

CITIES IN CRISIS CONSULTATIONS - Tacloban, Philippines



MARCH 2016

Overview of Urban Consultations

By 2050 over 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. This accelerating urbanization trend is accompanied by an increasing vulnerability of cities to both natural and man-made disasters. More and more, humanitarian actors are responding to urban crisis. They are however often badly equipped to understand and effectively engage with cities' complex socio-economic dynamics and governance structures. Recognizing these challenges, the World Humanitarian Summit has mandated an Urban Expert Group to identify key recommendations for promoting better humanitarian response to urban crisis.

With a view of contributing to this discussion, IMPACT Initiatives and UCLG's Task Force On Local and Regional Government Disaster Response facilitated a series of consultations in six cities affected by natural or man-made disasters. In collaboration with local authorities and aid actors, each city identified key lessons and guidance to inform future responses, outlined in city-specific reports and compiled into a comprehensive report which will be presented in May 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit, in partnership with the Urban Expert Group.

The Consultation Process:

- 1 Guiding questions for all cities agreed upon with the Urban Expert Group
- 2 Bilateral interviews held with city-level authorities and civil society, UN Agencies, NGOs and donors involved in the response
- 3 Final consultations hosted by local mayor(s) to identify lessons learned and develop recommendations for future response to urban crisis
- 4 Findings from interviews and consultations summarized in city-specific and overarching reports

INTRODUCTION

Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) hit the Eastern Visayas Region of the Philippines on 8 November 2013, affecting over 14 million people across nine regions and displacing 4 million from their homes. **Tacloban**, the region's capital city permanently home to over 220,000 people and with an average daytime population upwards of 1 million, **was severely affected, with the most significant damage concentrated in the informal settlements along the sea front.** The large-scale humanitarian response that was set in motion after Haiyan provided much needed additional assistance to affected populations. However, the lack of coordination and synergies between local and international actors resulted in sub-optimal humanitarian outcomes.

Based on consultations held in Tacloban with local actors and humanitarian organisations, this report outlines key lessons learned and recommendations deriving from the humanitarian response in Tacloban.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, stakeholders reported that the humanitarian response in Tacloban was effective and relevant, but with numerous caveats. In particular, the lack of coordination mechanisms between humanitarian and local actors contributed to misunderstandings, information gaps, duplication of aid and a failure to develop integrated programming. In addition, there were particular challenges in relation to how to best support communities from Informal Settlements, with diverging approaches being promoted by some international actors and by local authorities. The following recommendations could further strengthen future response to natural disasters in Tacloban and in other urban crisis:

- **Identify enhanced and more inclusive coordination mechanisms** between local actors and humanitarian organisations, involving local and municipal governments;
- **Facilitate better and earlier engagement of local responders and authorities**, notably through consultations and capacity building;
- **Area-based approaches would facilitate integrated response planning, targeting, and implementation** and allow to initiate recovery responses at earlier stages.

Crisis Overview

The first 3 days / 1 week

All systems were down initially. The initial focus was on debris removal, particularly clearing of the road to the airport. Some electric power was regained in this period. Local organizations were the key actors in this period.

The first 2 weeks

The primary focus was on search and recovery, health and the provision of food and non-food items as well as the restoration of communication and utilities.

After 10 days the city government was functional again.

Key actors in this period were local and national, with the UN and international NGOs represented, including UNDP and UNOCHA which initially set up their offices in the city hall.

The first 2 months

Debris removal continued, continued focus on relief distribution, with a particular focus on shelter.

The majority of international actors arrived after one month to support the response.

KEY CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN TACLOBAN

- 1 Local stakeholders faced difficulty engaging with and accommodating the humanitarian response:**

Local community and authorities faced further difficulties in managing the overall magnitude of assistance provided by the international community, comprised of a large, heterogeneous and exogenous group of humanitarian actors. Local stakeholders also reported a lack of understanding of the policies and procedures of the responding humanitarian organizations.
- 2 Lack of mechanisms to promote accountability and transparency among humanitarian actors:**

Local stakeholders expressed frustration with the absence of any mechanism to either ensure that responding organisations participate in coordination or are held to their commitments. Several organizations were unwilling to participate in coordination fora and did not share information regarding their program activities while other organisations made pledges and commitments and failed to meet them.
- 3 Insufficient coordination between local and international actors led to information gaps, misconceptions and duplication:**

Coordination between local and international actors was consistently indicated as the primary challenge. The perception expressed by local stakeholders was that humanitarian coordination was ultimately a parallel process to local government and as such limited the overall effectiveness of the response, a large share of which was conducted by local stakeholders. Levels of active coordination among humanitarian responders also varied considerably, ultimately leading to information gaps, misconceptions and duplication as well as lost opportunities for a more integrated response.
- 4 Lack of context-specific understanding and cultural sensitivity led to inappropriate programming:**

