

Überschwemmungen in Asien

Lagebericht unserer Partnerorganisation Visayan Forum in Manila

30. September 2009

Von Roland Pacis, Deputy Executive Director, Visayan Forum, Manila

I talked to some staff today who are living and working in the community.

Len-Len, 22, the computer teacher who helps trafficking victims in our office, "has never seen such unusual flood as before. Last Saturday morning, I went to the Visayan Forum (VF) office to teach some children. Rains were just the usual, but rains were incessant. By afternoon, I could not go home anymore because the TV said that 80% of Manila is already flooded. But I braved the floods anyway because my mom is alone taking care of my other siblings (7, 9, 11, 13 and 18 years old). When I arrived at night, all our clothes, electric fan, stove and tables were under water. So we moved up to the second floor, luckily there was one in the shanty that we rented. Our house is located beside the creek. Without warning, the water level just rose from waist to chest level. And it stay as such until midnight, when we were sleeping already in the second floor, I felt that cold on my back. Water reached us there too! Luckily it did not go any higher, but we had to stay sited all night. Our neighbors were already climbing on top of their houses, we could not reach them. So until 12 noon the following day, we just stayed there, surviving on canned goods."

"Since the river was full of garbage, the water did not come down until 2 days later. We wanted to ask for relief goods. But there was no relief. The local official said we should not be given any food because we just rented the room, and the owner is the one entitled to the relief. My small brothers and sisters have caught flu. Some other kids developed water-borne stomach diseases because the water is not drinkable. Bottled water is expensive we could not afford one, or just they are gone from the stores. "

"I have no plans so far. All I could do now is to wash and wash and wash all the clothes. Clean the house. Maybe by next month when I get my salary, I will help look for a new place a in the other community. But I still have to take care of the other children in the community because it is important to finish their computer training."

However, most of the computers in the Visayan Forum stepUP learning center have been soaked in flood water. All the other training materials are also destroyed. In the past, when there are calamities such as this, most of the BBK members seek shelter in the center. But even now, the center could not be a refuge anymore.

The flood is a “great leveler.” Poor people, rich people; artists/celebrities, fans; lazy people, busy working people; young and old – everyone was just affected and caught by surprise.

During the flood, most of the grocery items in the small stores have been destroyed too. It will take another loan from the local loan sharks to purchase new inventory to beef up the livelihood. Many fathers who depended their extra income by taking care of pigs and other poultry lost everything also.

VF is also planning an immediate medical mission as the impact of the water-related diseases are becoming evident. Most children are exposed to the elements and the bacteria. To consider, the BBK community is already one of the most prepared communities because VF has already trained many paramedics and volunteer mothers to help manage such calamities. But the extent and speed of the flood just caught them unprepared. But they are not discouraged.

In nearby areas covered by the program, waist-level floods have not receded. Many houses along the river have been swept away. But again, because of the preparedness seminars, they were able to save lives, none is lost.

However, in other parts of Manila such as Pasig, Marikina and Cainta, people were just caught unprepared from the sudden release of water from the Angat Dam. Although authorities are denying responsibility for the effect, most people claim there was just no time to prepare or save anything. In fact, many of those stranded and separate were on their daily grind of earning a living during that Saturday. Normally, it takes 24 hours of initial rains before people panic. But on that fateful day, most people were stranded and separated from their families as they still were on their way home from construction sites, offices and malls.

In areas worst hit, death toll have risen to more than 300. Some of the casualties are even prominent, rich and educated people, trying to save lives and properties. TV have focused on stories of celebrities being stranded and rescue. While in the meantime, traditionally flooded areas are seen by many politicians as opportunity to position for the next coming national and local elections in 2010. Poor areas are vote rich populations in dire need of immediate relief. However, since only a day ago did the response shift from rescue to relief operations. But a few organizations are preparing for long-term recovery and rehabilitation. Traditionally, disaster rehabilitation in the Philippines is perhaps geared towards the rural poor and agricultural areas. But now the Manila area is left unprepared, even local government units which has the power to allocate local funds cannot just release money because their mode of funding is just not geared towards relief and rehabilitation.

More updates to come later...