



## Local leadership and community matter: Establishing a transit station for exiting disaster survivors



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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experience of a municipality in the Philippines which became a transient station for disaster survivors seeking to move out of the area heavily affected by the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan-TY Surge. More specifically, it aims to examine the driving factors enabling the local government to provide relief services and explores the role of transport system in ensuring the mobility of people after a disaster. After typhoon Haiyan, there was a sudden surge of survivors moving to areas where sea transportation is available. One such area is the Municipality of Hilongos. The presence of transient survivors in the municipality moved its local government to provide relief assistance without prior preparations. The experience of Hilongos offers several insights regarding the nature of disaster spillover effects and the potential role of a nearby local government in providing assistance to areas stricken by a disaster. It also highlights the role of the transport sector in providing services during emergency disaster situation. Data for this paper were culled from the secondary data and key informant interviews with government officials as well as an FGD with the Quick Response Team of Hilongos Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Office. The experience of the local government of Hilongos suggests the need to craft a holistic, systemic, and collaborative approach in dealing with disaster-related effects or outcomes.

### 1. Introduction

Neighboring cities and towns play a crucial role in providing relief services to transient survivors who come from disaster-affected areas. Problems may arise, however, when the neighboring areas are not well prepared nor equipped with the resources needed to respond to such calls. Nonetheless, regardless of the level of preparations made, it is interesting to examine the factors that moved neighboring cities and towns less affected by calamity to assist disaster survivors from other municipalities within the context of the absence of policy instruments that would require them to do so.

One crucial issue in disaster management is people's mobility and transportation concerns. In fact, the transportation sector plays a critical role in pre-disaster evacuation and post-disaster recovery [2]. Movements of people before and after a disaster may be facilitated or hindered by the availability or absence thereof of transportation. While it is recognized that transportation is important during and after disaster, little research attention, however, has been given to the lack of it as well as its effects on the lives of the survivors. Moreover, this particular sector is rarely and not fully integrated in disaster management planning and strategies. For instance, issues such as transporting people

without adequate vehicles and shipping vessels are hardly addressed in disaster management plans. As a result, when a disaster strikes, inefficiency occurs and risks are not mitigated [11]. Hence, this case study will hopefully generate interest not only among those in academe but also in the government, and help understand the potential role of the transportation sector in disaster management.

### 2. DRRM Governance in the Philippines

The current national disaster response approach adopted by the Philippine government is two-tiered. At the national government level, response is tailored to augment operations at the local level when local government units (LGUs) are still able to carry out their mandate. Under this approach, the national government assists LGUs depending on the latter's request. The second response is the national government's assumption of functions when LGUs are not able to carry out their duties and responsibilities following a disaster.

Management of disaster principally starts at the level of the local government, owing to the decentralized system embedded in the Local Government Code (LGC). LGUs are deemed as "first disaster responders." Despite decentralization, though, the national government is

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nevertheless still mandated to provide technical assistance, resources, and other forms of disaster-related interventions to help LGUs under stress to cope with the disaster impacts.

The current plan – the 2011–2028 National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan – however hardly mentions the role of the transportation sector in general and the maritime transportation sector in particular in disaster response [8]. In fact, the Plan only mentions the role of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in providing sea vessels for mass transportation. The role of the Philippine Ports Authority is limited to providing information regarding hindrances and obstacles to vessel navigation. The Plan also fails to incorporate the role of the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina), the agency responsible for managing sea transportation, in disaster management. While the said Plan makes mention of the role of airport authorities, there is no mention of seaport authorities.

Meanwhile, at the LGU level, the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (MDRRM) Office of Hilongos is headed by the mayor as the chairperson and the vice mayor as the vice-chairperson. The MDRRM Council consists of 31 members and is divided into different divisions, namely, the Communication and Warning/RDANA Service Team, Transportation Service Team, Rescue and Evacuation Service Team, Relief and Rehabilitation Service Team, Medical and Health Service Team, Public Safety Service Team, Camp Management Service Team, and Damage Control and Engineering Service Team.

To deal with and respond to disasters, the municipality of Hilongos has several local policies relating to disaster management. One policy relates to the local ordinance (No. 2013-03) that mandates the implementation of forced evacuation among its constituents, especially those in the coastal barangays, when needed. Another local ordinance is an agreement between the LGU and local business establishments allowing the former to procure goods (for relief operations) without having to pay immediately. The municipality likewise has a list of identified individuals who voluntarily offer their transportation vehicles during disasters.

