cluster, 2013; UNICEF, 2013).

5. Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist at IOM Thailand, conducted on 28 March 2013 via Skype.

6. Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist at IOM Thailand, conducted on 28 March 2013 via Skype.

7. Personal communication with OCHA Humanitarian Affairs Officer, conducted 26 June 2013 via email.

Hence, UNICEF (2013) raised the concern that the incidence of trafficking could increase as a result of Typhoon Bopha. Already before Bopha, trafficking had been a common issue in the Mindanao region (UNICEF, 2013). Due to the clandestine nature of trafficking, however, reliable and up-to-date data have not yet been available that would allow better assessment of whether or not the issue of trafficking has increased due to Bopha. Nevertheless, the concern is reasonable because children that resulted from the typhoon are likely to be more vulnerable to child trafficking. For example, the rising number of migrating child laborers due to Typhoon Bopha could add to the issue of child trafficking (UNICEF, 2013). Furthermore, the growing number of women and girls who were left behind or looking for work could exacerbate the problem of sex trafficking. The fact that trafficking increased by about 10 per cent after Typhoon Washi had devastated the Philippines in 2011 indicates that trafficking could intensify (UNICEF, 2013). Consequently, several humanitarian actors have mainstreamed awareness-building programs on trafficking issues amongst governmental officials and regional anti-trafficking networks since Bopha (IOM Philippines, 2013a).

#### 4.4 Return of the displaced people

The question of when and whether displaced people can go back is difficult. Indeed, several people returned to their trusted environment to continue their life, or start a new life, as early as possible. However, even if people were able to return and live in their houses, the conditions in which they live are often very poor. A study conducted by REACH in March 2013 had shown that 46 per cent of families, or nearly a half a million people, lived in houses that were classified “uninhabitable” (Bamforth, 2013; Reach, 2012).

Updated data suggests that, as of 30 April 2013, 11,700 people displaced by Bopha still remain inside evacuation centers and 922,000 outside of evacuation centers (OCHA, 2013a: 10). While many live in tents and bunkhouses, the majority remains in spontaneous settlements (IOM Philippines, 2013). Those who live in spontaneous settlements are often considered more likely to return to normality than people residing in other sites. Many spontaneous settlements are close to the original homes of displaced people where families can live together and the community life can start again (Bamforth, 2013).

Yet, it may take years until all the people will be able to return and live in their homes as it was before Bopha. For example, land tenure issues might

complicate whether people will be able to rebuild their houses. Assessments show that many of the worst affected people were living in informal arrangements without any legal documentation on land ownership. However, such documentation is important in order to receive government assistance to rebuild houses; but it may take “some time” to obtain them (Kelly 2013: 4). Additionally, going back to normal will be difficult for everyone who suffered a loss, especially for dependents. Whole communities will also need to be rebuilt to enable a similar life before Bopha.<sup>8</sup> The question of whether the Government will actively support people return to their homelands and, instead, relocate them to less disaster prone areas is of high importance.

## 5. POLICY RESPONSES AND CHALLENGES

### 5.1. The questioned efficiency of preparedness measures

Many actions that aimed to prepare for any eventualities related to Bopha started on 30 November 2012 when the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) and the NDRRMC began to issue regular updates on the typhoon. Bopha was expected to reach the country by 4 December with wind strength between 100 km/h and 185 km/h. Local authorities also expected that Bopha would have more devastating impacts than Washi and therefore, aimed to intensify preparation and evacuations efforts. (IFRC, 2012; PAGASA, n.d.; OCHA, 2012)

Both governmental and non-governmental actors implemented emergency preparedness actions. This included that PAGASA and NDRRMC classified different regions under different public warning signals. In the view of these signals, authorities directed pre-emptive evacuations of families that resided in areas that were anticipated to be hit the strongest. Furthermore, they advised the population to take precautionary measures, which included cancelling travel and outdoor activities, seeking shelter in stronger buildings, evacuating to safer areas, calling off school classes and staying in shelters until the typhoon completely passed (IFRC, 2012, PAGASA n.d.). Furthermore, humanitarian stakeholders established evacuation centers, pre-positioned relief items and mobilized the emergency responders (IFRC, 2012). People

8. Interview with IOM Communications Specialists, Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist

generally took the warnings seriously and followed the recommended precautionary measures.

