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**Message from the
Resident Coordinator**

Lorna lives in the village of San Juan, Surigao del Norte Province, in the Caraga Region. On December 16, just before Typhoon Rai (local name Odette) hit her province, she and her family fled to a nearby school for shelter. A day later, she went back and found that her house had been destroyed.

Lorna is one of the millions of people who lost everything just days before Christmas, when Typhoon Rai swept through six of the country's 17 regions, with a sustained speed of 195 kilometers per hour.

On my field mission last December 22 and 23 to affected areas in the Caraga region and Surigao del Norte Province, I saw devastation and despair. The typhoon brought torrential rains, violent winds and floods leaving hundreds of thousands of families homeless, without water, sanitation, food and livelihoods.

The humanitarian community in the Philippines has just launched a Humanitarian Needs and Priorities Plan (HNP) amounting to US\$107.2 million to respond to the needs of at least 530,000 people in the worst affected areas in CARAGA and Eastern Visayas. With the Government leading response efforts, the HNP seeks to provide for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), life-saving food needs, emergency shelter, including the efficient management of evacuation camps, decentralized communication to restore access to islands and places which are currently cut off, and support for coordination by the government, among others.

This HNP carries with it a lesson I learned from a conversation I had with one of the highest officials in Surigao del Norte. When I asked what their priorities are, he

Lorna, a resident of Surigao City, Surigao del Norte Province, and one of millions of Filipinos affected by Typhoon Rai. Credit: UN OCHA/Iris Lapid

said to me, "That is not the right question to ask because my answer would be, we need everything and right away. What you should ask is, what are the actions that can rapidly leverage the people's resilience."

The lesson is this: Relief support must be as "smart" as possible. While we cannot escape from clustering and standardizing emergency aid and providing pre-cooked "packages" of assistance, it is important we have a "smart" understanding of the diversity, specificity and timing of humanitarian needs.

"Smart" coordination is essential and, fortunately, the humanitarian community is making great steps towards such a holistic approach with the development of sophisticated assessment tools for better targeting and delivery of humanitarian services such as cash transfers and protection services for specific vulnerable groups. Beyond that, joint work between the humanitarian and development community is remarkably improving.

"Blind aid," disconnected from context and delinked from recovery, will not be successful nor durable. And for this, knowing the community better, adapting our tools and frameworks to context and displaying an all-inclusive coordination approach will preserve the resilience of people and nourish their hope: something that cannot be monetized in a Humanitarian Response Plan.

So for all of you who are reading this, my call is for you to join us in preserving and reinforcing the hope of millions of people whose lives were upended by Typhoon Rai. This is an urgent task, for unless we restore their hope, there can be no recovery and no resilience.

They need our solidarity now. Let us not forget them as we celebrate the holiday season and welcome a peaceful New Year!

GUSTAVO GONZALEZ



COVID-19 Vaccination that Leaves No One Behind

Responding to First-Responders' needs

Dr. Muhammad Candao is the health quarantine focal person and Officer-in-Charge of the Health and Emergency Management Services (HEMS) of the Ministry of Health in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MOH-BARMM). Besides being a medical doctor, he has 15 years of experience as a medical technologist.

Yet, COVID-19 still posed a challenge to him: Dr. Candao needed to understand the COVID-19 virus. In addition, his health team did not have enough resources, particularly for COVID-19 testing.

IOM, with support from the Government of Germany, provided training to Dr. Candao and his team on Laboratory Quality Management System in order to enhance BARMM's laboratory services and promote quality that will ensure accuracy, reliability and timeliness of the overall testing process.

"This is very important to us because prompt diagnosis means prompt response, which would result to better

control of this pandemic," says Dr. Candao. With better equipment and training, the health team in the Bangsamoro region now has a better understanding of the COVID-19 virus, helping them speed up and strengthen their response to save more lives.

Through the project with the German Government, IOM has also provided rapid antigen testing kits, pulse oximeters and alcohol dispensers with thermometers to local health facilities. IOM will continue to work with the Bangsamoro government, and has plans to further support them with three land ambulances for safe and prompt transfer of patients, two cold chain vehicles for proper transport and storage of specimens and vaccines, and other medical equipment, to enhance the quality and capacity of COVID-19 response.

Dr. Candao says, "I am grateful for the support and assistance provided to my team. The training has given us confidence and the ability to be more effective and efficient in health operations and fulfill quality requirements in the Bangsamoro."

Community Vaccinations

Getting vaccines to BARMM



Local governments of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi officially sign the handover of cold-chain vehicles to their respective provinces. Credit: IOM Philippines



Dr. Bashary A. Latiph, Minister of Health of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), is grateful to receive cold chain vehicles to strengthen the COVID-19 vaccination drive in the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. BARMM is one of the poorest regions in the Philippines and is also among the regions where inoculation against the disease is one of the lowest.

The vehicles will be used to transport specimens, vaccines, and medicines, not only for the COVID-19 response but for other long-term needs such as vaccination campaigns for polio and measles.

