

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES IN DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS FOR FAMILIES AFFECTED BY TYPHOON ONDOY IN RIZAL PROVINCE

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Due to the 2009 flood brought by Typhoon Ondoy, relief operations were done through the partnership of a humanitarian organization and the academe. The engagement of the academe was deemed important to document and draw lessons from the experience in emergency response. This paper examines the experience on disaster relief operations. It looks at the processes, good practices, challenges and issues faced during the provision of relief goods from needs assessment, pre-distribution preparation, actual distribution and post-distribution activities. The paper provides insights in improving practices in disaster relief operations that can contribute to more humane processes, better interpersonal relations and substantial impact.

A. Background

Reducing risks during the emergency and post emergency situations is imperative to minimize physical, social, and economic losses among families affected by disasters. Disaster relief operations focused on providing assistance to emergency situations. An emergency is an extraordinary situation where there are serious and immediate threats to human life as a result of disaster (Kotze &

Holloway, 1996). During disasters, individuals and organizations engage in concerted efforts to mobilize resources to help those who are in need. While helping people through relief operations is a common response, there is very little effort to document and assess the processes that can help improve this practice.

The flood caused by Typhoon Ondoy on September 26-27, 2009 wreaked havoc in the Philippines, leaving great damage to property and losses in human lives. In Rizal province alone, it was reported that 80 out of 188 villages were badly hit by Ondoy. Eighty two died and 37,570 families and 263,224 individuals were affected (ABS-CBN 2009).

The situation prompted the U.P. College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD) and its affiliate organization, the *Sikhay Kilos* Development Association (*Sikhay*) to initiate ways to help its partner communities who were affected by the flood. This is in line with the CSWCD's mission of "academic excellence in the service of the nation and the global community through participatory, gender responsive, empowering and transformational development praxis" (CSWCD 2007). *Sikhay* is a non-stock and non-profit organization composed of CSWCD faculty, staff and alumni that aim to advance the welfare concerns of the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable groups (*Sikhay*, 2009). Both CSWCD and *Sikhay* were engaged by the Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam), a humanitarian organization, in assisting the communities in the province of Rizal through the provision of relief goods, particularly family hygiene kits (FHK). This is part of Oxfam's program for emergency public health that includes construction of hygiene facilities in evacuation centers, capacity building for health workers, livelihood assistance and advocacy work for better health and sanitation during emergencies.

Oxfam's project with *Sikhay* was called *Emergency Public Health Support to Selected Sites in Rizal Province Heavily Affected by Tropical Storm Ondoy*. It was implemented on October 16 - December 15, 2009. The project initially targeted to distribute FHKs to 6,000 families. Upon agreement of Oxfam and *Sikhay*, it was extended to 8,500 considering the number of families who were still in need. The project was able to distribute FHKs to 9,493 families in five municipalities of Rizal as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Families Given FHK

Municipalities	No. of Evacuation Centers and Communities	Families Served
Angono	27 in four barangays	2,961
Binangonan	7 in two barangays	620
Montalban	5 in four barangays	806
San Mateo	13 in four barangays	2,811
Taytay	11 in two barangays	2,295
Grand Total	63 in 16 barangays	9,493

Source: *Sikhay* Kilos Development Association, 2010

The FHKs contained two jerry cans (water container), one *tabo* (water dipper), two sleeping mats, two cotton bed sheets, three packs of sanitary napkins, three men's underwear, three boys' underwear, three girls' underwear, two large ladies' underwear, one XL ladies' underwear, 10 bath soap, seven small size laundry soap, and three large size laundry soap. These items were decided upon by Oxfam, based on their standards and guidelines for gender sensitive health and sanitation assistance. In addition to these, the Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) group, also of Oxfam, provided P1,000.00 cash to the families.

This project also aimed to document the experience in relief operations to enhance disaster relief practice and to identify further needs of the communities for rehabilitation purposes. This paper is a product of the documentation research done in connection with the relief operations.

Sikhay formed a project management team to do the assessment, pre-distribution, actual distribution and post-distribution tasks. The team was composed of a volunteer CSWCD faculty as team-leader, three project personnel, and volunteer faculty, staff, students and CSWCD friends. On the other hand, Oxfam had separate teams for FSL and FHK. *Sikhay* worked directly with the FHK team who was responsible in making initial assessment of the situation of the evacuation centers and communities, coordination with the Oxfam team responsible in packing, and transporting the relief goods.

