



## Food Distribution Policy for Typhoon Victims in the Philippines

Shella Gayle B. Billano, Gerard Cortez, Ojay D. L. Santos,  
Maria Elena Yabut-Timbang, and Brian C. Gozun

### I. Introduction

According to the World Risk Report of 2012, the Philippines ranked third out of 173 countries, based on exposure to hazards. Disasters can strike anytime, anywhere. It can cause irrevocable damage to life and property if the right measures are not put in place. This can also bring out the best and the worst in human nature. The manner in which action is taken in response to the crisis goes a long way in determining how people would fare from the experience (COA, 2014).

Supertyphoon Haiyan, locally known as Yolanda, that wreaked havoc in the Visayas region of the Philippines last November 8, 2013, highlighted the huge gaps in distributing the relief goods to the victims during the most crucial phase of the first 90 days of recovery. There are numerous lessons to be learned from the disastrous results of Supertyphoon Yolanda. One is time, which is the most essential element in disaster response. Second is preparedness, followed by proper coordination. Finally, there is a need to clearly delineate the job descriptions of those who should be in charge to avoid the overlapping of roles as it creates problem in coordination, leading to delays in disaster response.

Cabinet Secretary Jose Rene Almendras emphasized the enormity of struggle in immediately responding to the food needs of the disaster survivors. The fact that it was the first time anything of this magnitude (size, volume, and breadth) has happened to the Philippines. The logistics alone for food relief distribution: (1) how to move the goods; (2) where to move the goods; and, (3) how many trucks to transport relief goods from packing center to shipping center. The process of taking relief items to typhoon victims was a “huge production line” and that after the repacking of the goods, there were obstacles in transporting and distributing them to the survivors.

Given the background above, this study has the following objectives:

1. to assess the impacts of Republic Act No. 10121 on disaster response particularly on food distribution, and
2. to recommend policies that would further improve the distribution of food during times of natural calamities in the Philippines.

In order to meet the objectives of the study, a qualitative approach using secondary data was used to assess and analyse the impacts of the supertyphoon on the Visayas region. The timeline of the study is one year from the arrival of the typhoon up to the first anniversary.

The paper is divided into the introduction where a background of the study is presented, together with objectives and methodology. The second part is the results and discussion part where a review of Republic Act No. 10121 is highlighted, followed by the presentation and analysis of quantitative data related to food distribution. The last part provides policy recommendations that would benefit the country in terms of food distribution during times of disasters.

## **2. Results and Discussions**

### **2.1. A Review of Republic Act No. 10121**

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) or formerly called the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), is an agency under the Department of National Defense (DND), responsible for ensuring the protection and welfare of the people during disasters or emergencies. As stipulated in the Republic Act No. 10121 (2009), one of the NDRRMC's primary functions is to develop a National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Framework, which shall provide for a comprehensive, all-hazard, multi-sectored, inter-agency and community-based approach to disaster risk reduction and management.

While still chaired by the defense secretary, the NDRRMC has now four vice-chairs the interior secretary, who sits as vice-chairperson for disaster preparedness; the social welfare secretary (vice-chairperson for disaster response); the science and technology secretary (vice-chairperson for disaster prevention and mitigation); and the socioeconomic planning secretary (vice-chairperson for disaster rehabilitation and recovery).

From a 19-member NDCC, the new council has become a body of more than 40 members. They include the department secretaries, the chief of the Philippine National Police, and the presidents of the Government Service Insurance System, Social Security System, Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, League of Provinces of the Philippines, League of Cities of the Philippines, and League of Municipalities of the Philippines, among others (Pedroso, 2010). Aside from membership of government agencies, the NDRRMC now includes financial institutions, local government leagues, the private sector, and civil society organizations (CSOs) which reflects the "Whole of Society" approach on disaster management (COA, 2014).

Its role on food distribution is just assumed to be included already on Section 2.p. As stated in the said Section 2.p, NDRRMC is to provide maximum care, assistance, and services to individuals and families affected by disaster, implement emergency rehabilitation projects to lessen the impact of disaster, and facilitate resumption of normal social and economic activities. It was only the support for breastfeeding before and during disasters which was mentioned. Such case shows limitations on the policy since the framework for food distribution is not explicitly written. The good intentions of R.A. 10121, Section 19 stating the Prohibited Acts to regulate and direct the distribution of relief goods may hamper the smooth flow of food distribution due to the bureaucratic system. With a long list of prohibited acts, it tends to delimit the decision-making capacity of the LGU's at the grassroots level despite the innovation on the Act. They refuse to release food packs unless a written document is furnished from the immediate superior of higher agency or level.