### 3. Importance of transportation in disaster risk reduction management efforts

The transportation sector is an essential element of disaster management. It carries people and goods from one place to another during and after a disaster [12]. The vital role of transportation is best exemplified by the case of the UPS Foundation, which offered logistics services when Hurricane Katrina hit the United States in 2005. The company provided assistance in terms of inventory management, commodity tracking, warehousing, and transportation of relief goods, ensuring efficient and rapid disaster response [3].

Apart from the manifest function of transportation (moving people or goods from one place to another), the availability of transportation after a disaster also provides psychological relief among survivors [13]. After a disaster, survivors or victims may develop a sense of loss as a result of the disruption of normal routines and conditions. Loss of security, safety, jobs, and transportation, among others, could potentially affect the mental functioning of disaster survivors. The mere presence of basic services may therefore somehow provide some sense of hope.

The ease of movement of goods and people is very dependent on transportation sector resiliency. Amdal and Swigart [2] define this concept as “a system's ability to function before, during and after major disruptions through reliance upon multiple mobility options. The importance of a resilient transportation system becomes more apparent during disasters where multiple options for mobility are necessary for both passenger and goods movement due to the potential loss of one or more modes.”

The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) in the United States, for example, played a crucial role in providing services to people after Katrina. In fact, the agency was very well integrated into the disaster management operations.

The agency ensured transportation in 17 locations for evacuees' pick-up. Even prior to the disaster, the RTA had already come up with a list of volunteer owners who were willing to offer their vehicles for transport use, especially for those needing immediate medical attention [2].

The US Maritime Administration of the Department of Transportation also played a major role in post-disaster management. The National Defense Ready Reserve Fleet vessels were used as base of operations in New Orleans. The deployment of the vessels was instrumental to the efficient functioning of emergency services in a post-disaster situation. The vessels likewise facilitated the transport of food and provided shelter to post-disaster workers [2].

In a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) workshop conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation [15] Federal Highway Administration, the participants identified coastal and military ferries and private water vessels such as dinner cruise ships as crucial in emergency operations [14]. In the United States, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) is also given a crucial role in disaster response and recovery in that it is expected, among other things, to operate active and reserve vessels to respond to transportation requirements.

### 4. Role of transient areas during and after disaster

Areas with sea and air ports serve as transient spaces by default, as they provide access to area movements of people inside and outside of a specific territory. However, any disaster can potentially harm the operations of ports, thereby affecting not just movements of people but of goods as well. In the process, this could potentially harm the economic status of disaster-affected areas. The report of Liu and Lam [7] describes the case of the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan wherein disruptions of operations in the seaports in the area benefited other ports in proximity to the area. This situation shows the need for ports to develop a plan in the event that natural disasters occur in nearby ports.

The Kobe emergency report reads, “Disruptions in port can have a wide range of potential negative impact on its transportation networks, it also sometimes benefit other ports in close proximity. The aftermath of the 1995 earthquake saw traffic flows in the port of Kobe redirected to nearby hub ports such as Busan, Shanghai and Kaohsiung, some of which (referring to cargo companies) never returned even long after the cargo-handling capacity was restored (in Kobe)” [5].

The study that this particular paper was based on is a follow-up of an earlier research on the aftermath of Yolanda (internationally coded as Haiyan). The earlier research provided insights on the exodus of typhoon Yolanda survivors to neighboring areas such as Ormoc and Hilongos in order to access sea transportation. The anecdotal evidence was supported by data from the Philippine Ports Authority which revealed that there was a sudden surge of inbound and outbound passengers. The exodus of survivors to Hilongos necessitated its LGU to provide emergency services of its own volition.

This paper therefore aims to document such kind of LGU experiences. More specifically, it looks into the driving factors enabling the local government such as the locality of Hilongos in providing relief services to disaster survivors. In addition, it explores the role of the transport system in ensuring the mobility of people after disaster.

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reported reasons of displaced persons for leaving their respective areas as a result of the typhoon?
2. What are the mechanisms employed by the LGU in providing relief services to transient survivors and in mobilizing local resources?
3. What are the factors that surround the LGU's decision to offer transit and shelter relief services to people who decided to leave the disaster-stricken areas?

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