

RED International's partner in the Philippines is OM Philippines, a faith based organisation which works with churches in the Philippines on a wide variety of training programmes.

One of the areas they work is delivering training on disaster preparedness and mitigation. They had given this training to members of churches on Cebu a few months before Typhoon Haiyan Struck. This meant that they had a team of trained partners ready to respond after the typhoon hit.

This is a report from them looking back over the last year from December 2014.

## **Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) Relief and Re-Development – OM Philippines**

### **THE YEAR THAT WAS...**

The 8<sup>th</sup> of November, the Year 2013... made history as Super Typhoon Yolanda with international name Haiyan claimed more than 7,350 lives as it swept Tacloban City and nearby towns and leaving thousands of survivors mourning for the loss of their mothers, fathers, children, neighbours, co-workers, best friends, family, and friends alike without homes and livelihood.

It is at that fateful time when people converged, regardless of race and religious beliefs to work together in an overwhelming display of unity and generosity at the face of tragedy.

And so a year after the devastating Typhoon Yolanda, OM Philippines revisits the work in Medellin, Cebu and Tacloban City in an effort to capture God's work in and through OM Philippines with the help and partnership of its International Network. We look back at the year that was.

OM Philippines office in Cebu became its Emergency Operation Centre that received donations in cash or in kind and prepared their staff for Trauma counselling and debriefing specially amongst children. OM Philippines staff knew they were in for a long haul as Sally Ababa (Field leader) shared *"It would have been easy—and tempting—to spend all of the money that came in on mass distributions... We have chosen instead to build up local capacity to deal with the emergency over the next months and years. The big NGOs come and go. They are essential but their help is short-term. OM's goal is long-term: that no one in the Philippines [not just in areas in the news] will die because of hunger and thirst. Relief and development is not a sprint, it's a marathon."*

OM Philippines is just one of the many NGOs that worked alongside the local government and the Churches in Tacloban City and Northern Cebu. Seeing the chaos in the network of people helping and wanting help, they worked on connecting everyone through a hub they called R8 that hopes to leverage the needs and the people who can become point persons in different areas. R8 stands for Relief, Restore, Rehabilitate, Renew, Retreat, Rebuild, Refresh, Regain. *"There is a felt need to help churches re-group themselves in order to host/accommodate relief efforts initiated by faith-based organisations, most of the relief work there is being carried by big international NGOs and there is a high probability that smaller churches and communities can be neglected in the process. We hope to help fill the gaps"* added Sally.

Through the days and months that followed after Yolanda struck Philippines, OM Philippines made sure they kept their focus on long-term development projects that centres on building relationship amongst the people in the community.

## BUCKETS OF JOY

On Tuesday, 24 December 2013, OM Philippines-Cebu team witnessed the overflowing joy of about 135 families when they conducted two Christmas parties and distributed Christmas food packages in two communities in the typhoon-affected area of Daanbantayan on the northern tip of Cebu province.

In partnership with the Community Outreach Centre Church in Northern Cebu, OM Philippine staff and workers prepared a program with games, action songs, a short skit, a Christmas message and prayer. Then each of the children, as well as their parents, received a piece of cake, an apple, an ice cream and juice.

After the program, the families were asked to claim their Christmas food package at the Community Outreach Centre Church. Put together according to Filipino Christmas custom, the gift contained spaghetti, tomato sauce, meat sauce, cheese, fruit salad, cream, condense milk, Milo, coffee, fruit juice, sliced bread, powder milk, apples and oranges. All of this was presented in a washbasin and decorated with a red ribbon.

*"God has allowed the residents of these communities to experience something of the joy of Christmas despite all the destruction they went through a few weeks ago,"* said Richard Derrer from OM Philippines-Cebu.

*"Many had not expected such a special package,"* continued Sally, *"something different from the usual relief goods they had received over the past month. Many expressed how grateful they were to receive such a special gift, especially those who have come from remote places. Oftentimes, they had not been included in relief distribution because of the distance and inaccessibility of their places. For the team to take extra effort to come and be part of their community in celebrating their Christmas in such a special way was something they would not forget."*



In December 2013, the team distributed 1,200 Christmas food packs and held Christmas parties in 13 churches and communities reaching out to more than 15000 people.

One of the exhilarating challenges that OM Philippines faced this year was the huge donation of brand new clothing, shoes and food packs that were to be distributed to Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) survivors. With the help of partners and volunteers, OM Philippines was able to reach affected communities North Cebu, Leyte, Palawan and Samar in 3 waves of distribution.



The team, though tired and sleepless, had been comforted by the inexpressible joy of seeing the people so happy and thankful for the blessings they have received.

## Rebuilding Hopes

By August of 2014 year, OM Philippines' was ready to implement the Rebuilding Project using the University of San Carlos (USC) Cebu City design. Plans for Tindog Housing Project in Northern Cebu were carried on by short-termers and volunteers from different countries offering support to Jim Foss [an American who has worked in the Philippines for the past 14 years and himself an experienced construction worker of 35 years] who heads the project alongside seven local carpenters and seven local labourers who have been hired for the project.



The construction of 20 homes for 20 beneficiaries have been completed and been occupied by families, whose homes had been destroyed.

The project has since generated a buzz in the town, as international volunteers mingles with the local workers, the beneficiaries and also within the community.



