



UNited to Leave No One Behind

A monthly newsletter
of the United Nations in the Philippines

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UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines Gustavo Gonzalez (second from right) during his mission to Surigao City on 23 December 2021. Credit: OCHA



Message from the Resident Coordinator

Two and a half months ago, Super Typhoon Rai, known locally as Odette, swept through 11 of the country's 17 regions, bringing torrential rains, violent winds, floods and storm surges to the Visayas and Mindanao Islands.

In the initial days, we underestimated the full extent of the needs and over 70 assessments now show the full impact of Typhoon Rai on people and the scale of damage to infrastructure, agricultural land, fishing communities, livelihoods and housing.

The typhoon severely affected 9.9 million people across the six worst hit regions, leaving 2.4 million people in need of assistance. This issue of UNited to Leave No One Behind features stories of loss, survival and hope of people who have lived through the devastation of Typhoon Odette.

Thirteen-year-old Didang shares a shanty with 22 people and struggles to find some privacy without a toilet. Monilyn is grateful for the warmth and safety of an evacuation center in Bantilis, in the Dinagat Islands, but she is worried because her children are losing weight because of malnutrition. Mothers Gina and Condrada are hard put to feed their children and are anxious to start farming again. Fisherfolk Petronilo, Treciano, Evangeline and Vicenter are equally concerned about how they will provide for their families when their boats have been destroyed. Jonalyn, a woman with disability, has foregone her disability allowance so that her mother and father can rebuild their home.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in the Philippines is determined that their stories do not remain stories of loss

and survival but is committed to helping them sustain their hope and move towards recovery. I have always said that there cannot be recovery without hope.

On 2 February the HCT launched a revised Humanitarian Needs and Priorities Plan (HNP)*. This revised plan calls for \$169 million to target the needs of 840,000 of the most vulnerable people, up from 530,000 targeted in the original plan. The plan runs from December 2021 to June 2022.

Critical emergency response is the focus, with shelter; food security and agriculture; and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as top priorities. Protection will be integrated into all these operations, and we will build the foundations for early recovery and reconstruction from the get-go, working closely with Government counterparts.

Operations will continue to scale up in Caraga and Southern Leyte as well as an additional Region VII, focusing on Bohol and Cebu.

We will also continue to work with the Government and partners to address critical gaps in other areas of Region VI, including Negros Occidental and in Palawan, through direct support to Non-Government Organizations and Civil Society Organizations.

Recovery and long-term rebuilding must consider the impacts of the climate crisis to try to shore up resilience for future weather shocks.

I call on you to be our partner in making sure that our sisters and brothers who have lost so much because of Typhoon Odette are not forgotten and left behind.

*The HNP is a highly prioritized, needs-based plan to support the Government in reaching the most vulnerable people. It integrates the protection needs children, women, people with disabilities, older people, LGBTIQ persons and indigenous peoples throughout. Fully implementing the HNP will lay the groundwork for recovery and reconstruction and complement the Government's development efforts.

GUSTAVO GONZALEZ



IN THE WAKE OF ODETTE

Stories of Loss, Survival, and Hope

Children

Members of the Sama community bathe at a well. Due to lack of privacy, Didang Alibasi, 13, bathes with her clothes on and walks home to change. Credit: UNICEF/ Louie Pacardo

“We sit when we sleep at night,” says 13-year-old Didang Alibasi, a Badjao child who lives with 22 persons in a shanty. She pulls her knees to her chest to demonstrate her position. “We can’t even stretch our legs.”

Didang’s family lost their home when Typhoon Odette (international name: Rai) hit Surigao City on 16 December 2021.

Since the Badjao people lived in stilt houses on the sea, almost everything that they owned was washed away. The community, comprising 168 families, built temporary shelters between a busy road and a canal where people anchor their boats.

“Passers-by can see us,” says Didang. “It’s difficult to change clothes.” The shanties, made of debris from the typhoon, are open on the side facing the road and closed on the side facing the canal and the sea.

Without toilets, the families have to urinate and defecate on the sloping breakwater

behind their shanties. At daytime, the breakwater is in full view of people in the canal and in the nearby port. Only the darkness at night affords the families some privacy.

Didang takes a bath at a well near the shanties. She used to take a bath there even before the typhoon, but she has less privacy now. “People who had faucets at home also lost their water supply,” she says. “So much more people use the well now.”

The well is between an alley and a billiards hall where men hang out, so many women who bathe at the well are not comfortable. Wearing her wet clothes, Didang walks home to change.

