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CHALLENGES OF URBAN DISASTER RESPONSE-RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT AS STRATEGY

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	It is a widely cited fact that over half of the human population today lives in cities and urban dwellings. The implications of this shift in the 20th century are wide ranging, complex and have significance for all kinds of actors, not just the ones involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance. The response to disaster led crises has completely reformed as the precise definition of disasters and the vulnerabilities it leads to, have blurred in the recent past. As Bankoff (2006) notes, By the 1980's, it was apparent in both the developed and the developing world that to be "at risk" was not just a question of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and of regarding disasters as purely physical happenings requiring largely technological solutions.He explains the importance of the shifting paradigm of disaster response which helps us gain a clear understanding of the complexities of the urban crises. He further explains, Disasters were more properly viewed as primarily the result of human actions, that while hazards are natural, disasters are not. Social systems generate unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others and these inequalities are largely a function of the power relations (class, age, gender and ethnicity amongothers) operative in every society.

INTRODUCTION

As the 21st century witnesses the surge in urban growth and population, we can imply that the human wellbeing in these populations rely vividly upon the complex web of interconnected institutions, infrastructure and information management. Economic activities, opportunities and a desire for better life style have suppressed the idea of sustainable lifestyles, making cities as major accumulator of stresses. Often, we see that any sudden shocks to these dwellings result in social breakdown, physical collapse or economic meltdown. Cases like 1985 earthquakes of Mexico City are examples of a city's own growth playing a major role in its collapse. *Urban growth in developing countriesis frequently haphazard and overwhelming, far exceeding these cities' capacity to plan adequately and control development.* (Meeting the Urban Challenge ADAPTING HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS TO AN URBAN WORLD, 2012) Occurrence of urban disasters exposes the system of its existing weaknesses while bringing new challenges in light. While it has become easier for a city as a whole to provide the basic needs and deliver social services for their populations, the increasing amount of stresses on the infrastructure, economy and social networks bears its own costs. This has led to the emergence of new forms of disasters in an urban scenario in turn leading to more vulnerability.

Urban Vulnerbilities: The argument that is more significant with all its applied practicality is that of an emergence in urban vulnerability in the recent decades. *Cities are also often affected by disasters that occur elsewhere, as massive numbers of impoverished people seek shelter in an already overloaded urban environment* (Egal, 2011).

Historically, the urban growth or urbanisation as we know it today has always been linked to the economic development of its state or region. The urban type of disaster could be translated as the chronic urban emergency occurring out of prolonged or continual display of socio-economic stresses. The dependency on the city's interconnected network of differential functions makes its population susceptible to collapse in case of a disaster with bare minimum coping mechanisms incase of an ill implied design. The socio-economic status of the society plays a significant part in the pre and post disaster stage as well as in assessing the physical and psychological impacts. *The poor are one of the groups most likely to "fall through the cracks" during emergency relief operations* (Colorado State University, 1985) They are more likely to perceive hazards riskier, less likely to prepare for them and lesser likely to respond to the warnings. Not so ironically, they are more likely to die, suffer injuries, more psychological trauma and pose as a challenge during the response, recovery and reconstruction phases of a disaster. The reason why this theory is worth mentioning is because this distinction is particularly highlighted when studied with context to a city and its surroundings.

CASE STUDY

Tacloban, Philippines: The Asia-pacific region is highly vulnerable to disasters or hazards such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Philippines, being one of the fastest urbanizing regions along with recent recurring disasters, isconsidered as one of the most danger-prone country in the world. They play a major role in creating a vulnerable city model, prompting unsustainable and dangerous livelihoods. Prior to the typhoon, Tacloban was the fifth fastest

growing city in the country. It had become the social, economic, transportation and administrative hub for the eastern Visayas region and had been granted the status of *'Highly Urbanized"* region in 2008. The city's geographic location lies in the path of the 20 typhoons that hit the country every year. Windstorms have been recurring and the deadliest hazards. The following illustrations give us a timeline of windstorms in Philippines' history:

and it resulted over 7,000 deaths, leaving more than 4 million people displaced. Estimates of 1.1 million houses were damaged all over Philippines. The overarching challenges in the post disaster relief work were the highly politicized recovery process; many actors involved had dramatically differing approaches, agendas and capacities which resulted in significant tensions and coordination barriers.

It is evident from this timeline that the recent surge of storms and change in climatic conditions in the last 4 decades has been significant. These continual and reoccurring natures of hazards have been major causes of stresses, straining the development process of its several regions. With respect to Tacloban, it is also situated in that part of Leyte is where a "funnel" effect occurs and which tends to invite the strongest storm surges.

Typhoon Haiyan-2013: In November 2013, a super Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as typhoon Yolanda mercilessly destroyed central Philippines. This was the strongest storm ever recorded (at landfall)

The power and electricity were disrupted ensuring no communication to the outside world whatsoever. Debris was piled up three meters (9.8 feet) high along the main roads, making it hard for people to travel. 28 of the city's 136 *barangays* have coasts and lowlands were considered as danger zones which were mostly occupied by informal settlements. Of the 28,734 houses damaged in Tacloban alone, around 10,000 houses belonged to the urban poor. Most of their sources of livelihoods such as fish and produce trading had also been destroyed by the typhoon. *Many of the poor in the area studied were "invisible" until the hurricane hit, living in unmarked homes, on unmapped*

roads, or hidden behind large estates.(Poverty and Disasters in the United States: A Review of Recent Sociological Findings)

Emergency Response Stage: In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, the city's local government faced numerous challenges. Tacloban overstretched staff struggled to deal with the overwhelming influx of internationalhumanitarian response and media. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) declared a Level 3 response triggering a surge of foreign humanitarian expertise into the city. The local governments and staff had varying levels of capacity to deal with the situation as a result, the government and NGO's started working in parallel rather than following the integrated approach. The provision of basic amenities such as water supply, waste management, debris clearance, transportation and electricity were disrupted.