B. Framework for Disaster Relief Operations

International humanitarian agreements provide standards of conduct for disaster response among humanitarian organizations. These are “The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (ICRC)”, the SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards (SPHERE), and the Human Accountability Partnership (HAP). ICRC, for instance, promulgates the following principles in relief work (International Red Cross Movement, n.d.):

- “• *The humanitarian imperative comes first.*
- *Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.*
- *Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.*
- *We shall endeavor not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.*
- *We shall respect culture and custom.*
- *We shall attempt to build disaster response based on local capacities.*
- *Ways shall be found to involve program beneficiaries in the relief aid.*
- *Relief aid must strive to reduce vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting needs.*
- *We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept.*
- *In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified beings, not as hopeless objects.”*

SPHERE prescribes standards of behavior for humanitarian organizations during emergencies. It prioritizes water supply and sanitation, food and nutrition, shelter and safety, and health services as part of emergency packages. During emergency response, assessment, human resources and training, and coordination in program management are important. It also seeks to involve all the organization’s staff including those at the national level, the transfer of knowledge and skills and adequacy in human resources and training. Finally, effective activities require clear leadership, creation of a coordinating body, mechanisms to ensure that priorities are shared by all relief actors, and the prevention of project duplication (The Sphere Project, 2004).

HAP, on the other hand, calls for accountability of every action of humanitarian organizations to ensure quality of work. HAP defines accountability as the means by which power is used responsibly in the context of the following principles: humanity or upholding the right of all persons to receive and give assistance, impartiality, informed consent, duty of care, witness which requires reporting on policies or practices, transparency, independence, neutrality, and complementarity (HAP International, 2007).

These agreements bind Oxfam and its partners such as *Sikhay* to comply with the humanitarian principles. Mechanisms were set up to ensure that these were properly practiced and monitored in all phases of relief work.

C. The Process in Disaster Relief Operations

1. Pre-Distribution and Preparatory Phase

Project orientation and training

An orientation was conducted by Oxfam for the project team and volunteers regarding the perspectives, principles, procedures and guidelines in relief humanitarian work. The orientation provided information about Oxfam programs for the flood-affected communities and the relief operations project. Oxfam was responsible in providing, packaging, transporting and monitoring the relief goods. A training was also done about humanitarian principles and code of ethics in doing relief work. Towards the end of the project, the third training focused on financial management for *Sikhay* bookkeeper, finance officer and team leader. The latter was meant to enhance the capacity of *Sikhay* in managing humanitarian work.

LGU coordination and community assessment

Prior to relief operations, Oxfam and the project team made courtesy calls to the municipal mayors. Coordination was done with the Municipal Social Welfare

and Development Office in making post-disaster assessment and mapping the communities and affected families by the flood. *Sikhay* gathered data on the affected families and evacuation centers (ECs) from MSWD officers and cross checked them with the information provided at the barangay, community, and evacuation centers.

