

**38th WEDC International Conference, Loughborough University, UK, 2015**

**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:  
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Philippines: the challenges of the transition from  
emergency to development after Typhoon Haiyan**

*J. Ockelford (UK/Philippines)*

**BRIEFING PAPER 2207**

---

*Typhoon Haiyan, the biggest storm ever recorded to hit land, caused major devastation across a wide area of the Philippine, affecting more than 14 million people. Oxfam mounted an emergency response programme, which included early multi-sector assessments for planning the transition to a development phase, primarily in WASH and livelihoods. A number of external and internal challenges have arisen during the transition, with lessons for future such responses: early assessment and fund-raising for recovery and development; understanding the national context; controlling funding and activities in early recovery; and avoiding unsustainable quick-fixes in the recovery phase.*

---

**Context**

The Philippines has been classified as a middle-income country, but this can be misleading. There are extreme disparities between the rich and the poor, and the national figures are biased by a growth economy in some parts compared to the almost feudal nature of the rural economy in many areas, including the Eastern Visayas Region which was hardest hit by Typhoon Haiyan and some more recent typhoons. The Philippines is ranked 165th in the world in terms of GDP per capita, and almost two million people live on less than \$2 per day.

The Philippines has a well-established decentralised system of government, with tiers of elected local government units (LGUs) at province, city, municipality<sup>1</sup> and barangay. LGUs are responsible for water supply and sanitation, which in many places is delegated to “water districts”, semi-autonomous agencies regulated by a central Local Water Utilities Administration. The Philippines also has a multiplicity of legislation, presidential decrees, regulation, and local ordinances governing the water and sanitation sector. This has important implications for the way humanitarian agencies work, or should work, after the initial emergency phase is over.

The Philippine Water Supply Sector Road Map (NEDA, 2010) summarises the major long-term challenges:

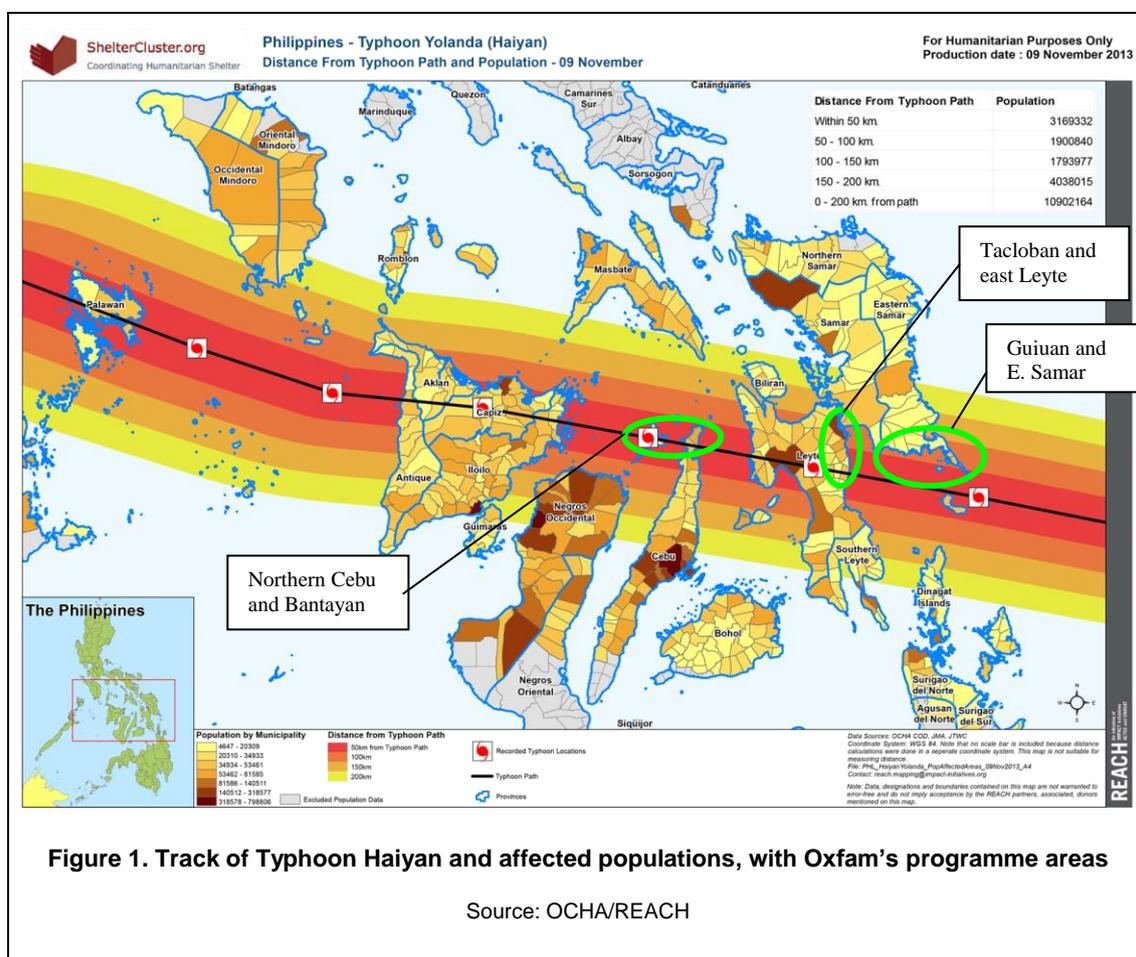
- The MTPDP [Medium Term Philippine Development Plan] identifies and prioritizes the issues and challenges besetting the sector. This include the disparities in water supply coverage across regions, depletion of groundwater especially in Metro Manila and Metro Cebu, lack of cost recovery on investments, institutional weaknesses and low willingness of consumers to pay. Pollution of water sources poses an additional threat to the sustainability of water supply systems and exposes the population to the environmentally-related diseases.
- The sector’s weak ability to respond to the water needs of the population and derivative problems related to sanitation, sewerage and wastewater management is rooted in the fragmented institutional environment, weak regulatory framework, inadequate support for service providers and utilities resulting in low performance levels, weak access to financing and investments, low levels of tariffs and cost recovery, inadequate support for rural water supplies, and lack of reliable and updated sector information needed for sector planning.

Water supply coverage is reported as relatively high, although functionality is a serious problem in many places, in particular in lower class and more rural municipalities and their small towns. In many of the areas hit by the typhoon sanitation coverage is low, less than 50% in some areas.

This context and its challenges is significant when addressing the additional challenges resulting from the typhoon, with confusion between the emergency, early recovery and rehabilitation needs and the long-term development needs.

### Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda)

Typhoon Haiyan, named Yolanda in the Philippines, made its first landfall in Guiuan, Eastern Samar at 04:40 a.m. on 8 November 2013, with ten-minute sustained winds of 230 km/h (145 mph) and unofficially estimated one-minute sustained winds of 315 km/h (195 mph). It has been reported as the most powerful storm ever recorded to strike land. It went on to make its second landfall in Leyte Island at 07:00 a.m. A storm surge in Leyte and Samar was estimated with 5–6 meter high waves. This storm surge devastated Tacloban City and the low-lying municipalities to the south. Within days of the disaster the Emergency Relief Coordinator of OCHA formally activated a Level 3 response – a designation marking the highest level of humanitarian crisis (HPN/ODI, January 2015). The track of the storm is shown in Figure 1.



The storm affected 14.9 million people with more than 4 million of these displaced from their destroyed homes; 1.2 million houses were damaged. More than 6,000 people were reported dead and more than 26,000 injured. Livelihoods were severely affected, with more than 1.8 million people in the agriculture sector affected and 74% of the fishing communities. This is a significant factor for re-establishing and improving WASH service for which people are expected to pay.