As a developing country and as history proved, corruption in the government is a major issue that requires provisions of numerous check and balance in the government processes. This is why Section 19 of RA 10121 contains a long list of prohibited acts which can slow down the distribution of relief goods, especially during the most crucial initial days of the relief phase after a disaster. In spite of the magnanimity of the donations from the Philippines and all over the world, the distribution was very slow. Most survivors are reported to be disappointed and felt neglected in such critical times.

Espiritu (2014) reported that people were disheartened by the speech of President Aquino, claiming the 1M food packs distributed to the Yolanda victims as of Nov. 22, 2013. Moreover, it was reported that survivors were not given food packs last June 8, 2014 because of the 50-km. radius standard coverage set by the government.

The unfortunate perceptions have been proven reasonable, according to the COA report (2014), which was posted on the COA website. Some 7,527 family food packs worth P2.7 million; 95,472 assorted canned goods; 81 packs of noodles; and, 21 sacks of rice went to waste due to improper handling in Yolanda devastated areas, particularly in Central and Eastern Visayas. The COA report blamed the losses on the lack of coordination among government agencies, which caused delays in the distribution of goods.

The report read "procured supplies intended for relief operations have not been fully delivered by the suppliers because of logistical gaps, such as lack of storage facility while awaiting repacking and eventual transport to affected areas and lack of delivery trucks" (COA, 2014). Warehousing the donations and relief goods at the National Relief Operations Center also created a "logistical nightmare" for the DSWD (Dinglasan, 2014). Relief distribution operations did not provide daily and periodic reporting on the results/status of its operations, as well

as accounting of funds received and its utilization given the huge funding, defeating the purpose of pinpointing responsibility, and promoting accountability and transparency. The COA report also revealed that some P700 million in donations from local sources and \$15 million (about P699 million) remained unspent as of 31 December 2013.

Obviously, a good law was promulgated but it is the implementation of the people that created gaps and horrific results. This time, the check and balance approach proved handy and justified the necessity for change as the Commission on Audit's report gave a better picture of what really happened, emphasizing the discrepancies. Overall, the state auditors pointed to the government's poor disaster response system as the reason for the difficulties in the relief operations in affected areas.

The delayed delivery or distribution to the areas hit by the calamity is one major logistic gap that needs to be responded to. Laude (2013) mentioned that the longer survivors go without access to clean water, food, shelter and medical help, the greater chance of disease breaking out and people dying as a result of wounds sustained in the storm. Assistance on food and clean water can best be targeted to the area which experienced the hardest hit to the least.

## **2.2. Food Distribution in Yolanda-hit Areas**

The researchers analyzed the available data from the Yolanda reports and news articles to assess if the numbers were sufficient or insufficient and to be able to say if there were indeed logistical gaps as seen in various reports. In food distribution to areas of calamity, the key elements of logistics are the food packs or rice and the availability of transportation. Relief goods were usually donated in bulk to DSWD and would need to be repacked in certain quantities. Based on Food Security and Cluster updates of June 6, 2014, each family was allocated with 25 kilos of rice, 20 pieces of canned goods, 20 noodles, and 20 coffee packs. The authors analyzed the data from Supply Chain Management Timeline - Typhoon Yolanda (2014). Only data on food packs, rice, and transportation within the first 90 days representing the Relief Phase were gathered for study.

The key elements on food distribution were examined to establish the distribution of food packs to the survivors, the percentage of relief goods (based on rice packs), and the capacity of the declared transportation vehicles for the delivery of the relief goods. The computed total number of packs distributed two weeks past November 8 was 4,274,505, based on published data by government agencies. Based on the data, majority of the food packs were delivered to Region VIII (Leyte and Samar). Notice also, that the food packs for Guiuan were only delivered after 4 days (November 12, 2014). This corresponds with the report of Rana (2013), saying the farthest islands in Guiuan, Eastern Samar have gone 4 days without food. There are 19 island barangays in Guiuan. The ones hardest to

reach have not received relief goods for quite some time. These are Homonhon, Manicani, Suluan and Calicoan. The mayor requested for a chopper from the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) to deliver food because there is no other way to reach them. The estimated population of the entire town of Guiuan is about 47,000, based on a 2010 census. The delivered 16,344 food packs are definitely insufficient with Guiuan's population.