Selection of evacuation centers and communities

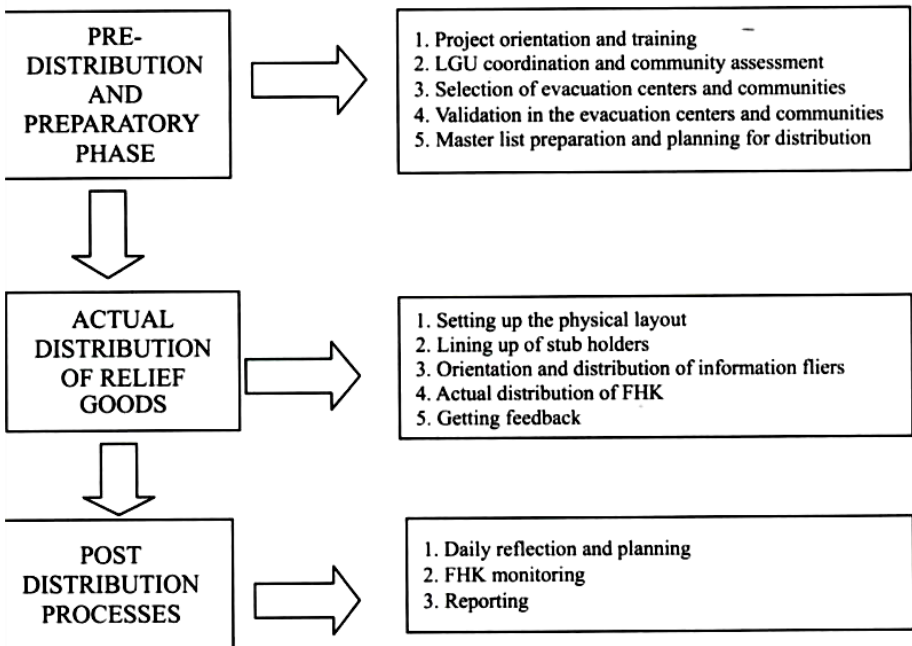
Based on Oxfam's guidelines, *Sikhay* initially selected evacuation centers based on its size, condition, and accessibility. The team prioritized ECs with at least 100 families, for better efficiency. ECs with less than 100 families but located close to each other were consolidated as a cluster and were also included in the list of beneficiaries. *Sikhay* also gave special preference to ECs with the worst living condition in terms of flooding situation, air circulation, toilet facilities and access to clean water. In the end, 63 ECs in 16 barangays were covered, including those that were accessible only by boat. However, the island barangays in Binangonan were not covered due to logistical problems, physical access, costs, and time constraints in transporting the goods.

The initial plan to distribute the FHKs only to families in the evacuation centers was later modified to include those residing in the communities. Many families did not leave their homes despite the flood while others went back to their houses after the flood receded. Many families did not stay in the ECs because of the conditions in there. These families did not receive any help because relief goods were primarily given to families staying in the ECs. There were also reports that some communities were not favored by the LGU officials due to political reasons, hence they did not get any relief goods.

Oxfam selected the communities based on their assessment and official reports of the LGUs. Oxfam likewise received requests for assistance from the residents and local leaders. *Sikhay* validated the data through ocular inspection and interviews with the residents. Selected areas included those that were still flooded and were previously submerged as shown by the condition of the houses and thickness of mud in the vicinity. Areas with high cases of leptospirosis were also prioritized.

Figure 1 summarizes the major activities undertaken for the FHK distribution process.

Figure 1: FHK Distribution Process



Validation in the evacuation centers and communities

The validation process involved identifying the families who would be receiving the FHK. Information about the family such as the name of the family head, the spouse, the number of children, male and female, were gathered and included in a master list. The families in turn were given coupons or stubs which they had to show to get a FHK during the distribution which was usually done two or three days after the validation.

During EC validation, *Sikhay* conducted actual spot check by identifying the family occupants of each space. In cases where two or more households occupy

a single space, confirmation was done with the EC leader on the veracity of the claims made by evacuees. There were also instances when the EC leader had a master list of families. In this case, the family representative provided the information. They were asked to line up in a convenient and shaded area to register their families.

For the community validation, *Sikhay* did house-to-house visit and interviewed the family representatives. When the local leaders had a master list of those affected by the flood, the people were convened and their names were called for interview by the *Sikhay* validation team.

Master list preparation and planning for distribution

The handwritten master lists of beneficiaries were encoded and assigned stub numbers. The names were sorted alphabetically to facilitate the FHK distribution. Copies were given to Oxfam for them to ascertain the number of FHK to be prepared and for the emergency food security and livelihood (EFSL) team to determine how much money would be distributed.

Sikhay conducted team meetings for site planning and team roles delineation. Sub-teams were formed for the physical set-up, FHK orientation, receiving and interviewing of beneficiaries, FHK handling, crowd management, and preparation of supplies and materials such as attendance sheets, ropes, masking tapes, tarpaulin, to mention a few.

