

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO MILENYO

If not for the early warning signals from the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAG-ASA), damage to life and property from tropical storm Milenyo could have been greater.

Still, Milenyo is the worst typhoon to hit the Philippines in a decade, tearing down billboards, ripping off roofs and trees, cutting off electricity, and bringing floods to various areas. Due to havoc it created, on September 28, 2006, a state of calamity was declared in Metro Manila, Bicol, Cavite, Bataan, Antique, San Roque, Northern Samar, and other areas. The government also ordered the suspension of all classes at all levels as well as closed government agencies for two days in Metro Manila.

Typhoon Xangsane, Milenyo's international name, affected seven regions, nine provinces, 31 cities, 179 municipalities, and 2,446 barangays. Property damage nationwide was estimated at PhP2.9 billion according to the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC). Of this amount, damage to agriculture stood at PhP1.8 billion, school buildings at PhP118 million, and infrastructure, PhP970 million.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary and National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Director-General Romulo L. Neri said that damage to agricultural crops and

infrastructure will impact on gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the last quarter of the year. However, he expects positive effects once reconstruction efforts start. "It is important that government fasttrack its infrastructure program to bring about the stimulative effects of rebuilding spending," he said.

The disruption of power supply due to Milenyo also created an impact on the economy in terms of lost productivity. Based on data provided by the Department of Energy, NEDA estimated power output loss during the typhoon is at 0.7 percent or a decline of 0.0033 percentage points of GDP for 2006. This translates to some PhP1.8 billion in foregone revenues.

The Bicol region was one of the worst hit by this typhoon. The Department of Agriculture (DA), revealed that around 34,554 farmers were affected in the region. Around 38,279.54 hectares of land planted to palay, corn, vegetables, fruit trees and other crops were destroyed resulting in PhP521 million in losses, as of September 30, 2006.

Bicol covers 19 percent of the country's total lands planted with coconut and ranks sixth in the whole country in terms of production value. According to NEDA's regional office, about 50 percent of existing coconut areas in the region were variably damaged.



To provide alternative livelihoods for affected coconut farmers, there is a need to integrate poultry/livestock and/or intercropping. Among the potential commodities for the region include goats, and sheeps; high value crops such as banana, cassava and legumes; and tilapia and carp culture.

Meanwhile, damage to roads, buildings, bridges and other infrastructure facilities in Bicol was estimated at around PhP800 million. School buildings worth PhP318 million were also destroyed.

Government Response

To help the victims of typhoon Milenyo, the government allotted a total of PhP9.4 million for relief assistance, according to NDCC. This came from the following agencies: Department of Social Welfare and Development or DSWD (PhP5.36 million); local government units or LGUs (PhP1.47 million); nongovernment organizations or NGOs (PhP83,300.00); and NDCC (PhP2.48 million). On the other hand, standby resources total PhP51.5 million and will come from the National Resource Operations Center and DSWD field offices.

About PhP1.3 billion is being used to rehabilitate damaged school buildings nationwide. This will come from the PhP46.43 billion supplemental budget, according to Department of Budget and Management Secretary Rolando Andaya, Jr. The PhP1.3 billion is part of the Department of Education's share of PhP9.6 billion from the PhP46.4 billion supplemental budget for this year which was recently approved by the Congress.

Disaster Mitigation through the MTPDP

The government shall pursue certain activities to prevent loss of lives and properties in the country due to natural disasters such as typhoons and landslides. Under the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP), 2004-2010, the following activities include: (a) integration of disaster preparedness and management strategy in development planning process through periodic risk assessments, updating of respective land use policies, and institutionalization of community-based mechanisms; (b) conduct of soil stability measures for landslide-vulnerable areas; (c) geo-hazard mapping; and (d) capacity building and awareness on disaster risk management among local officials and concerned national government agencies.

Moreover, adequate flood control and drainage facilities in all flood/disaster prone areas shall be built, alongside improvement and repair of existing facilities. The government will also improve the conveyance capacities of existing river channel floodways, drainage canals and esteros through dredging/desilting, riverbank protection, relocation of informal settlers, proper disposal of garbage, and efficient maintenance in coordination with the LGUs.

The NEDA has also been advocating for the organization of large scale community-based and environmentally friendly program for the crop and fishery intensification and diversification, especially of high-value and non-traditional agricultural commodities, as well as the promotion of non-farm enterprises in agribusiness lands to increase and stabilize rural income.

Getting READY with Disaster

The NDCC has put in place the Hazards Mapping and Assessment for Effective Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (READY) project in order to address the problem on disaster risk management (DRM). This project started in June 2006 and will end in May 2010 and is being funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

READY promotes preparedness against national disaster by serving as platform to coordinate donors and activities on disaster risk reduction. This project was inspired by the Real, Infanta, and Nakar (REINA) project in 2005 in the aftermath of the 2004 flashfloods and landslides that claimed many lives and destroyed properties, agricultural and residential lands in Quezon province.

The READY project will cover 27 high risks provinces that include Surigao del Sur and del Norte, Leyte, Cavite, Pampanga, Benquet, among others. It aims to: (a) institutionalize and standardize DRM measures and processes in the Philippines at the national level; (b) empower the most vulnerable communities and cities to prepare DRM plans at the community level; and (c) develop a systematic approach to community-based DRM.

Another project initiated by the Philippine government is the multihazard mapping that will cover 16 provinces in the country. This is designed to assist the LGUs in making informed decisions in adapting DRM measures for disaster-prone communities. This project include equipment acquisition, aerial photography/base map production, capacity building, among others. Among the provinces covered under this project are Pangasinan, Batanes, Bulacan, Quezon, Cebu, Mt. Province, and Lanao del Sur. This project will be implemented from 2006 until 2008.

Last year, geohazard assessment and mapping of priority areas such as Pampanga River Basin, Bicol River Basin, and the provinces of Aurora, Quezon and Cebu were carried out to identify the sites prone to geologic hazards such as flooding, landslides, subsidence and liquefaction and warn local governments of potential dangers. Based on the 2005 Socioeconomic Report, at least one quadrangle map was generated in 14 regions nationwide. With the frequent occurrences of natural disasters in various areas in the country, however, there is a need to conduct capacity building initiatives for the LGUs in geohazard assessment and dissemination of information.
