

Why Children Can't Wait: a Special Report on Children and Youth Displaced by Typhoon Yolanda

JUNE 25, 2014



More than seven months ago, Typhoon Yolanda made landfall in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. It traversed more than nine provinces, affecting a total of 14 million people; six million of them were children.

In sudden-onset natural disasters, children and youth¹ face immediate and obvious risks like death, injury, illness, and separation from families. Once initial life-saving activities have concluded, however, new and more insidious risks emerge if causal factors, like displacement, are not quickly addressed. These risks include increased poverty, interruption of education, exploitation and disruption to social safety nets and supportive family structures.²

Now, more than 7 months after Yolanda, close to 6000 families remain displaced and this prolonged displacement is threatening to impede recovery. Accordingly, Save the Children is calling on:

1. The Government of the Philippines (and local and provincial governments) to move more quickly to provide safe, permanent shelter solutions for displaced people; and
2. All humanitarian actors and donors working in the Philippines to ensure children and youth displaced by Yolanda receive increased and specialized support.

Yolanda Displacement Site Snapshot

Evacuation Centers: Two evacuation centers are still operating in the Yolanda-affected areas. They house 1,862 persons, and are located in schools.

Tent Cities: Tent cities are still serving as transitional housing sites for many of the Yolanda displaced. The number of people living in these sites actually increased from 333 persons in December 2013 to 6,297 in April 2014.

Bunkhouses: Bunkhouses are multi-family row houses provided by the government. There are 18,289 persons in 47 bunkhouses in Regions VI and VIII. Region VIII houses a majority of the bunkhouses (45), which are home to 17,499 individuals.

From the DSWD Report: The Evolving Picture of Displacement in the Wake of Typhoon Haiyan: an Evidence Based Overview (2014).

¹ In the Philippines, “youth” generally includes those aged 14-15 years old and can extend up to age 30 in some cases. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

² Save the Children, Plan International, UNICEF, World Vision, “After Yolanda: What Children, Think, Need and Recommend,” (2013).

Summary Recommendations³

- Government agencies should make immediate physical improvements to government-run transitional housing sites including the provision of higher quality covered living space, improved water and sanitation facilities and fire-safety enhancements.
- All actors should prioritize interventions targeted at children and youth living in displacement sites including, but not limited to, greater utilization of Child Friendly Spaces, enhancement of security measures and robust behavior change campaigns (like the recent “Back to Learning” campaign).
- All actors should ensure careful and consistent communications/consultations with displaced populations about resettlement options and timelines. Private actors should be coordinating closely with appropriate government agencies in all aspects of the recovery but particularly in regards to resettlement-focused activities.
- The national government should move more expeditiously to release a master rehabilitation plan so that displaced populations and other affected people can better understand where their priorities and needs fit within the whole.
- Because financial constraints are closely linked with school drops outs, all actors should be looking for ways to help meet additional school-related costs, such as transportation and school supplies, for affected populations, especially ones who are still displaced.
- Existing evacuation centers in schools or on school grounds should be transitioned immediately using, where needed, some of the alternative solutions detailed below.
- The Department of Education should quickly lead a thorough review of existing guidelines on disaster management, as they apply to the educational system in the Philippines, (especially the use of schools as evacuation centers) so as to incorporate lessons-learned from Yolanda into future emergency responses.

Displacement in Yolanda-affected Areas

Displacement figures are gradually decreasing but they are not going down fast enough for the children and youth still in transitional housing. Although there was a sharp decline in the number of displacement sites⁴ during the first months of the response, this was followed by a significant increase over the first quarter of 2014. A recent Department of Social Welfare and Development report attributes the increase to the transfer of people from “unsafe areas” to newly erected displacement sites.

³ More detailed recommendations are set forth at the end of the report.

⁴ Displacement sites are classified into evacuation centers, transitional sites that include bunkhouses and tent cities, and spontaneous settlements.

Data from April 28, 2014 showed there were still 5,830 families (representing more than 26,000 individuals) in the Yolanda displacement sites.⁵ The majority of these are in Tacloban which, at time of writing, hosted some 3,646 displaced families.⁶

Living Conditions in Displacement Sites

Child safety and child protection issues common to any emergency on the scale of Yolanda are, in this instance, being exacerbated by the hazardous and uncertain living conditions characteristic of most, if not all, the Yolanda displacement sites.