2. Actual Distribution of Relief Goods

Setting-up the physical lay-out

During the validation stage, *Sikhay* team and local leaders planned the physical set-up for distribution. There must be enough space to accommodate the target recipients, possibly in shaded area and where the personnel and relief goods

were secured. A map was drawn that identified the crowd waiting area, entry and exit route, locations of tables for receiving the beneficiaries, the FHK claiming area, locations, positions and movement of trucks with the goods. Tarpaulin posters were placed for identification of the organizations involved in the relief distribution. Ropes were used as demarcation lines to manage the crowd. Team members and volunteers were employed at strategic points to facilitate a smooth and orderly distribution.

Lining up of stub holders

The people with claim stubs were asked to line up in the column with letters corresponding to their surnames. The alphabetical arrangement corresponded to the master list. The policy of “No Coupon, No FHK” was adopted and announced to the crowd to prevent onlookers from joining the line. The elderly, those with disabilities, pregnant women and those carrying infants were asked to go to the front.

Orientation and distribution of information fliers

Once the lines of people were settled and were ready for distribution, an orientation was given about the FHK distribution. The orientation was delivered either by Oxfam or *Sikhay* staff. Messages were made through the public address system and flyers were distributed to each beneficiary.

The orientation consisted of the following : greetings; a brief background on Oxfam and *Sikhay*; the contents of FHK; hygiene reminders e.g., proper hand washing, handling of drinking water and proper garbage disposal; instructions on the distribution process which included where to sign, where to get the FHK and exit points after FHK receipt, priority line for the elderly, pregnant and lactating women, and persons with disabilities; an assurance that all coupon holders will be provided with FHK; reminders to beneficiaries to check on their kits immediately upon receipt, and to provide immediate feedback to *Sikhay* should they have any concerns.

Actual distribution of FHK

Beneficiaries lined up in three stages before they reached the tables where their names and coupon or stub numbers were checked. The purpose of multi-staging was to prevent over crowding in front of the table. On their turn, the recipients gave their stubs and affixed their signature or thumb mark opposite their names in the master list. They were directed to the area where their FHK and the P1,000 FSL cash would be handed to them, after which they were directed to the exit. Oxfam ensured that the FHK given were properly packed and could be conveniently carried, using a re-usable cloth bag. At times, *Sikhay* and community volunteers escorted the elderly, the pregnant and those with disabilities to their waiting families outside the line. During the actual distribution, community leaders and barangay leaders helped in ensuring order, but they were not allowed to handle the FHK.

Sikhay made an inventory before leaving the distribution site to ascertain that the number of goods disposed matched the actual beneficiaries.

Getting feedback

Beneficiaries gave feedback verbally, or through text messages and drop boxes provided by *Sikhay*. Volunteers were also assigned in the queue to receive and answer queries during validation and distribution. Written messages were usually expressions of gratitude and appreciation to Oxfam and *Sikhay*, inquiries for the next schedule of distribution, and appeal for their inclusion as recipients. The feedback was conveyed to Oxfam during the end-of-the-day meeting.

Positive comments included the people's appreciation of the way *Sikhay* handled the validation process. House-to-house information gathering and coupon distribution by *Sikhay* received high commendation from the recipients, especially those in worst-affected communities that were never reached by assistance. Recipients were happy that *Sikhay* took charge of the

data gathering and stub distribution instead of the government or barangay officials because of fear of favoritism. They also said that the laminated and colored coupons with signature was better because it was difficult to photocopy and imitate them.

Comments were also received regarding the system of FHK-distribution. They said that it was fast, efficient and systematic and far better than the previous relief goods distribution done by some NGOs in Rizal. The laminated and colored signed stubs gave them assurance that everyone would get their share, unlike in the past relief distribution where they lined up for hours only to be told that there were no more relief goods. The use of ropes helped the process of directing and mobilizing the people. They also appreciated the effort to prioritize the elderly, the pregnant and those with disability.

There were negative reactions as well. Some people envied those in the ECs saying, “those people at the EC always received relief goods from government and NGOs.” There were people who insisted that they should be recipients since they were also victims of flooding. Their complaints were all valid but the team had to explain that there were certain criteria. Only those whose names were in the master list were qualified to get the kit. All those identified as staying at the EC or living in the community qualified. However, during the evaluation, some were probably not around, hence they were not included in the master list. In cases like this, on the spot validation was done, with the EC leaders or barangay officials attesting the veracity of the information. They were given stubs that enabled them to claim their FHK, on the same day or another distribution day, depending on the number of beneficiaries validated.