The cold chain vehicles were provided by IOM, with support from the Government of Japan. In addition, IOM is planning to hand over Gene Expert

Machines for the detection of COVID-19 and other viruses, solar-driven biosafety refrigerators and sea ambulances early next year.

Dr. Latiph says, "We are grateful for the timely assistance at the height of the vaccination roll-out in BARMM and for the crucial support that contributes to ensuring the Bangsamoro people with a fundamental human right to health and a foundation for economic prosperity and security."





Staff members of GentleMen Bicol, a UNFPA-supported non-government organization, provide lifesaving sexual health products and services in a remote Catanduanes Island. Credit GentleMen Bicol

HIV/AIDS Services



Providing crucial HIV/ AIDS services in an isolated, rural town

Within the remote island of Catanduanes, in the province of Bicol, a handful of dedicated health workers supported by UNFPA are quietly overturning the stigma surrounding HIV testing, condom use, and sexual health awareness in this small, conservative, rural community.

“Members of LGBTQI+ communities are hesitant to access community-based HIV testing at their rural provincial health services, because on small islands, there is [always] a risk they will be [gossiped] about,” shares Christian Mamansag from the non-government organization GentleMen Bicol. The pervasive stigma of HIV, and the fear of being ‘outed,’ explains Christian, prevents high-risk individuals and members of the LGBTQI+ community from accessing crucial sexual health and testing services. This stigma, on top of Catanduanes Island’s relative geographical isolation from larger health centers, creates a high risk situation among the most vulnerable, particularly within members of the LGBTQI+ community.

GentleMen Bicol is dedicated to tackling and preventing the spread of HIV head on, through HIV counseling services, HIV and AIDS awareness seminars, discreet HIV screening services, and safe HIV / AIDS treatment facilities, which provide antiretroviral (ARV) medication refills. With no treatment facility on the island, GentleMen Bicol is an essential lifeline of support.

GentleMen Bicol’s Ger Evan says many sexually active young people are more likely to engage in unprotected sex without knowing that they might contract HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). “Younger people want sexual and reproductive health services but are unable to access them because of negative community attitudes about young people’s sexual behaviour.”

Read more: “We train young people to fill the gap between health services and the community”

Poverty Reduction

Poverty Reduction through Women's Empowerment

Leonora Arana “Angging” Mila resides in a farming community in the municipality of San Isidro, in Agusan del Norte Province, Mindanao. Growing up in a poor family, “Angging” had always aspired for a better life, but after marrying early and bearing four children, she found herself re-living the life of her impoverished parents. Her husband grew abaca and other crops, and when that proved to be not enough, took up small-scale mining along with the other farmers in their community.

Angging cried often because they could not buy the bare necessities especially when mining slowed down. Angging had almost gone abroad to work as a domestic worker when she decided to join a group of small upland abaca farmers called SIUFO (San Isidro Upland Farmers’ Organization), which later became the San Isidro Upland Farmers’ Multi-Purpose Cooperative (SIUFMULCO)

Angging became the chairperson of the cooperative’s Board of Directors in 2002; and its manager in 2005. Angging recalls her hardships in managing the coop.

“There were times when I worked for almost 24 hours, traveling to different areas just to find potential buyers. I even forgot to eat sometimes because I was so busy,” she says. “During those times, my husband and I fought a

lot. I really persuaded him to be patient because [my hard work] was also for us.”

With only 23 members in 1989 when the coop started, SIUFMULCO now has 294 farming family members, 45 of whom are women. SIUFMULCO supplies an average of 100 Metric Tons (MT) and can reach up to 300MT of Abaca fiber, equivalent to five truckloads per month, with a gross value of PhP8 million to various parts of the country including Leyte, Iligan, and Bicol. This has made SIUFMULCO the biggest abaca consolidator in the region.

Angging credits much of her success to the Convergence on Value Chain Enhancement for Rural Growth and Empowerment (Project ConVERGE), a project implemented by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to champion gender equality and women empowerment as instruments of poverty reduction.

Read more: Making Milestones: Converging Motherhood and Leadership



Photo: Manager Mila at SIUFMULCO Office
Credit: Project ConVERGE Caraga



Support for Internally Displaced Persons

Livelihood as a stepping stone to peace

Samrah S. Suleik is a single mother with five children aged 12 to 21 years old. She lives with them in a six square-meter tent at the Market Site evacuation camp in the SMPS Box, Maguindanao in BARMM. In March 2021, they were displaced due to law enforcement operations between Armed Forces of the Philippines and non-state armed groups. Her husband has passed away since then and she has been trying to earn a living every day so that her youngest children can travel to a nearby town every Monday to complete school modules.

“In the camp there is no work, so sometimes I don’t have money for transportation or to buy internet credit for their mobile phones so they can do their homework,” Samrah tells us.

In November 2021, OCHA, together with Gustavo Gonzalez, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) in the Philippines, visited the Market Site evacuation camp, where IOM and its partners are currently implementing a nexus, or emergency to recovery, intervention. Over 205 displaced families live in the camp; they are afraid to return to their homes because of the continued presence of armed groups. When asked what they need the most, all the families answered in unison: livelihood.



