

UNited

to Leave No One Behind

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Message from the Resident Coordinator

Super Typhoon Odette (international name: Rai), which shattered tens of thousands of homes and livelihoods in December 2021, appears to be fading from people’s memory and attention, especially in Manila.

This is a sad state of affairs because for the typhoon affected families, their difficult recovery is a daily reminder of what happened to them close to 200 days ago. This is why residents of the village of Bitaug, in the municipality of Burgos, on Siargao island, were happy to receive a visitor to their village on 21 May 2022. Sarah Charles, who leads USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, listened to their stories.

In this edition of UNited to Leave No One Behind, Glicerio, Virginia, Imelda, and Lisa—all survivors of Typhoon Odette – relate their common tale of terror from December 16 when the typhoon hit Siargao island. They have their own individual tales to tell too of how the typhoon has changed their lives, as they strive for the resilience needed to recover.

It is vital that their stories and those of other affected families are retold, recalled, remembered, until their needs are fully met and their recovery is completed. Otherwise, their number will add even more to the millions of Filipinos, who for various reasons have been left behind.

At the same time, this edition of our newsletter brings to you the uplifting story of April, a woman entrepreneur who has emerged from a double crisis—Typhoon Odette on top of COVID-19. April was able to rebuild her business, Collabox, which curates sustainable brands in Cebu City for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) action and social innovation, by implementing the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Business Continuity Plan.

Finally, we are proud to be part of the success story of Nilda, a member of the Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB), whose training from IOM and other partners gave her the courage to stand up to an abusive overseas employer and to make her way back to the country to finish her education as a teacher.

Let us take heart from such success stories in order to sustain our hope and commitment to leave no one behind.



USAID’s Sarah Charles is visibly moved as a tearful Imelda tells her she has lost her husband, her home and her income, with two children to support.
© Dermot Peavoy/WFP

Gustavo Gonzalez



Filipino migrant woman fights for her rights

“Ang babae ay hindi parating nasa loob ng bahay lang. May kakayahan kang ma-impluwensyahan ang kapwa mo babae.” (A woman should not always be inside the house. She has the power to influence other women.)

Nida, 35, is a resident of Poblacion, Buluan, Maguindanao, and a member of the Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB) 109th Base Command for 17 years.

As the oldest among her 10 siblings, Nida had witnessed all the struggles of her family. Her mother was a homemaker while her father was a farmer in the morning and a fisher at night.

In 2005, Nida received a scholarship from the Regional Madrasah Graduate Academy and took this opportunity to become a teacher. In that same year, she met Noraina, an active BIWAB member of 109th Base Command who became her mentor in life.

Nida participated in BIWAB’s Conflict Mediation and Prevention (BCMP) Training of Trainers in Koronadal City to develop a localized and culturally sensitive training curriculum on conflict mediation and prevention. This training was conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, and through the project, “Promoting Conflict Prevention, Social Cohesion, and Community Resilience in BARMM in the time of COVID-19” or STEP-BARMM.

After finishing her education in November 2009, Nida went abroad to work as a private tutor. Unfortunately,



she ended up working as a domestic helper. She remembered the lessons from her BIWAB mentors and insisted on returning to the Philippines despite opposition from her employer.

“Pinaglaban ko ang karapatan ko bilang isang babae, hindi ako basta babae lang” (I fought for my right as a woman, I am not just a woman). Nida gathered all her courage to face her family and eventually they understood and respected her decision.

Despite her suffering, Nida and her family did not lose hope in reaching her goal to become a licensed professional teacher. Her family supported her by selling their carabao as payment for the licensure exam. She failed on her first try but was successful on her second.

Today, Nida has been a public-school teacher for eight years. She has also been the chairperson of a youth-led organization called the Muslim Youth Brotherhood for 15 years, while also being a volunteer and an advocate of peace in her community.



After rebuilding her business, Ms April Ong Vano shifted to relief operations to provide immediate support for fisherfolks and their families. © Collabox



A week previously, April held a press showcase in Cebu to highlight community impact initiatives, including the Olango Island livelihood project. Unable to follow through, she shifted to relief operations to provide immediate support for fisherfolks and their families.