During distribution, there were questions whether the excess FHKs can be given to those who did not have stubs. The immediate response was that, only people with validated stubs could receive the FHK and all unclaimed FHKs would be sent back to Oxfam warehouse for accounting. Furthermore, giving a favor to one person could be a dangerous precedent that could result to conflicts.

3. Post Distribution Processes

Daily reflection and planning

After every distribution, Oxfam and *Sikhay* met to keep track of activities, outcomes, succeeding schedules and targeted ECs and communities. This process was very useful because this enabled the team to have a common understanding of what happened. Most of the post distribution meetings were done with the Oxfam team. Dinner was provided to all the team members and volunteers.

FHK monitoring

Sikhay conducted monitoring meetings with the family-beneficiaries in all the municipalities covered by Oxfam. Eight ECs and six communities were covered in the monitoring, with 645 participants, 436 (67.6%) of whom were women and 209 (32.4%) were men. The monitoring activities were done to get feedback from the people about the FHK and FSL distribution, especially on how they used the goods and cash.

Research reporting

Since the project also had a research component, the team ensured that a documentation of the relief operation was done. The members had a workshop where they laid down the processes, challenges, lessons and recommendations for future relief operations. They also contributed to the narrative report submitted by *Sikhay* to Oxfam. A paper was also presented in a CSWCD forum.

D. Issues and Challenges

Inadequate sources of relevant and updated data

LGUs play a crucial role in rapid data collection and assessment that would serve as basis for immediate interventions by humanitarian organizations.

However, not all LGUs could give such data, being confronted by the enormity of disaster-response related tasks and the absence of an institutionalized information system that could readily generate necessary data. Such a situation required the team to do the assessment themselves that proved to be helpful as it ensured completeness and reliability of data and gave *Sikhay* the realities of life of the urban poor.

Resource limitation and unpreparedness to disasters and relief work

Poverty worsened the miserable conditions of families affected by disasters. Some ECs were located in unsuitable places such as flooded areas in Angono and Taytay, under the bridge in San Mateo, or close to the shore or river in Taytay. Others were overcrowded with three or more families occupying a very small space, did not have toilet and water facilities, and were poorly lit and ventilated. These conditions made the volunteers realized the health consequences and the importance of addressing people's vulnerabilities. ECs must be a suitable place but the LGUs could not provide such amenities to the people. The use of the schools as ECs also greatly affected the school children. Their prolonged stay in the EC led to illnesses and school delinquency.

Difficulties to effective and efficient distribution

There were communities that did not have sufficient space for relief goods distribution. While *Sikhay* and the local leaders had a contingency plan in case of rain, distribution was still delayed during a heavy downpour. This was aggravated by flooding in the ECs at the time of distribution. There were also conflicts of schedule of community activities, e.g., medical mission or demolition were done simultaneously with relief goods distribution.

Coordination with Oxfam-EFSL Team

In the entire project, the coordination with Oxfam Public Health Team (PHT) was smooth and marked by cordiality and efficiency. However, *Sikhay*

encountered problems in coordinating with the EFSL Team, who provided P1,000.00 per family. Apparently, *Sikhay* and the EFSL teams had different expectations with respect to the management of the actual distribution. *Sikhay* thought of itself as the lead coordinator of the distribution process in the EC or community, even if it involved both FHK and EFSL. In the end, it was made clear that the PHT and EFSL Teams were separate entities, thus activities were later done separately.

Negative attitudes among some people

Cases of cheating, opportunism, and indifference of people were observed during relief work. There were cases of double-claiming of relief goods by having two stubs in the name of two members of the same family. For example, husband and wife gave incorrect information during the validation, one giving the middle name and the other, the surname. The double registrations during the validation were discovered in the alphabetized master list that showed the members of the family. There were those who claimed goods for declared relatives without permission, causing the real stub owner to run after the claimant. There were also instances of barangay leaders and volunteers who directly asked for goods despite not being a victim of disaster. There were incidences of people fabricating stories and staying in ECs despite having sturdy homes in the vicinity just to be included in the list of recipients. There were also instances of wealthy residents who insisted that they be given relief goods just like their poor neighbors, but they were informed that they were not included in the validation because the prioritized beneficiaries were the poor families affected by the flood.