Finally, for movement and distribution of the relief goods, capacity of the transportation assets of the government should be re-assessed. If excluding manpower constraints, the transportation assets are sufficient or insufficient to have a timely delivery to all points of disaster areas.

The assessment of the transportation assets registers a positive result, if and only all vehicles were available with sufficient manpower to operate. But the reality is so many constraints, even those created on field that greatly affected the food distribution. According to Cantalejo (2014), the COA auditors reported inadequate supervision and monitoring of the unloading of goods from the barge due to manpower constraints. Cargo containers, trucks, cargo ships and other logistics were also unavailable to transport the relief goods from the port to the storage buildings. Specifically in Central Visayas, auditors noted that open dump trucks were used to transport relief goods, exposing them to even more risks of damage. Some goods were also not covered while they were being transported from Cebu City to Tacloban City on board the vessel. Again, the fear of decision-making that may construe as a form of corruption or any similar violation was prevalent. Most agency officials are too afraid to violate the law or at the least, incur the possibility of a certain transaction being disallowed. This creates a fear of accountability. But ironically on the other hand, there were procurement contracts not conducted through public bidding due to the urgency of the need and yet, a significant amount of items procured remained undistributed even months after they were purchased. This is in contrast with the fear to violate.

### **3. Recommendations**

Natural disasters are inevitable occurrences requiring keen handling so nobody is left behind. The way a country responds to the immediate needs of its people speaks a lot of its stability, accountability and concern to deliver only quality services.

The researchers have five points for recommendations in aid of legislation.

#### **3.1. Status Quo of RA 10121 with additional clauses for flexibility**

R.A. 10121 is already a well-promulgated act. The strength of the change from NDCC to NDRRMC is the paradigm shift in handling disasters. From a reactive approach, NDRRMC is now proactive. The approach encompasses the

key components of a society. RA 10121 should remain in use and should be strengthened as increasing risk reduction programs instead of waiting for disaster relief is economically more efficient in the long-run. In addition, it should also include a section or clause whereby, in a disaster with a magnanimous scale like Yolanda, the distribution should not be delayed by the numerous number of regulating offices. Goods originating from the DSWD Main or Hub should already be directed to the barangay level with a city or municipality representatives assisting. No need to transport the truckloads or a certain transmittal or disbursement sheet to numerous points. Flexibility is a must since the top priority is immediate food distribution and not following longstanding procedures as if there are no emergencies.

### **3.2 Equipping DSWD workers with Humanitarian Skills**

The Yolanda experience should serve as a platform to concretize guidelines in handling the huge amount of relief goods. Alongside this, DSWD should train relief workers or humanitarian workers to be self-sufficient and equip them with abilities to cope with uncertainties on the field. Furthermore, train the humanitarian workers to have the capability to train future humanitarian workers. This will create a ripple effect for a better disaster response in the future.

Having a field staff resilient in the face of uncertainties, can aid in sound decision makings while on field work. Sound decisions will lessen mistakes on the field. Usually a no mistake correlates to a non-delay in the distribution of relief goods. This is economically good for the country. Moreover, mistakes on the field are a reflection of how the government responds in the face of a disaster. The more reported mistakes, the lower the trust the people have towards the government in meeting their needs during a crucial time. Whatever a deployed staff on the field does is the accountability of the government, even the President per se, when the impact is really evident. The control of the President can be put to question like what happened to the food spoilage due to non-periodic monitoring of stocks in the hub or warehouse.

### **3.3 Identification of Emergencies**

With the state of the art equipment of PAGASA, forecasting on where a typhoon will hit is not a big problem anymore. The data from PAGASA before a typhoon comes can already be the basis for DSWD to prepare relief items and mobilize its staff. Identification of what particular logistics, quantity and probable constraints can already be pre-studied. Alongside with DSWD, the transportation assets of the government can already be on standby mode already. Next, is the identification of which area is the hardest hit after the typhoon makes its landfall, in order to re-direct the movement and quantity allocation of relief goods to be distributed. This is to avoid logistical gaps in the delivery of food assistance where they are most needed.

An earlier identification of emergencies would allow aid organizations to begin relief efforts sooner. As a result, these agencies would have time to coordinate responses and determine the most efficient and effective relief programs. Furthermore, a faster response leads to more lives saved, as diseases and injuries could be treated before irreversible damage to the human body is done. Food and water could be distributed before malnutrition or thirst claims lives. The economic consequences of a slow response are great. Immediate response will prevent big expenses on providing supplemental feeding or any food sustenance to fight malnutrition. A preventive approach also stops the possibility of an epidemic which will definitely require more medical expenses instead of allocating it to food assistance.