Recovery and Rehabilitation: The city of Tacloban already has a comprehensive Land use plan (CLUP). This resulted in situations such as rapid expansion of a landfill site which had previously been earmarked for closure and consequently a reduction in land available for permanent housing. *"In rural areas the barangay health worker can list down all the needs of the residents in one sitting. In an urban area that is not possible."*Jermaine Bayas, Oxfam. Along with the issues faced by the recovery and response mechanisms in a rural setting, Urban area have to deal with varying needs of the population in the Tacloban city. Priorities to the scale of devastation become an even more difficult task. For example, to deal with individual housing and shelter or address the larger question of infrastructure and planning becomes a dilemma, especially in the country like Philippines where rebuilding mechanisms have not had a scope to develop inspite of the recurring nature of disasters. According to DFID report (DFID-2013 Humanitarian Response to Urban Crises), in case of Tacloban, issues that were highlighted were;

Beneficiary identification: Beneficiary identification was more difficult in Tacloban than in rural municipalities and that it required more detailed and time consuming assessments as the number of households to assess were diverse and migration of the population was left uncertain.

Community engagement: Once beneficiaries had been identified interviewees felt that they were less willing to work together as they didn't know each other and were more socially, economically and culturally diverse. This diversity was also viewed as an opportunity though as communities were felt to be more open to new ideas (such as livelihood opportunities or assistance methods) and more likely to develop their own solutions.

Population movement: Tacloban is a regional centre for education, services and trade. Consequently there was significant population movement prior to the typhoon with the city's official population of 221,000 increasing to more than 1 million when commuters, migrant workers and students were taken into account.

Displacement: Tacloban is well connected to other cities by road, sea and air prior to the typhoon. After the typhoon roads were cleared rapidly and shipping routes began to recover while a network of military aircraft transported relief goods and affected people. The availability of transportation made it easier for people to evacuate from Tacloban to other cities than in rural areas. However this type of displacement was very difficult t to track and support.

Urban Systems in Tacloban and their Challenges: It required a city wide, integrated approach to relief and security as recognising the inter-dependence of systems within the city and between the city and the surrounding region was a more challenging task than coming up with mechanisms to reduce vulnerability in the development phase. The density of the built environment and lack of undeveloped land posed its own threats. Housing aid was particularly a challenge as, *"In Tacloban families live in a much greater variety of locations (city centre infill, peri-urban suburbs, houses built on stilts in the sea) and housing typologies (small sites, multiple stories) built with a greater variety of construction materials and methods."* (DFID-2013

Humanitarian Response to Urban Crises). Many of the affected families lived on land owned by the government or on informal agreements with the landowners. Implementation of a proper system became a major obstacle, further leading to land tenure issues.

Preparedness-formation of regional and national taskforce: Preparedness is has been a particularly important aspect in the urban context as the potential scale of need generated in such a scenario overwhelms the human and material resources of most organisations. This stands true unless they have specific approaches or mechanism in place to access additional resources at short notice. The cluster systems did play an important role in the city's recovery model but apart from them, task forces were set up by the national government to address specific issues like that of rehabilitation. *Task Force Yolanda was activated by the national government at the regional level on 19 November 2013. It was headed by a military general and the Office of Civil Defence functioned as secretariat. Under the task force were sub-task forces that dealt with clearing up the debris, with law and order, food and water, cadaver collection and normalisation.* (IIed, G.Paraagas et. al, 2016)

The formation of the task force TindongTacloban played a key role in the rebuilding phase. *This task force, which mirrors the UN cluster approach for humanitarian coordination, comprised the city mayor as chairperson, the city administrator as vice chairperson and 14 clusters: health, shelter, relief distribution and evacuation centre management and local child protection, solid waste management, normalisation, cadaver retrieval, human resource, education, peace and order, environmental protection, logistics, disaster risk reduction, protection for women and children, and urban planning and rehabilitation* (IIed, G.Paraagas et. al, 2016). The Tacloban Recovery and rehabilitation plan (TRRP) identified the immediate actions andoperational strategies required toward recovery. Since 2013, additional have been conducted to support the plan such as a climate and disaster risk assessment which has been supported by the UN- Habitat.

Rethinking Development as a strategy: It is very necessary to identify the opportunities to develop a framework that leads to resilience building and disaster risk reduction at the same time. To design institutions implementing national and municipal policies in place whose function is to anticipate urbanisation and maximize resilience is one criteria that should be noted in today's rapidly growing urban world. Not just policy implementation but also to ensure the appropriate mechanisms to facilitate regional and national level of coordination in case of these policy formations. Furthermore, reforming the existing institutions in place to the needs of urban anticipated crises is the need for this century to support the city's sustainable and healthy growth. *Research done on donor efforts in urban development suggests some clear shifts in thinking in the international donor community on engagement at the municipal level* (Milbert, 2004). Establishing effective collaborations across all tiers of the government and the international humanitarian aid community is a necessary intervention in the development policy formation for the future decades to come. The urban built environment encompasses the approach of disaster risk reduction and preparedness models. This links it explicitly to development related issues.

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