April was able to rebuild her business, Collabox, which curates sustainable brands in Cebu for

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) action and social innovation, by implementing the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Business Continuity Plan. She developed an effective risk and contingency system applying what she learned from the ILO Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project funded by J.P. Morgan. However, not all affected businesses and livelihoods have Business Continuity Plans like April’s Collabox.

“Typhoon Odette has worsened the already dire situation of many enterprises and workers as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. A coordinated human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient is needed to build a better future and to leave no one behind,” said Director Khalid Hassan of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines.

Read: ILO, DOLE ink agreement to help workers return to work safely and digitally

Typhoon Survivors Tell Their Stories

by Dermot Peavoy

Typhoon survivors (left to right):
Glecerio, Virginia, Imelda and Lisa.
© Dermot Peavoy/WFP



Glecerio, Virginia, Imelda, and Lisa, share one big story together. All are survivors of super-Typhoon Odette (international name Rai) which hit their island of Siargao with full force, on 16 December last year. They all tell a similar tale of terror from that day. But they have their own individual tales to tell too of how the typhoon has changed their lives, as they strive for the resilience needed to recover.

All four belong to the coastal barangay (village) of Bitaug, in the municipality of Burgos, on Siargao. They heeded the advice of the barangay captain to evacuate to the school on 15 December 2021, the eve of the anticipated landfall of Odette. Glecerio remembers vividly the change of atmosphere when the typhoon struck the next day: "It was not like other typhoons I've seen. The air became thick and white. I could not see beyond two metres. My wife and children thought their lives were ending. People in the school were screaming and wanted to run away. Only God knew whether we would survive".

The roof was soon torn off the school and sea water rose to knee level within. Evacuees were then transferred to a church on higher ground. Virginia puts hand to heart, remembering her fear: "We thought we would all die as we watched the storm from the church attic and listened

to the powerful wind". Imelda has a similar recollection: "We thought it was our last day. The wind was strong, the waves were high, and rain was heavy, and we couldn't see anything."

In this edition of the UN Newsletter, Glecerio, Virginia, Imelda, and Lisa, describe vividly the impact of Typhoon Odette (Rai) on their lives, as they struggle to recover.

Our four survivors came together in Bitaug on 21 May 2022, at the request of the World Food Programme (WFP), to tell their individual stories to Sarah Charles of USAID, during her visit to their barangay. In her role as Assistant to the Administrator at USAID, Ms Charles leads the agency's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). She was visibly moved as she listened. On hearing their stories, Ms Charles can have had no doubt as she returned to Washington, that typhoon survivors like these needed and deserved the assistance they so gratefully received.



Glecerio's Story "The typhoon broke my boat to bits"



Glecerio, fisherman. Typhoon Odette (Rai) destroyed his boat and his home © Dermot Peavoy/WFP

Glecerio emerged from the evacuation centre at 7am the day after Odette passed and went to see his home. He was emotional describing what faced him there: "I

cried a lot seeing my house totally damaged, and I couldn't find my boat." Like others, he relied on a 10ft sea wall to protect his house and boat. He left the boat behind the sea wall, but both wall and boat were broken to bits by the ferocity of the typhoon.

Now he has to rent a boat, dividing the value of his catch with the owner, after deducting the costs of gasoline and ice. "People used to come here to buy my fish", he said, "and I could earn at least 1000PhP gross a day". But having to rent a boat has greatly reduced his earnings.

"I really, really want a new boat", he added, "but I don't know how to afford that anymore, as I don't have the income needed to borrow money". He estimates that a new wooden boat would cost 120,000PhP and asks: "Who can give me that money"?

Glecerio says he and his family are recovering, thanks to the rice and cash assistance received from WFP. The family used the cash assistance to buy fruit, vegetables, and a pot for cooking rice. "Without this assistance", he said, "we would have been in the forest looking for wild yams to eat, as there are no coconuts left".

Virginia's Story "Our plantation was flattened"

Virginia did as she has always done ahead of a typhoon. She prepared food and brought it to the evacuation centre, to last until the typhoon had passed. "However," she said, "water entered the church and ruined all the food and my motorbike, and everyone climbed to the church attic. We were hungry for three days in wet clothes and had nothing but our cell phones. We were also worried about our house, our property, and our coconut plantation."