Fired up emotions of affected residents

Overcrowding and the hot climate could stir emotions of people who, in their desire to immediately get relief goods, resorted to short cuts, impositions and unwanted comments such as badmouthing. Patience and greater understanding in dealing with people in distress must also be a virtue among humanitarian volunteers.

The magnitude of damages caused by Typhoon Ondoy posed a great challenge not only to Oxfam, other humanitarian organizations and *Sikhay*, but most especially to the Local Government Units (LGUs) which were directly responsible of their affected constituents. The Municipal Social Welfare and Development Offices (MSWDO) often times were confronted by families from communities not reached by Oxfam's FHK and Emergency Family Security Kit (EFSK).

E. Good Practices in Disaster Relief Operations

Establishment of a system for disaster relief operations

There was a system for relief goods distribution from the needs assessment, preparations, actual distribution and post distribution activities. The composition and roles of the relief team and volunteers were clarified during orientation and meetings. System of communication, decision making and conflict management were also put up to facilitate the conduct of the relief operations. The relief operations management team met and planned regularly to promote team spirit, coordination and efficiency. They worked using a well-planned yet flexible weekly schedule. In some days, the team split into two groups to maximize time and accomplish the overlapping concerns of coordination, validation and distribution. Post-activity meetings were conducted daily to review the approaches used, share experiences, and plan the team's succeeding activities.

The meetings enabled the relief operations provider to keep track of goods distributed and available for distribution. Teamwork and discipline were also fostered by the day-ender reflections. Responsible and competent leadership promoted teamwork and intellectual growth of the volunteers. Daily pointers from the team leader through pre-activity orientations and day-ender de-briefing and relaxation were regarded by team members as both reinvigorating and stimulating.

Feedback from the community and Oxfam itself said that the relief operation conducted by *Sikhay* was smooth, efficient and effective, which resulted to exceeding the number of target families. There were times when 1,300 families per day were given FHKs compared to the average 700 in other areas.

Local participation in relief operations and evacuation center management

The updated data base provided by the LGU helped to speed up the assessment and pre-distribution processes. It also promoted efficient utilization of resources. In communities where there were people's organizations, the leaders were involved in data gathering and validation, setting up the venue for distribution and acted as security person during the distribution. Similarly, at the evacuation center, the evacuees were organized by row and the leaders were involved in similar tasks. They also served as key informants when there was a need to verify data.

In relation to this, there were different ways by which the EC were managed by the local people. There were ECs directly managed and maintained by the municipal LGUs. ECs that used the barangay halls were managed by the Barangay. Most of the ECs put up in covered court, schools and private-owned facilities were managed by the evacuees themselves, headed by informal leaders.

Assessment and validation that promote impartiality and security

All the families in the evacuation centers were qualified to become beneficiaries. Gender-sensitive assessment and validation method were adopted where either of the spouse can be the beneficiaries. Sex disaggregated data were obtained. Single parents living as separate families were considered. On-the-spot and house-to-house validation to ensure wider coverage of worst-affected families were done. To prevent duplication of family recipients and "gate crashing" by non-bona fide residents, the relief operation systems used laminated stubs and master listing that enabled the cross checking of family entries. Direct assessment in the EC and the community provided the relief providers with opportunity to better understand the conditions of the affected families.

The stubs used were difficult to tamper and reproduce. They were laminated, with control number to identify the holders, and signed with colored pen. The recipients themselves appreciated the system because it prevented others from making fake stubs. For the relief providers, it made the distribution easier

because the recipients could be easily identified with the control number and matched with the master list.

Ensuring safety, people's welfare and gender sensitivity during relief operation

Physical and spatial planning for actual distribution promoted security and an orderly and systematic relief goods operations. Site planning included setting up the physical lay out for crowd management, allocating spaces for relief providers' work area, routes of people getting the goods, positioning and mobility of vehicles and trucks carrying the relief goods, positioning of team members and volunteers for security, crowd management and providing information. Spatial arrangement and physical set-up were important also in promoting discipline and transparency. The set-up allowed visibility, systematic flow and prevented mob behavior during distribution.