Given the high number of casualties that Bopha caused, it appears that the implemented preparedness measures were insufficient and ineffective. Therefore, one may interrogates the extent to which the Philippines could still be seen as a model in addressing issues related to DRR (Ginnetti et al., 2013). However, Bopha happened in a region where a typhoon of such great strength had no precedent. This raises the question as to whether people can be expected to effectively and successfully prepare for something that never happened before and that no one genuinely expected to ever happen.<sup>9</sup>

## 5.2. Declaration of the “state of national calamity”

On 7 December, after Bopha’s landfall, the President of the Philippines signed Proclamation No. 522 to declare a state of national calamity. In doing so, he aimed to speed up the rescue, relief and rehabilitation plans implemented by the national and international humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2013; Kelly 2013). While President Aquino stressed that government actors would take the lead in addressing the needs that had resulted from Bopha, he also emphasized the importance of a coordinated approach between different humanitarian actors (OCHA, 2013: 1).

## 5.3. Humanitarian response and the clusters approach

By supporting the UN clusters approach to address the particular needs of the displaced population, the Philippines aimed to strengthen the effectiveness of the humanitarian response by making sure that high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all activity sectors were achieved (DRC, n.d.). Needs assessments were conducted by national authorities in cooperation with other humanitarian organizations and completed on 5 December (OCHA, 2013: 1, 15) and identified key clusters to be implemented - camp coordination and camp management (CCCM), early recovery, food security and agriculture (OCHA, 2013). The clusters approach was implemented at the regional, provincial and municipal levels on a needs basis. This was significant given that the majority of the local governments in the affected areas had little experience in addressing both natural and man-made disasters (OCHA,

2013: 12-13).

As planned by the responsibility sharing of the cluster approach, specific actors were in charge of specific sectors, according to their mandate, competences and field presence. The DSWD and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) took the lead for the early recovery cluster (OCHA, 2013: 53). Cluster outputs included the distribution of food packs and the realization of cash-for-work such as hiring workers to clear debris, rebuilding homes and infrastructure (OCHA 2013: 13). Bunk-houses were constructed and emergency shelter kits were distributed to address the needs for shelter (OCHA, 2013).

However, significant gaps remained in the provision of shelter (OCHA 2013: 13, OCHA 2013d). A comprehensive shelter policy for Bopha had still to be drafted in March 2013 (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013). This lack of policy hampered humanitarian assistance because local authorities, communities and other humanitarian stakeholders were awaiting clarity in how to address certain shelter issues. However, a comprehensive shelter policy could have significantly accelerated the provision of assistance to those living in evacuations centers, transitional sites, spontaneous settlements and in other vulnerable conditions (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013). This had been seen in the previous year when Typhoon Washi hit the country. In its aftermath, a Local Inter-Agency Committee (LIAC) had been created that developed a shelter strategy to coordinate and leverage national and international assistance more effectively (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013),

The environmental disasters that happened in the months after Bopha added to the challenge of implementing the clusters approach and addressing the needs of the displaced population. In particular, rains did not stop for months and dangerous floods occurred in Bopha-affected regions in January 2013 (IRIN, 2013). The monsoon and typhoon season that started in May/June were additional challenges (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013).

The inaccessibility of areas, politicization of aid and security have also been major challenges to adequate and nondiscriminatory aid provision. Many areas were hardly accessible and sometimes only accessible with helicopters due to the destruction of numerous roads and bridges.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, local groups and typhoon survivors argued that the provision of aid would have been politicized due to the elections in May 2013. This would have meant that those who were considered potential voters would have been provided with humanitarian assistance before others that were not considered potential

9. Ibid.

10. Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist.

voters (IRIN, 2013a). Furthermore, humanitarian assistance had to take special security measures due to the conflict-related situation in the region.<sup>11</sup>

Funding has been a last major challenge to humanitarian response efficiency. Even though constant appeals were made to the international community, the humanitarian response to Bopha has generally been underfunded, especially for emergency shelter needs (OCHA, 2013d). Out of the nearly one hundred thousand people who were helped by agencies in the shelter cluster, for example, only half had obtained a tarpaulin because of the agencies' inability to obtain the sufficient financial resources (Bamforth, 2013).