Many humanitarian actors did not sufficiently engage with the community to understand multi-sectorial vulnerabilities which led to inappropriate programming. Stakeholders reported that some types of assistance provided were not culturally appropriate and a lack of cultural sensitivity was highlighted. Most notably, the initial provision of tents was mentioned as an inappropriate and unacceptable means of shelter in the context.
- 5 A lack of pre-crisis preparedness significantly increased community vulnerabilities:**

Stakeholders expressed that the community was not equipped with either the facilities and equipment required nor the training (knowledge, skills, and abilities) to respond appropriately. Ineffective community outreach led to critical misunderstandings and reduced household-level preparedness.
- 6 No build zones presented unique challenges to relief and recovery:**

Informal Settlements in areas defined as 'No Build Zones' presented numerous challenges. In line with local regulation, authorities did not allow reconstruction in these areas, instead proposing the relocation of its inhabitants to newly identified 'Safe Zones'. However many humanitarian organisations were not willing or able (often because of donor or policy constraints) to support relocated households. As a consequence of this divergent approach, support to inhabitants of Informal Settlements was piecemeal and insufficient to meet their needs, despite the fact that they were the most affected by the Typhoon.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN RESPONSES

1 **Capacity building to municipal actors:**

Local authorities have received very little effective training on how to best respond to the crisis and on how to engage with humanitarian actors. Capacity building of municipal actors should be mainstreamed in future preparedness and response programming of humanitarian organisations.

2 **Develop feedback and accountability mechanisms between responding humanitarian actors and local stakeholders:**

Enhanced coordination should be paralleled by a regular reporting mechanism by humanitarian responders towards local stakeholders, providing updates on their action and plans. Such feedback mechanism would increase transparency and accountability.

3 **Greater collaboration and coordination between humanitarian responders and local stakeholders to maximise the effectiveness of future responses:**

The participating stakeholders felt that the humanitarian response should ultimately empower the local government rather than coming in as a separate or parallel entity. Better collaboration and enhanced coordination mechanisms that are more inclusive of local and municipal governments and even direct partnership with local authorities were recommended.

4 **Prioritise area-based responses and integrated programming:**

Humanitarian actors should link with barangay / community level stakeholders to understand their multisectoral needs and propose an holistic, area-based response plan that builds on local capacity.

5 **Engage communities with disaster risk reduction training at the Barangay level:**

Empowering community members with greater self-reliance is key for the response to future emergencies. "Resiliency isn't just structural, it's people as well" was a key quote from the consultations. DRR trainings should thereby be rolled out systematically, to prepare populations for future shocks.

6 **Envisioning a longer transitional period as part of recovery:**

Although transitional shelters were envisioned as an interim solution during the response phase, in the case of Tacloban transitional shelter accommodation is likely to become the residence of most displaced people for a period of 3 – 5 years. For future responses, shelter actors should utilize a shelter typology that can withstand that time frame and be an adequate shelter for affected communities.

Best practice: Public-Private Partnership

Who: Local Government and Business Community

Since Haiyan, authorities in Tacloban have engaged with the private sector to institute preparedness protocols following storm warnings, including the declaration of no parking in the central business district, a ban on alcohol sales and the designation of private sector goods as relief supplies.

Best practice: Resilient Communication

Who: Local Government

The communication blackout suffered in the wake of Haiyan has led to the development of a storm resistant communication facility in the hills above the city that is outfitted with redundant systems.

Best practice: Adapting the Cluster System

Who: Local Government

Following the crisis, municipal authorities have adapted and adopted a cluster-like coordination system to coordinate the response. Each 'cluster' is led by a municipal department, promoting ownership by local authorities and providing clear interlocutors to humanitarian actors.

Best practice: Financial Self-Sufficiency

Who: Local Government

Tacloban has now set aside 10% of the city budget as a reserve to fund future natural disaster response and recovery activities.

Best practice: Evacuation Mapping

Who: Local Government

Families have now been assigned to dedicated evacuations sites. They are notified, pre-listed and given color coded IDs to facilitate an organized evacuation and systematic accommodation at the site.

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva-based international association, aiming to shape practices and influence policies in humanitarian and development settings in order to improve efficiency of aid responses and positively impact lives of people and their communities. IMPACT implements assessment, monitoring, evaluation and organizational capacity-building programmes and has established field-presence in over 15 countries.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global network of cities and local, metropolitan and regional governments. UCLG has established a Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response, in order to provide a platform for local governments to exchange knowledge and expertise on disaster management.

Cités Unies France, a federation of French local and regional governments involved in international relations and, in particular, in decentralized co-operation, is responsible for the Secretariat of UCLG's Task Force and has been directly supporting this consultation process.