### **3.4. Instill a Sense of Urgency**

Government officials and staffs especially the ones in key positions should also be trained or at least given seminars on humanitarian logistics. Because of too much paper works, they tend to stick to the bureaucratic process, thus, hindering the smooth flow of delivery of food assistance on field. While there is an increasing need for the government to spend its resources, which are readily available, they can hardly trickle down to the succeeding levels of government in order to reach the victims because state actors are either too reluctant to act if there are no rules, or they insist on following longstanding procedures as if there are no emergencies. The fear of accountability prevails over the sense of urgency to respond to an emergency case.

Such bureaucratic system still continues despite the approval of Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) Resolution No. 34-2013 on November 14, 2013 to facilitate the government's disaster response, which: 1) reiterated that GPPB approval is not necessary for government contracts of less than P500 million; 2) granted the authority to all concerned government entities to procure goods and infrastructure projects through Negotiated Procurement for contracts with Approved Budget for the Contract of at least P500 million, for the purpose of rescue, recovery, relief and/or rehabilitation during the State of National Calamity; and 3) required all concerned government agencies to submit a list of transactions covered by said authority at the end of every month.

In general, improving emergency response requires streamlining the aid process; hence, incurring less expense for what is not that essential. Governments should also lower bureaucratic obstacles that impede NGOs. In order for aid organizations to gain access to disaster areas, for instance, they first must be granted visas by government authorities. While visas are usually granted immediately to aid workers or even waived at point of entry during natural disasters, there are still difficulties. Governments will sometimes deny aid personnel access based upon their nationality, or another cultural factor. Visas given in the form of tourist visas also cause problems, as they expire after a short

period of time, causing workers to have to frequently leave and re-enter the country. To ensure organizations can respond as quickly as possible to disasters, the efficiency of the process of procuring these visas needs to be maximized. Flexible arrangements should be encouraged between governments and prominent NGOs to decrease the lag time between the actual occurrence of the disaster and the arrival of aid (International Federation of Red Cross, 2003)

### **3.5 Timely Declaration of a State of National Calamity**

Although the scale and magnitude of Yolanda's destruction satisfied the criteria or condition required for declaration of a state of calamity under NDCC Memo Order no. 04 series of 1998 dated March 4, 1998. It three (3) days on November 11, 2013, for President Aquino to declare a State of National Calamity through Proclamation No. 682 that aimed to hasten the rescue, recovery, relief and rehabilitation efforts of the government and the private sector, including international humanitarian aid. It was only then that government agencies and LGUs immediately mobilized their own resources and facilities for the massive rescue, recovery, relief and rehabilitation operations. As President, he had to wait for three critical days and even claimed that it's the role of the LGU's to assess the need for such declaration. He had NDRRMC people on field to feed him the necessary data that will quantify the devastation in the areas. This already contributed to a great delay and poor disaster response.

### **4. Conclusion**

The Philippine government should draw lessons from the Yolanda case. Every government has a responsibility to identify its role in an overall country strategy with regard to food security especially in times of disasters. It is important to be reminded of what the World Vision International (2014) stressed, "delay in the process + delay decision-making + lack of manpower = delay in implementation".

If all the declared government transportation assets are factual, then transport of relief goods should not be a problem. The limited manpower which is identified as a constraint should be dealt with. The claimed proactive approach of RA 10121 is only on paper. The government is in dire need of looking into the skills of the appointees and members of NDRRMC. Are they really appropriate for the position? Are they really aware of their roles and functions in the whole system? The Yolanda case proved only a failed implementation of NDRRMC. Many survivors were left waiting for immediate response despite the huge quantity of relief goods flowing in from various NGOs and other countries. Coordination was poor as political will was also down. Initiatives were drowned with fear of violations.

The Philippine government needs to strengthen accountability, humanitarian logistics skills and coordination on all levels. The researchers boldly foresee more

efforts and concerns will be put to waste unless the government reorganizes and equip its people with the right skills in facing future disasters.