#### 5.4. No-Build-Zones (NBZs)

Besides the clusters approach that has particularly focused on addressing the needs of the displaced population in the short-term, the Government has implemented actions that aim to reduce the risk of people's displacement due to natural disasters in the long-term. A particularly interesting and controversial strategy has been the identification of so-called 'No-Build-Zones' (NBZs). To do so, the Government's Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) has conducted geo-hazard risk assessments in Bopha-affected provinces. In these assessments, areas are classified either as low-risk areas where it is safe to build, medium-risk areas where mitigation measures may be appropriate or high-risk areas where it is unsafe to build. High-risk areas are interpreted as NBZs. Depending on the risk category, the MGB recommends actions that can be either moderate or radical. For example, in some cases, it is recommended to move houses for a few meters away. In other cases, it is recommended to relocate whole communities. (IRIN, 2013; Kelly, 2013: 17)

Until today, the Government has not yet released a NBZ policy. The MGB recommendations are not compulsory and cannot be legally enforced on local governments (Kelly, 2013: 16-20). Nevertheless, the identification of NBZs has had important consequences. For example, President Aquino has urgently advised local governments to adopt the recommendations issued by the MGB (Kelly, 2013: 17). In addition, several national authorities have avoided providing rebuilding assistance to areas that were classified as NBZs (Kelly, 2013: 18). Furthermore, in order to realize resettlement

programs, local governments have to obtain an authorization from the MGB to ensure that these areas are safe (Kelly, 2013: 18). If areas have previously been classified as a NBZ, authorization forms are not issued.

A major reason why the demarcation of NBZs is still an unofficial policy is that it is a highly controversial topic. This has been discussed at numerous levels within the Philippines for many years and Bopha has, all over again, clarified the contentious nature of this topic.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, the realization of NBZs could significantly lessen Mindanao's risk of people displacements because of natural disasters. On the other hand, important challenges to implement such policy exist.

For example, challenges can be associated with indigenous people. Many indigenous communities live in areas that are likely to be classified as NBZs. However, they may be reluctant to move from their land due to their ancestral relationship with the land (Kelly, 2013: 26-28). In addition, their land and property rights are legally recognized by the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, complicating issues around relocating them (Kelly, 2013: 26-28). Indeed, Section 7 of the IPRA that shows that indigenous people are only entitled to return to their land if the State considers it to be "safe". However, many indigenous people are likely to not accept this clause if it is to be enforced. Numerous field consultations conducted after Bopha revealed that indigenous people have an extremely strong desire to return to their land. Although indigenous people went through trauma, experienced severe losses and are aware that such disasters can happen again, they still want to go back to their old homes and regions that their ancestors have inhabited for centuries.<sup>13</sup>

People's reliance on certain livelihoods and their willingness to change particular life patterns can also complicate the creation of NBZs. Given that many people rely on subsistence and commercial farming, their relocation to land unsuitable for such activities can be devastating (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013). Furthermore, several people have expressed their unwillingness to transform their life styles because as migrating would require them to do so (Kelly, 2013: 22). For example, people who have a long family tradition of farming may now have to be a fisher due to the new living circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

11. Interview with IOM Communications Specialist. The rural-based guerrilla force, New People's Army (NPA), which is the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), has been fighting in eastern Mindanao against the Philippine government for decades (OCHA, 2013: 9; BBC, 2012).

12. Interview with IOM Communications Specialists, Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist.

13. Interview with IOM Communications Specialist.

14. Ibid.

Furthermore, there are important logistical and cost challenges. In some instances, the MGB has identified many and wide-ranging areas as NBZs. For example, 80 per cent of New Bataan has been classified as such.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, this raises questions around whether the relocation of a great number of people is feasible to implement and if there is a viable alternative to which they could be relocated.<sup>16</sup> Another challenge is that the relocation of people is often a slow process. In particular, the identification of relocation sites has seen significant delays. While government land has been acquired relatively fast, negotiating relocation sites that are privately owned has taken far longer (Kelly, 2013: 21-22). In addition, past experiences have shown that the relocation of people has been a very costly policy (Scheidler & Hilmi, 2013). Given that the Philippines are ranked as lower-middle income country, associated costs can be a difficulty to finance (World Bank, 2013).