As indicated above, many displaced families remain housed in tent cities. While tents provide some limited shelter and are commonly used in the aftermath of a large scale disaster, they do not provide adequate security or protection against the elements on a long term basis. Save the Children interviews with parents indicate that poorly ventilated tents are particularly difficult for children with chronic ailments such as asthma.⁷

Likewise, water, sanitation and hygiene services across all of the displacement sites are inadequate. Twenty-seven percent of the displacement sites exceed the recommended ratio of 20 individuals per latrine.⁸ The number of sites with drainage problems has increased from 19% to 29%⁹ and these numbers will continue to go up in the coming rainy season unless course corrections are made now.

Overflowing septic tanks are a common problem among all of the bunkhouses in Tacloban City.¹⁰ Siphoning the tanks takes time and resources that camp managers say they are hard pressed to find. Moreover, managers say that once a septic tank overflows they can only seal off the affected areas until assistance arrives.¹¹

Most latrines are located a safe distance from the settlements and a majority have locks on the inside,¹² but lighting is an issue in too many of the sites. Only 37.9% of the latrines and bathrooms are well lit, and only 18.2% of them have well-lit paths to access them.¹³ Bad lighting in latrines and on paths can pose a serious threat to the security of children and young girls, particularly at night time. Some of the bunkhouses are also unfenced leaving residence with little, if any, protection from trespassers.

Generators have been provided in some evacuation centers to provide artificial lighting, however, the free fuel that comes with these generators is not sufficient to keep the lights running throughout the night.¹⁴ In other cases, cables provided are not long or sturdy enough to service areas located some distance from the generators.¹⁵

⁵ Department of Social Welfare and Development, International Organization for Migration, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, SAS, "The Evolving Picture of Displacement in the Wake of Typhoon Haiyan: An Evidence Based Overview," (2014), last modified, June 3, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The-Evolving-Picture-of-Displacement-in-the-Wake-of-Typhoon-Haiyan.pdf>, p. 44

⁶ Ibid, p. 26

⁷ Based on Save the Children visit to and interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

⁸ As of April 28, 2014. Ibid, p. 35

⁹ As of April 28, 2014. Ibid

¹⁰ Based on Save the Children visit to and interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² As of April 28, 2014. Between mid-February and April 2014. Department of Social Welfare and Development, International Organization for Migration, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, SAS, "The Evolving Picture of Displacement in the Wake of Typhoon Haiyan: An Evidence Based Overview," (2014), last modified, June 3, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The-Evolving-Picture-of-Displacement-in-the-Wake-of-Typhoon-Haiyan.pdf>, p. 36

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Based on Save the Children visit to and interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

¹⁵ Ibid.

As seen in a recent fire in one of the tent cities,¹⁶ lanterns and candles used for lighting also constitute significant safety hazards. Access and escape routes should be identified and communicated in all communal living spaces but the crowded conditions in the displacement sites mean that it would be difficult to implement any evacuation plan in the event of an emergency.

Finally, displaced families, especially those still living in the evacuation centers, want to have other options available so that they can leave the unfavorable living conditions described above as soon as possible, but many of them have lost their homes, or come from areas now identified as no-dwelling/unsafe zones, where rebuilding for residential purposes has been prohibited by the government.¹⁷ They are poor, with limited options, and dependent on the government to provide better, longer-term solutions for them.

Child-focused Programming

Research by the Education Cluster and Child Protection Sub-Cluster indicates that throughout the Yolanda-affected areas, 54% of sample barangays reported children involved in harsh and dangerous labor, with 39% reporting that this has been an increasing problem since Yolanda.¹⁸ Seventy-five percent of barangays reported children working and therefore not able to go to school.¹⁹ In evacuation centers, children are frequently seen peddling food items.

To help counteract exploitation, Child Friendly Spaces have been established in some bunkhouses. Interviews indicate there is a genuine desire on the part of camp management and community leadership to engage children in spite of limited resources.²⁰ And while there has been some increased use of existing child-friendly spaces (from 14.7% to 19.8%), these figures still can and should go higher. Government personnel recently underwent new training related to running and managing child-friendly spaces²¹ and it is hoped that this training will help to boost usage and access of these spaces.