## **References**

Bauzon, B.C., & Valente, C. (2013, November 12). Where is the food? The Manila Times. Retrieved from <http://www.manilatimes.net/where-is-the-food/52633/>

Cantalejo, L.R. (2014, September 10). Relief goods for Yolanda survivors late. Retrieved from <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2014/09/10/relief-goods-yolanda-survivors-late-364673>

Commission on Audit. (2014). Report on the audit of typhoon Yolanda relief operations. Retrieved from [http://www.coa.gov.ph/disaster\\_audit/#report](http://www.coa.gov.ph/disaster_audit/#report)  
Department of Social Welfare and Development. (2014, July 09). DSWD refutes claim of neglecting 'Yolanda' survivors. Retrieved from <https://www.dswd.gov.ph/2014/07/dswd-refutes-claim-of-neglecting-yolanda-survivors/for-typhoon-glenda/>

Dinglasan, R.R. (2014, September 7). Thousands of DSWD food packs for Yolanda relief lost to spoilage – COA. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/378162/news/nation/thousands-of-dswd-food-packs-for-yolanda-relief-lost-to-spoilage-coa>

Espiritu, P. (2014, August 2). PNoy, you are a liar—typhoon Yolanda survivors. Kicker Daily News. Retrieved from [kickerdaily.com/pnoy-you-are-liar-supertyphoon-yolanda-survivors/](http://kickerdaily.com/pnoy-you-are-liar-supertyphoon-yolanda-survivors/)  
Fernandez, A. (2014, September 6). Aid to Yolanda victims delayed by poor disaster response system – COA. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/378075/news/nation/aid-to-yolanda-victims-delayed-by-poor-disaster-response-system-coa>. GMA News. GMA News Online. Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/334972/news/world/international-disaster-relief-agencies-mobilize-to-help-yolanda-survivors>

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2014). Policy: Food security and nutrition. Retrieved from <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Governance/Policies/foodsecurity-policy-en.pdf>

Laude, J. (2013, November 13). Tons of aid undelivered. The Philippine Star. Retrieved from <http://www.philstar.com.headlines/2013/11/14/1256476/tons-aid-undelivered>.

Laverinto, C.A. (2010). The Philippine disaster management system. Office of Civil Defense 3-Regional Disaster Coordinating 3 Council (OCD-NDCC), National Disaster Coordinating Council. Retrieved from [http://www.adrc.asia/aboutus/vrdata/countryreport/josefina2009\\_cr.pdf](http://www.adrc.asia/aboutus/vrdata/countryreport/josefina2009_cr.pdf)

Nagurney, A. (2014, January). An integrated disaster relief supply chain network model with time targets and demand uncertainty. Springer International Publishing Switzerland, (2015), pp 287-318. Retrieved from <http://supernet.isenberg.umass.edu/articles/Disaster-Relief-Integrated-Goal-Programming-Supply-Chain-Network-Model.pdf>

Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. (2010, September 10). Implementing rules and regulations of Republic Act No. 10121, also known as “an act strengthening the Philippine disaster risk reduction and management system, providing for the national disaster risk reduction and management framework and institutionalizing the national disaster risk reduction and management plan, appropriating funds therefor and for other purposes”. Retrieved from [http://www.ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/95/Implementing\\_Rules\\_and\\_Regulation\\_RA\\_10121.pdf](http://www.ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/95/Implementing_Rules_and_Regulation_RA_10121.pdf)

Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. (2014). NDRRMC Situational Reports-Effects of Supertyphoon Yolanda. Retrieved from <http://www.ndrmc.gov.ph>

National Food Authority. (2014). Rice releases to relief agencies for supertyphoon Yolanda. Retrieved from <http://www.nfa.gov.ph>

OPARR. (2014, July 28). Yolanda rehabilitation and recovery efforts. Retrieved from <http://president.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Revised-DraftYolanda-Rehab-Briefer-as-of-1-Aug-2014-w-status-report.pdf>

Ranada, P. (2013, November 14). No food for 4 days in Guiuan islands. Retrieved from <http://www.rappler.com/move-ph/issues/disasters/supersupertyphoon-yolanda/43665-food-guiuan-islands-haiyan>

The Manila Observatory (2013, November 7). Supertyphoon Haiyan brief technical report. Retrieved from [http://www.observatory.ph/cgi-bin/publications/pub\\_details.py?p=144](http://www.observatory.ph/cgi-bin/publications/pub_details.py?p=144)

USDA Foods (2014, June). USDA Foods Program Disaster Manual. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FDDDisasterManual.pdf>

World Vision International. (2014, May). Real-time evaluation of world vision’s response to supertyphoon Haiyan. Humanitarian Emergency Affairs, November 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.alnap.org/resource/19215>