Constant Danger

So far, the community has not recorded any abuse against children. “But I’m so worried about safety,” says Dahila Araman, 56, a Badjao leader. “The children could be hit by a vehicle anytime.”

Different types of vehicles, from motorcycles to trucks, ply the road in front of the shanties. Horns blare the whole day to warn people. Because the road serves as a yard of the shanties, the children run about.

So far, the only help the Sama community has received are tarpaulins for their roof and rations. They have to stay in their shanties for some time.

Read: **Privacy and protection for children affected by Typhoon Odette**

After Typhoon Odette, the Sama community in Surigao City had to build shanties along a busy road. Passing vehicles pose a serious risk to children.” Credit: UNICEF/ Louie Pacardo



Reymon Polleros (left) with his mother, Monilyn, and brother, Randel, in the evacuation center. Credit: UNICEF Philippines/Louie Pacardo

Reymon Polleros, 7, likes staying in the evacuation center. "It's big," he says. "And it's not cold here."

In the past two weeks, Reymon and his family have been taking refuge in Bantilis, the newly built two-story evacuation centre in Cagdianao, Dinagat Islands. The family had to evacuate as Typhoon Odette (international name: Rai) battered the province on December 16, 2021.

"Our house was small and made of lightweight materials," says Reymon's mother, 37-year-old Monilyn. "None of it was left standing after the typhoon."

Despite the comfort that some children experience in Bantilis, staying in the building is not without challenges. Evacuees need more support aside from relief goods.

The safety of children is a serious concern as they are prone to neglect and abuse without proper interventions.

Health Problems

Like most buildings and houses in Dinagat Islands, running water in Bantilis was cut by the typhoon. "We have to bathe and wash our clothes in a stream some distance from here," says Monilyn. "The source of potable water is even farther."

The youngest of her four children, 3-year-old Randel, suffers from malnutrition. "He cannot speak as well as other children his age, and he weighs less," says Monilyn. "When the barangay health worker checked on him in October, he only weighed 11 kilograms."

Randel needs follow-up care urgently. Monilyn is not sure if Randel is moderate or severely malnourished. She also fears that his health might have declined during his stay in the evacuation centre.

Although Bantilis hasn't had any medical emergencies so far, cases of acute gastroenteritis have been reported in three villages in Cagdianao



Islands. The provincial disaster risk reduction and management office reported 123 cases of gastroenteritis and expects outbreaks in the coming days due to poor access to clean drinking water.

Read: Child evacuees face unseen threats after Typhoon Odette

Photo: Bantilis, the evacuation center of Cagdianao town, Dinagat Islands province, sheltered 54 families during Typhoon Odette. Some of the families continue to stay in the building more than ten days after the disaster. Credit: UNICEF Philippines/Louie Pacardo

Photo: PacardoRandel Polleros, 3, suffers from malnutrition. Before Typhoon Odette hit his town, children with his condition received sporadic attention. After the disaster, they might receive even less as government funds are funnelled into rehabilitation of infrastructure and provisions for the general population. Credit: UNICEF Philippines/Louie Pacardo



A mother & grandmother

Gina Apelias, from Dinagat Islands, is still trying to get over the trauma of losing her belongings because of Typhoon Odette/Rai. Credit: Ecoweb



An elderly woman

Condrada sits outside the makeshift home that her son built for her following the impact of Typhoon Odette/Rai. Credit: Ecoweb

Gina Apelias, who has four children and four grandchildren, is still trying to get over the trauma of losing her belongings because of Typhoon Odette. On December 16, 2021, during Odette's second landfall on Dinagat Islands, Gina saw her house being pummeled by the winds and their roof being torn off and spinning upwards in what seemed like a hurricane. Shorn of protection, they were at risk of being hit by all kinds of flying objects and it was all Gina could do but to wrap her children and grandchildren in hand-woven mats as they clung desperately to her.

For three hours Gina and the children watched as Odette stripped away all that they owned. She relates that for many moments during their ordeal she blacked out as she remained powerless to save any of their belongings.

"This will be our downfall," Gina recalls thinking at the time.

Gina was able to save the children from the typhoon but in the wake of it, she worries about

keeping them alive. Except for a handful of hearts of palm, the vegetables she had been growing were destroyed. Not knowing whom to ask for help, Gina has had to beg for it. "Whenever cars pass by, I wave at them and ask for food or something to drink."

Gina is focused on replanting her garden to feed the children in the coming months.

"Even if we do not have enough food to eat right now, I will find a way for my family to have something to eat and to sleep better until we recover from this trial," she says.