"After three days", she adds, "my husband woke early and went to our plantation and house. He came back in shock and in tears, telling me our plantation had been flattened, and nothing was left of our house except some posts and a door".

They had suffered great losses. Only 50 coconut trees remained of a plantation of 400 on their 5-hectare holding. It will take 5 years for the plantation to recover. It was their main source of income. Virginia supplemented their income with 'direct selling' of clothes and cosmetics to individual customers. But her most recent consignment of clothing and cosmetics, valued at 27,000PhP, was destroyed; and suppliers are pressing her endlessly to refund them, all the while piling on interest. Their loss of income obliged their fourth child to stop his second-year university studies in criminology.

After three days of hunger in the evacuation centre, Virginia acted: "I walked to the municipality to ask for food and kitchen utensils. They gave me 10kgs, which I shared with others in the evacuation centre, because I would not allow myself to eat, while others couldn't."

"We were also very happy to receive the WFP food assistance sack of 50kgs", she continued, "because normally we received only a 5kg or 10kg sack of rice for the family. It helped us a lot. We consumed it for one month. After that we received cash assistance, which allowed me to buy milk, kitchen utensils, nails to rebuild our house and maintenance medicines for my husband. It helped us a lot."



Virginia's family plantation was flattened, and her home and income destroyed © Dermot Peavoy/WFP

Imelda's Story

"My home is gone, along with all my belongings"



Imelda, a widow, lost her home, her income and all her belongings
© Dermot Peavoy/WFP

Imelda is a widow, and two of her five children are of school-going age. She cannot control her tears as she recalls discovering that nothing remained of her demolished home except three posts: "It makes me feel so sad, because I don't have a husband and my home is gone, along with all my belongings. I'm sad as well for two of my children, as I cannot keep them in school because my house and income are gone".

Imelda peddled gamos (salted fish) and bulad (dried fish). As of now, she does not have the capital she needs to return to her small peddling business. She used some of the cash she received from WFP to cut coconut timber ('coco lumber') to rebuild their house, and the remainder for family food.

Lisa's Story

"The storm was getting stronger, and he had not returned"

At the evacuation centre on the morning of 16 December, Lisa asked her fisherman husband Giovanni to return home to cook some food for themselves and their two children, and to bring back important documents like birth certificates. To do this, he had to leave the evacuation centre. Lisa takes up the story: "I began to worry, as the storm was getting stronger, and he had not returned".

"Then, at 12:45, he returned in tears, telling me the typhoon had destroyed our house and one half of our boat was missing. When he entered the house, he found the sea already at knee level. It had damaged our food, but he saved the documents. We cried a lot together." The couple were relying on the sea wall to protect their home and their boat. But it was no match for the force of the typhoon, which broke it into pieces.

To earn money now, Lisa's husband Giovanni has to rent a boat. During the fishing season, when he had his own boat, Giovanni could put aside 500PhP net per day, to save for their daily needs when the fishing season ends. Now he can save only 500PhP per week. That represents a huge loss of income. He therefore needs a new boat of his own, but Lisa says they do not have enough income to pay for one. She reckons it could cost PhP 90,000.



Lisa with husband Giovanni and their children. They are wearing footwear bought with WFP cash assistance, and Giovanni is holding the net bought with it.
© Dermot Peavoy/WFP

When their food was destroyed in the typhoon, neighbours shared their food with Lisa and her family. "But I prioritised my children", she said, "and ate only small amounts myself". Lisa worried continually about how to carry on feeding her two children aged 6 and 2, her husband Giovanni and herself.

She is thankful for the food they received from WFP. "It saved us for one month", she said, "and the cash assistance allowed us to buy shoes for us all, mineral water for the children, and a fishing net for my husband".

"We are now moving on", says Lisa, "because of the assistance we received, and we're rebuilding our house gradually."



Office of the Resident Coordinator



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



Investing in rural people



International Labour Organization



IOM
UN MIGRATION



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