The welfare of each man and woman was a huge consideration in the relief distribution. The elderly, pregnant, and people with disabilities were prioritized. The venue for relief goods distribution was in a covered or shaded area. The distribution was fast, smooth and orderly to avoid dehumanizing consequences in the process. In some ECs, the people were asked to queue only when it was their turn to get their FHK to avoid waiting in long lines. The people were requested to keep a safe distance from the next person to avoid unnecessary body contacts. The distribution started on the appointed time and was completed during the day to provide ample opportunity for people to earn their living and do other activities.

Riots or mob behaviors are possibilities that any humanitarian organization might face. A reliable distribution system with proper coordination with local authorities may prevent violence. While this was not encountered, there were contingency plans as a preparation for such eventuality. The *Sikhay* team was sensitive to people who were agitated. The team members integrated with the people and were courteous, relaxed and friendly. The trucks containing the relief goods positioned in a distance away from the crowd. Similarly, the bulk of the crowd waiting and

watching the relief operation were staged far from the registration team and distribution area.

Accountability in distribution and disposal of all the relief

In relief operations, accountability entails responsible handling and delivery of relief goods, proper packaging, responsible handling and handing to beneficiaries, and proper timing. To uphold quality and accountability in all its operations, Oxfam conducted staff training and development activities to its partners. These included orientation, humanitarian guidelines and procedures, and management of feedback and complaints. The staff and volunteers were asked to sign the code of ethics for humanitarian work. The trainings enabled the team members to practice and appreciate better the significance of the work.

The relief operation system allowed all stub holders to get relief goods. This was made possible through Oxfam's adequate provisions of supplies and close monitoring of the beneficiaries that were validated. The distribution operation ended with counting the actual number of households who received the relief, tallying against the target recipients, and balancing with the number of goods left. The feedbacking system also promoted responsible delivery of services to the people. Part of ensuring accountability was a day-ender meeting after each operation to keep track of accomplishments, data, issues and concerns, and how they were addressed.

Balanced staff work and volunteerism

The relief distribution project is a commissioned work by Oxfam to *Sikhay*. All the costs of the operations were provided by Oxfam such as the supplies, transportation and food of the staff and volunteers. While the faculty project leader worked as a full time volunteer, there were four full time staff who were employed for the project. The rest were volunteers who irregularly joined the relief distribution. The presence of the regular staff ensured continuity and familiarity with the relief operations.

Conclusions

The relief operations showed some realities in times of disaster. The poor people were the ones who suffered most, not in absolute term, but in proportion to what they have. They lost almost everything: their homes, their assets and the environment that would enable them to be economically productive. The communities were flooded because of violation of human and natural laws, such as settlements encroaching the lake, lake shorelines converted into subdivisions and riverbanks occupied by informal settlers.

The evacuation centers were unfit, considering the space available and the poor health and sanitation facilities. Many families got out of their homes that were flooded, only to experience floods again at the evacuation centers. The LGUs were apparently not capable to respond adequately and effectively with the magnitude of disaster that faced them. Amidst these situations, emergency responses were meant to alleviate temporary sufferings.

The U.P. CSWCD is not a disaster relief distribution agency, but in times of disasters, the commitment to serve the marginalized people surface spontaneously. U.P. CSWCD does not have budget allocated for relief operations. However, through *Sikhay* and in partnership with humanitarian organizations such as Oxfam, resources and its constituents can be mobilized for relief operations. As an academic community, the U.P.CSWCD and *Sikhay* can integrate research and documentation in relief operations, to draw lessons that can be used for teaching and basis for improving the practices.

It is necessary that relief operation be guided by humanitarian framework and operational guidelines. Organizational efficiency ensures better quality of service and reduces potential risks related to relief operations. Emergency response does not only entail distribution of relief goods. It requires a heart and a commitment to serve. It encompasses an entire range of interrelated efforts from assessment, pre-distribution, actual distribution and post distribution activities that promotes humanitarian standards and principles. Humanitarian principles must be upheld, together with the values of participation, transparency, accountability, impartiality, human rights and dignity. In this way, the people and the communities can be helped to cope and bounce back as resilient individuals and communities.

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