Despite these promising trends, the construction and increased use of Child Friendly Spaces for strategic programming in the displacement sites remains critical. The very nature of temporary collective housing, where there is much time but little to do, requires a higher level of engagement and effort towards young people. Activities targeted at teenagers are in particular short supply and, at present, underage drinking and other negative coping behaviors are blatantly visible in some of the displacement sites.²²

Education and Displacement

Before Yolanda, school dropout rates in both public and private elementary schools for Eastern Visayas (at 8%) were already higher than in other parts of the country.²³ The national average is currently

¹⁶ Gabieta, Joey. "Woman, 6 kids survived typhoon's wrath, but die in fire at evacuation site," *Inquirer*. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/606157/five-children-die-in-leyte-tent-city-fire>, May 29, 2014

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Global Protection Cluster and Global Education Cluster, "Key Findings from Joint Assessment Phase 1 –Key Informant Interviews, Child Protection and Education Cluster Joint Assessment of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) Response (Affected Municipalities in the Philippines Region VI and Region VIII, March-April 2014)," last modified, May 26, 2014,

https://philippines.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/philippines.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/Phase%201%20Key%20Findings%202%20Pager%20FINAL%20to%20circulate%20copy_0.pdf

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Based on Save the Children visit to and interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Save the Children, "See me, ask me, hear me: children's recommendations for recovery three months after Typhoon Haiyan" (2014), p. 3

2.9%.²⁴ And while the return to learning for all children and youth in Yolanda-affected regions is proving to be a challenge, displaced children and youth face additional hardships.

Based on focus group discussions conducted with out-of-school youth in Yolanda-affected areas, financial constraints are one of the primary inhibitors standing between children and youth and their return to school. Participants gave some of the reasons why they feel they cannot attend school as poverty (some admitted they were ashamed to go to school without materials, while others said they could not pay costs such as transportation), absence of parental interest/financial resources in supporting their education, the need to care for siblings and/or to earn income to support the family.²⁵

For children and youth living in displacement sites, uncertainty about the future further depresses enrolment. DepEd has encouraged students to transfer to schools closest to the displacement sites, but many parents are reportedly hesitant to register their children in these schools because they believe they will be relocating in the near future. Many claim their relocation to permanent housing is imminent, despite the fact that the process of preparing sites for habitation is proving to be slow-moving and complicated (and exacerbated by lack of available land for purchase).²⁶

As of April, there were 325 youth out of school in the three bunkhouses in Tacloban City.²⁷ Across Tacloban (Palo, Tanauan and Tacloban City) there were over 500 out-of-school youth.²⁸

Further compounding this issue is the fact that some schools were still serving as displacement sites more than six months after the storm. In the two schools still being used as evacuation centers in May, temporary partitions were built into the bigger rooms to accommodate evacuees.²⁹ In at least one school, school leadership was planning to evict families in time for the start of the school year; however, the evacuees were still unaware of any relocation plans, making secondary displacement a strong possibility.³⁰

Detailed recommendations

Temporary shelter

The Department of Social Welfare should lead on ensuring immediate structural and operational improvements are made to many of the government-run displacement sites. These improvements include the following:

- Adequate covered living space must be provided to every family. Adequate space is space that ensures privacy, safety and health, while enabling essential household and livelihood activities to take place.³¹
- Water and sanitation facilities need to be quickly improved particularly with regards to the ratio of users to latrines and the frequency with which septic tanks are emptied. Lighting issues connected with the latrines (and other facilities) also need to be promptly addressed.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Based on Save the Children focus group discussion with children in Tacloban conducted from February 19, 2014 to April 4, 2014

²⁶ Based on Save the Children interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

²⁷ This is according to assessments carried out by INTERSOS. CCCM Cluster, "CCCM Cluster Meeting Minutes (April 23, 2014)," last modified, May 26, 2014, http://cccmphilippines.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/140423_TacCCCM_Minutes.pdf