Finally, political issues can represent obstacles to put a NBZ policy into practice. Although the national government is generally in favor of implementing NBZs, local governments do not often agree with the realization of NBZs, mainly because this would complicate the usual voting procedure.<sup>17</sup> In particular, population shifts may mean that certain voting districts will cease to exist. As a consequence, the existence of local governments in these areas may be affected.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown the extent to which the Bopha typhoon has caused large-scale displacements of people. These displacements have been complex because they occurred before and after the typhoon in many different forms. Furthermore, the typhoon has decreased standards of living of the displaced people both in the short and long term. The economic status of the Philippines may drag out the negative impacts of the storm because of the country's financial limitations. This already difficult situation is additionally complicated because climate patterns are changing and similar disasters may increasingly happen in the future in the country.

The above-explained situation has confronted the Philippine government with new challenges that are related to the issue of the displacement

of people due to natural disasters. Indeed, many have considered the country as a global leader in enacting policies and legislation to reduce the risk of natural disasters. However, given the detrimental impacts that Bopha had, more efforts need to be taken to address the issue of natural disasters and its consequences on the displacement of people more effectively.

Policy recommendations are suggested to address how to more efficiently prepare and manage forthcoming disasters, and address the particular needs of those displaced.

### Scale up current policy responses

The humanitarian assistance should scale up the current policy responses. Still today, there are many gaps that need to be filled in order to address the needs of the displaced people in a more effective and efficient manner. The implementation of a comprehensive shelter policy should be considered as a priority. Furthermore, it should include increasing the financial support for the different clusters, especially for the shelter cluster that has experienced insufficient funding (OCHA, 2013c).

### Implement standardized preparedness measures

Standardized preparedness measures should be implemented countrywide. In an interview, specialists on post crises and emergency issues noted that the Philippines were prepared for a typhoon of such great strength; however, it was not prepared for a typhoon that hit the country so far in the south in such enormous power. To implement such measures, offices that exclusively handle issues related to natural disasters could be established in each province; governmental actors from the regional, municipal and village level should participate in regular and compulsory trainings; and national campaigns that inform the population on appropriate preparation measures and emphasize that early warning systems must be taken seriously should be conducted in all provinces. The case of Indonesia could serve as an example of how a best practice approach could be implemented, given that this country has realized a standardized way of response.<sup>18</sup>

### Develop clear strategies that address the needs of those who live in so-called 'NBZs'

It is recommended to develop clear strategies that address the needs of those who live in areas that are to be classified as NBZs, which still appears to be a grey area in existing policy responses.

<sup>15</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>. Interview with IOM Regional Emergency and Post Crisis Specialist.

<sup>18</sup>. Ibid.

Strategies should include developing clearer legal instruments that describe the process of declaring and enforcing NBZs (Kelly, 2013: 20). Furthermore, people living in NBZs should be clearly informed about the risks they face and receive appropriate assistance that support their decision – whether it is to remain in the NBZ area or move away (Kelly, 2013:20).

### **Ensure that mechanisms to protect the rights of people displaced by environmental events are put into action**

It is imperative to ensure that appropriate mechanisms to protect the rights of people displaced by environmental events are put into action. People displaced by natural events do not only have particular needs, but their numbers may also be increasing in the coming years due to the

changing climate patterns affecting the Philippines. Indeed, in February 2013, the Philippines's Congress took already the right step in the right direction by launching a landmark bill that spells out the particular rights of IDPs before and after displacement and allows IDPs to claim monetary assistance and compensation (UNHCR, 2013). The challenge is now one of its implementation.<sup>19</sup> ■

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19. National and international actors praised this bill, which represented the first of its kind in Asia, as a milestone for the protection of IDPs in the Philippines (UNHCR 2013). However, in June 2013, the President of the Philippines vetoed the Rights of the IDP Act (NRC&IDMC 2013). Clearly, this emphasizes both the challenge to implement mechanisms to protect the rights of people displaced by environmental events, as well as the need to continue campaigning for it.

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