A similar situation is repeated in the East Libutan evacuation center, where 685 displaced families have been living since 2020. The Mindanao Humanitarian Team, composed of humanitarian organizations in Mindanao, monitors the situation with partners such as Oxfam and local NGOs who are implementing an ECHO* funded project in the camp in collaboration with the local authorities.

Jeanette, one of the displaced women, comes to the RC/HC with clear ideas. She says that the families’ priorities are livelihoods, in-kind food, water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), mental health and psychological support, protection and emergency shelter. Like Samrah, Jeanette is certain that once their priority needs are met, she will have the tools to start thinking about the nexus and peace.



Photo: Samrah S. Suleik in her tent at the Market Site evacuation camp in the SMPS Box. Credit: UN OCHA

Support for MSMEs during COVID-19

How the right toothbrush can make you a climate activist

For Mark “Sultan” Gersava, a farmer from Sultan Kudarat and a climate activist, helping to stop climate change did not need a grand gesture on a national scale. What he did was help people make one simple change in the way they lived: swapping the ubiquitous plastic straw for one made of bamboo.

Mark has a strong affinity to the bamboo tree. Growing up in a poor family, bamboo shoots had been a reliable source of food for him, his parents, and 11 siblings. He also learned about the many environmental benefits of the “underutilized” bamboo.

“It captures more carbon dioxide than any other plant,” says Mark. “For every hectare, other trees can capture 48 tons, while bamboo trees can capture 62 tons. It also produces 30 percent more oxygen.”

In 2017 and with just P10,000 in capital, Mark started Bambuhay, a social enterprise named after the bamboo and “buhay”—the Filipino



Photo: Toothbrush made of bamboo produced and marketed by Bambuhay Credit: Bambuhay



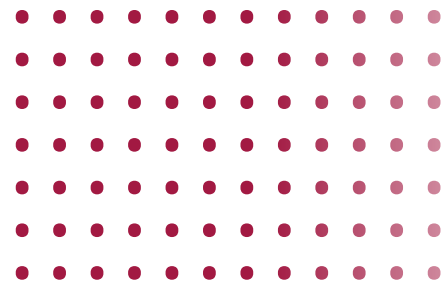
word for “life”. He established a straw facility in Carrangalan, Nueva Ecija, with 12 people in production and 37 harvesters. He sourced the bamboo from the Talavera Watershed Forest Reserve, which has 100,000 hectares of naturally grown bamboo.

However, just a few months later, Bambuhay almost ran aground due to cash flow problems. With very little capital, and being heavily dependent on sales revenue, Bambuhay could not keep up with the increasing demand for their products. Working 36 hours straight at a time, Mark’s health failed. He was ready to give up.

In 2018, Bambuhay applied and was accepted into the UN’s Innovation for Social Impact Partnership (ISIP) project.

Read more: A social enterprise scales the heights of the bamboo tree

Women and Peacebuilding



Alyah: From former combatant to community leader

Alyah, a 44-year-old single mother of four, is the sole breadwinner of her family. Besides sending her two older children to school, she supports her elderly parents with her small income from part-time madrasa teaching at Camp Darapanan, one of the six major camps of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

She is the president of the Mapadtaya Livelihood Association—a community-based association (CBA) in Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Maguindanao—which is one of the beneficiaries of the project “Advancing Women’s Rights and Influence through Socioeconomic Empowerment of the Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade (ARISE-BIWAB), a UN joint intervention, to empower BIWAB—women former combatants—socioeconomically and to strengthen their political participation.

Alyah, a resourceful woman, sells malongs, prayer dresses, and cloth masks produced by the Mapadtaya Livelihood Association while juggling her day job as a madrasa teacher at Camp Darapanan. She is grateful for the UN’s assistance which has helped not only her but also other members of the BIWAB association.

he says, “We have begun to reap the income from dressmaking skills training and the cash-for-work programme. We were able to transfer our acquired learnings and skills to other members of the association and have already trained two batches so far. With the earnings of over PHP 20,000 (about USD415) from the dresses and face masks we have made and sold, our association will purchase equipment for inaul weaving and further improve the products.”

Aside from the livelihood skills training, Alyah also received trainings on leadership and gender rights. Now honed as a community gender champion, she believes that the trainings have greatly helped their association and their community to be able to advocate gender rights at the grassroots level.



Another achievement of this project is the accreditation of the Mapadtaya Livelihood Association by the local government unit (LGU) of Datu Anggal Midtimbang. Recognizing the sustained efforts of the association, the LGU provided them with in-kind support for the refurbishment of their office space, including a kiosk to display their products.

Alyah (rightmost), an ex-combatant from Maguindanao, now heads the the Mapadtaya Livelihood Association, a community- based association in Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Maguindanao and a beneficiary of a UN joint intervention to empower women former combatants socio-economically and to strengthen their political participation. Credit: IOM Philippines





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