²⁸ This is according to assessments carried out by DSWD and CCCM. Philippines Education Cluster, "Snapshot of Education Needs, Progress and Gaps April 2014," last modified, May 26, 2014,

https://philippines.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Education_Cluster_SNAPSHOT_April2014.pdf

²⁹ Based on Save the Children visit to and interviews in displacement sites (April 29-30, 2014)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The Sphere Project, "Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response," (2011), p. 258

- Shelter designs should maximize ventilation and minimize the entry of direct sunlight.³² For tents, providing a double-skinned roof (i.e., adding a sheet of plastic above the tent) with proper ventilation between the layers may also reduce radiant heat gain. This is particularly important as families living in tent cities face the prospect of staying in them through the next typhoon season.
- Fire and other similar risks must be assessed and mitigation plans put in place. This includes:
 - Providing firebreaks;
 - Providing artificial lighting to prevent households from using light sources that are potential fire hazards (especially where tents are used);
 - Replacing tents with ones made of fire retardant material;³³
 - Designating and disseminating escape routes;³⁴
 - Providing firefighting equipment and safety training at displacement sites.

Permanent Shelter

All government actors need to move more quickly to provide safe, permanent shelter solutions. Where building new structures is impeded by a shortage of suitable land on the open market (or other factors difficult to address quickly) the government will need to explore alternative solutions to large-scale collective relocation including:

- Providing structured programmes for rental support;
- Host family support programs; and/or
- Alternative land tenure support (e.g. rent to buy schemes, and new transitional shelter solutions that consider family preferences for location, dictated by social fabric, education preference for children, and proximity to existing livelihood).

Child-focused programming

Apart from ensuring that children and youth are protected from physical dangers in displacement sites, DSWD and the relevant municipal governments must also ensure they are protected from physical violence, sexual violence, psychosocial distress, and illegal child labor. To this end:

- Child friendly spaces can, and should be, utilized as portals for information on self-protection, hygiene awareness, and life skills development. Robust programming for children in these spaces should be a top priority to counteract boredom and help meet psycho-social needs.
- “Lost and Found Centres” should be created in bigger displacement sites to ensure that small children who wander from home can be easily located.
- Specialized, age-appropriate support programming should be provided for youth living in displacement sites who need to find healthy, productive ways to spend free time. Separate “youth friendly sites” should be considered and youth should be given substantial opportunities to help plan and implement programming in them.

³² Ibid, p. 260

³³ UNHCR, “UNHCR Core Relief Items Catalogue,” 2012

³⁴ The Sphere Project, “Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response,” (2011), p. 256

Communication and Coordination

All actors need to redouble efforts to communicate more regularly and proactively with displaced families concerning the timeline for their transfer and provision of services. Flyers and other printed communications should be easy to understand, direct, and available in the local language.

DSWD should ensure thorough and inclusive consultation with displaced families about their needs and wants relative to relocation. These consultations should include children and should explore a range of resettlement options and timelines for families and individuals to consider.

All parts of the national government should move more expeditiously to complete and publicly communicate a “master plan” for Yolanda reconstruction. Communities want to know what will happen to them tomorrow as well as how they fit into the bigger picture.

Private actors (non-governmental organizations, companies and individuals) engaged in rehabilitation and reconstruction should be coordinating with both national and local government agencies concerning all aspects of their programming but particularly in regards to any resettlement-focused activities.

Education

DepEd should make the collection and compilation of school registration and attendance data (including data specific to displaced populations) a top priority in order to allow them to identify emerging issues related to school attendance early on.

Both government and non-governmental agencies working in Yolanda-affected areas should do everything necessary to ensure that secondary school-related costs such as transportation and school supplies are met. School return can also be incentivized through the implementation of feeding programs and other special initiatives and campaigns.

DSWD and DepEd will need to coordinate more closely to identify and deal with the challenges presently facing educational facilities doubling as temporary settlements. The country’s experience with Typhoon Yolanda presents an excellent opportunity for the DepEd, in particular, to lead a thorough review of existing guidelines on disaster risk reduction and response as it applies to the education sector. Efforts must be undertaken to minimize negative impacts to both the school community and the displaced community.

About Save the Children

Save the Children is an independent children's rights organization, with members in 29 countries and operation programs in more than 120. We fight for children's rights and deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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