Read: Fearless Mothers' Resounding Plea: The Support We Need in Dinagat Islands

Condrada Pelicano, 84, a farmer living on the Dinagat Islands, did not expect that her house, which she thought was sturdy, would be destroyed by Typhoon Odette. She sought refuge in her son's home, but it too could not withstand the strong winds. Condrada and her son witnessed how their neighbors' houses collapsed all around them.

Using scrap tin sheets and lumber that they were able to gather, Condrada's son built a small hut so she could have a place to sleep in.

Despite losing everything, Condrada is hopeful and looks forward to going back to farming.

"No farmer will ever give up on planting until they see something growing, she says. "In the same way, I will not give up until I recover."

A Person with Disability

Jonalyn, 32, is a Person with Disability living on the Dinagat Islands with her mother and father. When they heard about the coming typhoon, they decided to move to higher ground. But they did not move fast enough. On their way to the mountains, Jonalyn could not run fast enough and was hit on the leg by a rusty iron sheet hurled by Odette's winds.

"My mother is the only one with me at home," says Jonalyn. "I don't have a sibling...I'm the only one. No help... I am also disabled. The wound is very big. I felt the numbness but it was then stitched by the doctor."

Jonalyn's mother Ana used her P500 monthly supplemental allowance for disabled persons from the government to buy the needed medicines.

However, Ana says, "We are having a hard time now because 500 pesos can't sustain my daughter's medicines and we still have to buy food and money to build our house. We would like to ask [anyone] if they can help us fix our house and buy medicine. Help us build our small hut because there is nothing left."



Photo 1 Jonalyn, 32, is a Person with Disability living on the Dinagat Islands. When they heard about the coming typhoon, they decided to move to higher ground. But they did not move fast enough. On their way to the mountains, Jonalyn could not run fast enough and was hit on the leg by a rusty iron sheet hurled by Odette's winds. Credit: Ecoweb

Photo 2: Jonalyn's three-week wound covered in medical plaster Credit: Ecoweb



PETRONILO BOHOL
Typhoon Survivor

Petronilo Bohol, a fisherman in Malitbog, Southern Leyte, points to an empty lot where his house used to be. He had just finished building it when Typhoon Odette sent big ocean waves crashing inland and reducing his home to so many pieces of tin and wood. His boat was likewise destroyed. He sobs as he tells his story. "I can't control my emotions.," Petroniloo says. "I cry for my seven children. Now we have no way to make a living."

Listen to Petronilo's story
Photo Credit: Oxfam



Treciano Moriano from Surigao Island remembers the five-meter storm surge that crashed into the coast and submerged his home. He keeps his hopes up despite the loss of his animals and possessions. "My prayer is for us to be able to get by every day," Treciano says. "I pray that we would have something to eat and that we can rebuild our home. I'll have peace of mind if I am able to build even a small house. It may not be as big as we had before, as long as we have a roof over our heads." Treciano has started to sell fish to make a living.

Listen to Treciano's story
Photo Credit: IFRC AP



Glecerio Magdula and his family lost their home. Without his fishing boats and coconuts to trade for rice, Glecerio doesn't know how he will feed his family. "I don't have any means of livelihood now because all my pump boats were destroyed. There's nothing left. That's my only source of income. The goods that we repacked yesterday came from our relatives. Rice, canned goods, noodles. We give priority to families who also lost their homes." Glecerio shared the relief items he received with others – sharing them with 50 families in his village."

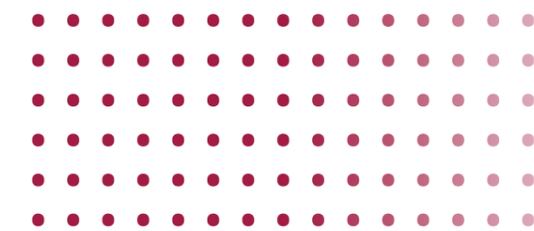
Listen to Glecerio's story
Photo Credit: IFRC AP



After celebrating #NewYearsEve in a school-turned evacuation center in #Surigao city, Evangeline and Vicente Rocacurva shared their three wishes for the New Year after surviving Typhoon Odette.

"We just want our house back and also to be able to start earning again - I want to open my small neighborhood store, my husband wishes to be able to start fishing again, and of course, for good health. This is all we wish for. We were asking ourselves, 'Is there anyone who can help us?'"

Listen to Evangeline and Vicenter Rocacurva's story
Photo Credit: WFP





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