## **Oxfam's emergency response**

Oxfam mounted an emergency response covering WASH, emergency food and sustainable livelihoods (EFSVL), and protection, with gender as a cross-cutting issue, in three programme areas: Tacloban and eastern Leyte, Guiuan and Eastern Samar, and Bantayan Island and Daanbantayan in Northern Cebu; a fourth area in Ormoc and western Leyte was added later. Altogether Oxfam reached about 750,000 beneficiaries, spending approximately GB£15 million, about half of the more than GB£30 million raised in the early fund-raising.

In WASH, as well as major distributions of water kits and hygiene kits; water trucking and provision of emergency tanks; construction of emergency toilets in relocation sites; and hygiene promotion campaigns, Oxfam with UNICEF provided modest but critical support to Leyte Metro Water District to enable it to re-establish water supplies to Tacloban and other municipalities; this was a major factor in averting epidemic disease outbreaks. Oxfam also established and operated two septage treatment facilities, treating sludge from institutional septic tanks and fresh excreta from emergency toilets with hydrated lime.

## **Multi-Sector Assessments for the recovery into development phases**

From 18 December 2013 to mid-January 2014, within two months of the emergency, Oxfam carried out Multi-Sector Assessments (MSAs) covering protection, EFSVL, WASH, gender and policy/advocacy in three of the programme areas to assess needs for the recovery into development phases. The team was made up of internal specialists, who were not directly involved in the emergency response, for each of these, led by the author, who is a WASH development specialist with some experience in emergencies, rather than a specialist humanitarian. The MSAs were constrained because it was only possible to make short visits and timing was not ideal, being over the Christmas and New Year period. A debriefing was given in each programme area at end of visit and a tabulated summary issued within a few days of completion of field work.

With limited availability of information, the assessment team tried to provide an analysis of the pre-typhoon and the emergency contexts and the issues in gender, shelter, WASH, food security and livelihoods, organisations and institutions, and finance for moving from early recovery to development and disaster risk reduction (DRR). The MSA reports included sections with proposals for potential interventions for an early recovery phase and a development programme. It was an important innovation for Oxfam to conduct such assessments so early in response. The MSAs proved to be very useful for developing the longer term response strategy but it needs more time and resources to conduct them effectively.

## **The planned WASH Programme**

The MSAs were the basis for the WASH strategy that was developed subsequently. Due to lack of time, it was not possible to do a thorough study of lessons from previous disasters; the WASH programme was developed more in the awareness of previous inadequacies in such responses rather than from specific lessons, and included the author's knowledge of WASH in the Philippines from previous work there. The WASH Strategy included components as shown in Figure 2, to contribute to the Government of the Philippines' intention of "building back better".

The national staffing needs for the development programme more or less matched the numbers already employed in the emergency and early recovery phases. Oxfam's intention was to retain and retrain these staff for development WASH, so that it would have people experienced in emergency response as surge capacity for when, not if, the next disaster strikes. Oxfam also recruited internationally for specialists to manage and develop some of the components.

Figure 2 represents the intention. Achieving this has been difficult, or not possible in some of the components, for various external and internal reasons described in the following sections. What is being achieved now is a scaled-down programme encompassing CLTS, sanitation marketing with micro-finance and septage management in two programme areas, with some scope to add support for water supplies and support for small town services and possible solid waste management.