JV SALADAGA and ARNEL CABALLES – are just two of the paid workers who enjoy their working relationship with Kuya Jim and the team because they walk their talk. Unlike other works they did before, this allowed them to see the joy in the eyes of the beneficiaries upon receiving their finished home. This gives them feelings of fulfilment and hope.



CELERINA SEGUMLA, 67 years old and JOY SANICO, 31 years old both lost their homes to Typhoon Yolanda giving them and their family sleepless nights each time it rains. They were 2 of the 20 beneficiaries whom the community has chosen themselves.

NANAY CELERINA recalls the day when her new home was turned over to her, she was teary eyed and at this time still speechless. Her new home have allowed her and her grandchildren the peace of sleeping through the storm.



JOY SANICO on the other hand together with her daughter and husband who works as a family driver in Manila to augment the family income and who has yet to see their new home is very much excited to spend their first Christmas in their new home sweet home.



## A YEAR AFTER YOLANDA

Exactly a year after Typhoon Yolanda that hit Tacloban and nearby towns, the Philippines and the world commemorate this fateful day at the Mass Grave site of Holy Cross Memorial Park, remembering the people, the international workers and the many experiences that made the Filipino people stronger and more resilient. This day that will forever be etched in the hearts of men and women, child and old alike.

In a speech delivered by Mayor Alfred Romualdez during the program, the mayor remarks, “They say that the pain of losing loved ones never goes away, we just learn to live with it. But we take comfort that every one of us who survived that storm, share this pain together. With our faith in God and in one another, together we can transform our pain and suffering into strength, motivation and inspiration for a better tomorrow to honour and give meaning to the thousands of lives lost... Now is the time for us to rise up and work for the future of our children and our city.”

It has been a year yet every time Typhoon Yolanda pop up in any conversation, it never fails to bring tears in the eyes of the survivors, bearing in mind that for most of the survivors this is their first time to actually grieve their loss because the past year they were themselves quite occupied in order to survive the aftermath of Yolanda.

The rows of countless of white crosses at the grave site is a grim reminder of what Yolanda left and one of them is Kuya Cesar Movella, a Pedi-cab driver from San Jose, Tacloban. He lost his wife, his only son, his father, his brother and family. Gazing at the 6 white crosses in front of him representing those lost loved ones, he sits still to make sure the lighted candles remains lighted.



His countenance looks so heavy and worn out, and one can sense his deep longing for someone to just be beside him. His was a picture of what Mother Theresa quoted saying, “Loneliness is the most terrible poverty.”

“It is our prayer that our partner Church in San Jose will be able to come alongside him especially on the coming yuletide season. “ – Lita (OMP staff)



One year after Yolanda, Vice Mayor Jerry “Sambo” Yaokasin, also the first contact person of OM Philippines who paved the way of OM’s involvement in Relief work in the area, gave us a general update of where Tacloban is now. According to him that generally the economy is back with 1000 new businesses opening up. Relocation of informal settlers is still ongoing. The needs are still massive, especially in the area of livelihood, reconstruction and psycho-social de-briefing. Many are still hurting and disorientated. Volunteers are still encouraged to come as most of the survivors just need someone who would listen to them.



Being a former pastor himself allowed him to see the good things that came with Typhoon Yolanda like *“for one my church who is very conservative and exclusive has opened up to Mission agencies. The church must learn its role so that it can set the captives free and be compassionate. We have to be there at the forefront... I am thankful that when the relief was gone, the Christians stayed.”*

*“We are starting to hope again, to rise again and see the future. We have learnt to be thankful and grateful.”* – Hon. Jerry “Sambo” Yaokasin, Vice Mayor – Tacloban

OM Philippines is privileged to be the first team to open and clean up the church of Vice-Mayor Yaokasin three weeks after the typhoon. OM Philippines also help facilitate the restarting of the different ministries of the church among the children and youth.

## **WHAT’S NEXT?**

Gerry Rizon, team leader for OM Cebu and currently in charge of OMPs Relief and Development shared with us some of the Livelihood that was already provided to the survivors.

They have commissioned our Social Workers’ interns to do an extensive community profiling in the village where they built houses and preliminary findings are: malnutrition of kids, WASH (Water and sanitation, hygiene needs) for lack of latrines, lack of livelihood alternatives and shelter.

Thus, working with some local government officials, they are working on how we could collaborate with them in terms of feeding as well as extending EPIC Solution Training for some basic entrepreneurial skills and investments.

Livelihood support so far

- In Palawan A fishing boat machine given for Badjao fisherman
- Given cash loans for micro-finance to one of the EPIC solution participant in Kinatarkan.
- In Bohol, 3 turtle machine (kuliglig) to be used in farming.
- In Cebu, introduced FAITH “Food Always In the Table” GARDEN among the farmers giving them 3700 Tomato seedlings to start with.

Upon completion of the 20 homes in Medellin, Cebu – the team in Cebu will do an assessment of the project, and evaluate the program. They will also need to hire a new set of workers for the project.

And as the community prepares for the Christmas season 2014, OM Philippines wishes to thank all of you who have responded to our call for help sharing with us your hard earned money and prayers allowing us to fulfil our mandate to be of service, transforming lives and communities.