

CITIES IN CRISIS CONSULTATIONS - Guiuan, 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, UN Agencies, NGOs and donors involved in the response
- 3 Final consultations hosted by local mayor(s) to develop recommendations for future crisis responses
- 4 Findings from interviews and consultations summarized in city-specific and overarching reports

INTRODUCTION

Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) hit the Eastern Samar Region of the Philippines on 8 November 2013, affecting over 14 million people across nine regions and displacing 4 million from their homes. **Guiuan**, a second class municipality in the region home to nearly 50,000 inhabitants, was severely affected, **with the most significant damage concentrated in informal settlements, geographically isolated Barangays and coastal areas**. The large-scale humanitarian response that was set in motion after Haiyan provided much needed additional assistance to affected populations. However, insufficient coordination between local and international actors resulted in sub-optimal humanitarian outcomes. Based on consultations held in Guiuan with local actors and humanitarian organisations, this report outlines key lessons learnt and recommendations deriving from the humanitarian response in Guiuan.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, stakeholders reported that the humanitarian response in Guiuan 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 in areas deemed as No Build Zones, 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 Guiuan and in other urban crises:

- 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 capacity building and technical partnerships;
- Protect sources of livelihood to reduce vulnerability and enable residents at risk to evacuate without fear of losing their economic assets.

Crisis Overview

The first 3 days / 1 week

During the first 3 days, personnel were lacking. All agencies were affected, government assistance was unable to move. The relief came late due to prepositioning / logistics, the port was affected, and the delivery of food items was constrained due to lack of transportation and road damage. There was a breakdown in security, peace and order. Poor communication was reported during this period.

After 3 days, humanitarian help was present, aiding in the transport and delivery of assistance. Local personnel were already reporting to the office.

The first 2 weeks

For the first 2 weeks, the local government unit was taking the lead, holding coordination meetings every afternoon

After 3 weeks

After 3 weeks, OCHA took over coordination. Guiuan became the regional hub for the Samar response.

KEY CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN GUIUAN

- 1 Difficulty consolidating and harmonizing different policies, terminology and data:**

Local stakeholders faced difficulty in reconciling differing policies and terminology, particularly with regard to defining damage levels and severity. Consolidating information was also highlighted as a key challenge due to insufficient or incomplete data sets for project or program tracking / 3Ws. This was further complicated by reportedly poor data sharing among actors.
- 2 Lack of mechanisms to promote accountability and transparency among humanitarian actors:**

Local stakeholders expressed frustration with the absence of any mechanism to ensure that responding organisations participate in coordination fora. Several organizations were unwilling to coordinate and did not share information regarding their program activities making them difficult to track contributing directly to duplication of efforts. Furthermore there were refusals to cooperate with municipal offices and problems assigning organizations to specific areas. Local stakeholders also reported high turnover of international staff as a significant challenge. In some instances with little or no warning, international staff departed without a replacement identified or a proper handover of responsibility.
- 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 a 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 A lack of pre-crisis preparedness significantly increased community vulnerabilities:**

Stakeholders expressed that community preparedness and planning were insufficient. The pre-crisis plan was seen as just a “compliance document” and not fully functional, missing the required specifics for outlining rescue and basic response activities. Ultimately, stakeholders felt they did not have a guide for what to do at that time and what to do next, that planning really started when international actors came in. Local stakeholders also highlighted a lack of local level training and a need within the local government unit for greater skills, especially coordination.
- 5 No build zones presented unique challenges to relief and recovery:**

Areas defined as ‘No Build Zones’ presented multiple challenges. As restrictions were placed on identifying beneficiaries in these coastline areas some humanitarian actors were hesitant to deliver aid within these areas. No land was officially available for service provision near No Build Zones. Further, procedural requirements slowed down relocations. Ultimately, some informal allowances / waivers were granted to build within no build zones.

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. The development of technical partnerships between local departments and international specialists was a key recommendation from the consultation.

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. Furthermore, a mechanism to mitigate high turnover of key INGO focal points to enable smoother transitions should be explored.

3 Greater collaboration and coordination between humanitarian responders and local stakeholders to maximize the effectiveness of future response:

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. Better and more complete data sharing on 3Ws and project status were strongly recommended.

4 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. DRR trainings should thereby be rolled out systematically, to prepare populations for future shocks. Training of community-based personnel at the Barangay level and the development of mass evacuation training, especially in schools, and early warning systems were key recommendations.

5 Protecting the source of livelihoods to reduce vulnerability:

Residents were living in coastal areas deemed No Build Zones due to proximity to livelihoods. Those that stayed through the typhoon did so to protect their assets at their peril. Protecting the source of livelihoods may offer a means to reduce vulnerability. One option that is being explored is the development of communal boat garages to safely house the assets of fisherman during storm events to allow them to evacuate without fear of losing their livelihood.

Best practice: Protecting Livelihoods to Reduce Vulnerability

Who: Local Government

Since Haiyan, Guiuan has moving forward with a concept for communal boat garages that fishermen can use to safely store their boats and equipment during storm events. The hope is that willingness to evacuate will increase as fears of losing livelihoods will be diminished thereby reducing community vulnerability.

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.