## **External challenges**

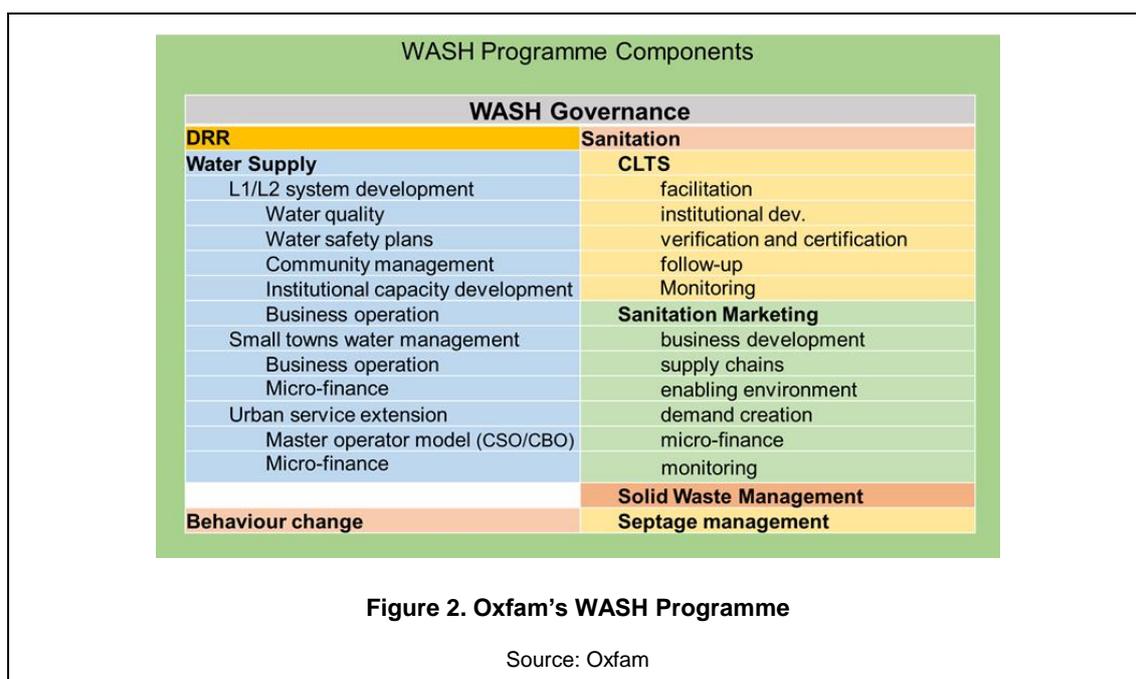
The sheer scale of the needs has been, and still is, a huge challenge. The impact of the Typhoon on already weak and inadequate infrastructure is enormous; capacity and capability of institutions (with a few exceptions) are also factors. The author's personal view is that weak institutions are part of weak resilience

to disasters, and make the self-rebuilding more difficult and slower. National and local politics is also a factor in relationships between institutions.

Despite the scale of need, it can be a crowded space. The various humanitarian actors have differing and contradictory approaches, without considering the impact on overall development in the Philippines. The nature of humanitarian agencies and staffing is to try achieve quick fixes, which is necessary for the immediate response phase. The problem is that this approach is carried over into the recovery phase and transition to the longer term by implementing short, target based programs without sufficient understanding of the underlying challenges of sustainability and disaster risk reduction (DRR). An example is the approach to sanitation: projects provide new toilets with subsidies mixed into CLTS to meet short-term targets of zero open defecation, rather than allowing CLTS to work to create behaviour change and demand and establishing supply-side sanitation marketing to meet the demand.

This short-termism is reflected in attitudes to government policies and regulations. Different agencies are developing their own toilet designs, some of which are technically defective, rather than conforming to or trying to influence the government’s standards, which are themselves inadequate. Humanitarians still talk about meeting Sphere Standards and indicators, rather than following national standards.

A major factor in the external environment is the lack of skilled engineers. Similar to nursing, Philippines is a major exporter of its trained engineers, mainly to the Middle East. Interest in WASH amongst engineering graduates is also low – most want to work on structures and major engineering projects. The result is that there is a very small pool of WASH specialists for all the agencies to draw from. Many of those employed are from a cadre of “construction supervisors” with little previous experience in WASH.



The other factor alluded to in the description of the impact of the typhoon is the ability of people to pay for services. In the Eastern Visayas Region where levels of poverty already made this a challenge, people have taken a huge hit on their livelihoods and incomes. The challenge of making services affordable has grown bigger.

An ongoing challenge concerns resettlement. Soon after the disaster, the Government declared a “No-build zone” (NBZ) to prevent people rebuilding within 45m of the shoreline. This has meant relocating people, mainly poor fisherfolk, away from their livelihoods. The availability of adequate land for resettling these people has been difficult. The thinking behind provision of services for temporary transitional sites and the permanent sites represents a particular challenge in sanitation. The Government guidance specifies that a toilet should be provided, but the practice is to build septic tanks with little thought about the effluent and drainage from the tanks. With the very dense housing, these site are likely to become urban slums with very dangerous environmental sanitation very quickly. Oxfam is currently assisting one local government by

providing a joined-up sanitation solution consisting of one or two anaerobic baffled reactors (ABRs) serving a whole resettlement site of more than 100 houses. Initial estimates indicate that this may actually be a cheaper solution than multiple septic tanks, as well as providing a much better quality of effluent. Hopefully this pilot demonstration can influence the National Housing Authority to change its guidance to address site planning to allow space for such systemic solutions.

### Internal factors

In Oxfam WASH comes under the Humanitarian Department, even though the intention is to also work in development WASH. This means that WASH for the development phase is operating in a humanitarian culture. An example is the recruitment of international specialists: Oxfam is seen by job seekers as a humanitarian organisation, and jobs were initially advertised on inappropriate recruitment sites. Short term contracts (12 months) may deter development people, and there is a need to consider accompanied posts.

During the early recovery phase, short-term staff were doing things that are more appropriate in the development phase. These included provision of new toilets and water supplies, which were not developed with the necessary processes and considerations to make them sustainable. Part of this was due to the imperative of meeting targets set during the emergency phase – staff were chasing targets that were no longer relevant. Part of it was also having generous budgets available with the push to spend (“burn rates” per staff being a measure of effectiveness in humanitarian work) rather than conserving the funds for the later stage of “building back better”.

Spending during the early recovery and transition phases used up more of the funding than originally planned. One of the clear lessons is that fund-raising for the development phase needs to start much earlier, even while the emergency response is in progress; donors need to be influenced in this respect.

### Conclusions

Working in the transition to development after a major disaster is challenging. Although it is Oxfam’s policy to do this at scale, it has not been possible to fully demonstrate the achievement of this policy intention in the response to Typhoon Haiyan. A number of important lessons can, however, be identified in the trying. Amongst these are:

- conducting MSAs early in the emergency were important for setting the overall direction of the response
- fund-raising for the development phase early in the response, including advocacy with donors for this
- a change in culture of humanitarians to consider the development context and need for developmental approaches to achieve sustainability and DRR.
- humanitarian actors need to understand the context in which the response is taking place
- Activities and spending in the early recovery need to be controlled so that funds are not spent on things that need a longer term developmental approach to be sustainable.

---

### Acknowledgements

The author/s would like to extend thanks to his colleagues in Oxfam who carried out the work in the emergency and recovery phases in very challenging conditions.

---

### References

- HPN/ODI, January 2015, Humanitarian Exchange No.63, Humanitarian Policy Network, Overseas Development Institute, London
- NEDA, 2010, *Philippine Water Supply Sector Road Map (2nd Edition)*, National Economic Development Authority, Philippines, pp xvi-xvii

---

### Note/s

<sup>1</sup> A municipality is an administrative area. It can be urban, or rural with some urban barangays forming a small town.

## OCKELFORD

---

### **Contact details**

Jeremy Ockelford

18 F.T. Benitez Street,

Tierra Verde II

Tandang Sora,

Quezon City

Philippines

Tel: +63 (0)9062292241

Email: [jockelford@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:jockelford@oxfam.org.uk) (until June 2015) then [jockelford@aol.com](mailto:jockelford@aol.com)

---