

RESPONDING TO EL NIÑO



Lessons and Recommendations from the 2015-2016 Crisis



Center for Local and Regional Governance

Policy Brief

September 2016

Dennis G. Dela Torre
Erwin Gaspar A. Alampay, PhD
Authors



National College of Public Administration and Governance
University of the Philippines

RESPONDING TO EL NIÑO:

Lessons and Recommendations from the 2015-2016 Crisis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This policy brief is a product of a research conducted nationwide from January to June 2016 regarding the recent El Niño crisis. This study was funded through a research grant from Oxfam in the Philippines. Inputs were culled from a series of consultations participated in by members of the academe, civil society representatives, and national development partners, government agencies and local government units and people's organizations. The consultations were conducted in Tacloban City on March 18, 2016; Koronadal City on April 7, 2016; and in Quezon City on April 21, 2016. This policy brief was launched and presented in Davao City on August 17, 2016. The discussions were supplemented with additional literature review and desktop research performed by the authors, with El Niño data culled from NEDA and DA available at the time of writing. The following staff from CLRG provided support to this study: Raphael Montes Jr., Prejean Prieto, Maricris delos Santos, Elyzabeth Cureg, Celinia Jamig, Don Jeffrey Quebral, Lourdes Villar, Pauline Bautista, Rebecca Oropilla and John Ermin Francisco. Staff support from Oxfam in the Philippines was provided by Dante Dalabajan, Marie Nunez, Shubert Ciencia, Jermaine Bayas, Lyca Sarenas, Ana Caspe, John Mark Dionson and Airah Cadiogan.

Published September 2016 by the Center for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG), and the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG) of the University of the Philippines-Diliman.



The Center for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG) is a knowledge-based, information-driven and globally competitive institution committed to the promotion and strengthening of capacities and capabilities of local and regional governments for national development and good governance. Established by the University of the Philippines (UP) and Congress as the Local Government Center in 1965, the CLRG is a constituent unit of the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG). The Center has more than 50 years of experience in assisting and empowering local governments through capacity building and extension services. It has pioneered initiatives and continues to evolve with the trends in the local government sector. Pursuing UP's role as the nation's social critic, CLRG helps inform and define the public discourse on local governance reform and related issues.



The National College of Public Administration & Governance (NCPAG) is the country's leading academic institution in providing instruction, research and extension services in public management and public policy. It was established on 15 June 1952, as the Institute of Public Administration, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia. Over the years, NCPAG has actively and consistently pursued a threefold mission: a) instruction, b) research, and c) public service. The NCPAG has expanded the field from an exclusive focus on governmental management to the broader concern of governance for the public interest. It studies not only the role of the bureaucracy but also that of the state and civil society in enhancing public service.

Authors: Dennis G. dela Torre and Erwin Gaspar A. Alampay, PhD

Technical Editor: Dennis G. dela Torre

Layout: Tabularasa Writing & Editing Co.

Photo Credits: Oxfam in the Philippines, CLRG Documentation Team and Pauline Bautista

with support from Oxfam



The Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 93 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. In the Philippines, we work with poor people to sustain their livelihoods, and reduce their risks to natural and human-made disasters. We strive to enable poor people to have a voice in economic issues affecting them and we support poor women as they lead in transforming unequal social and economic relations

CONTENTS

01 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

02 SUMMARY

05 IMPACTS OF EL NIÑO

07 SLOW RESPONSE TO SLOW ONSET CLIMATE EVENTS

09 INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM UNDER
CC AND DRR LAWS

10 EL NIÑO AND THE ELECTIONS

11 LONG-TERM REHABILITATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE
ADAPTATION FINANCE

Responding to El Niño:

Lessons and Recommendations from the 2015-2016 Crisis

SUMMARY

The 2015-2016 El Niño is still causing devastating impacts across the globe and has been projected to be the worst recorded in human history. In the Philippines, evidence from the ground slowly but surely revealed how devastating this El Niño cycle has been, with agricultural losses alone amounting to Php 15.2 billion (325 million US\$)

Because the peak of the recent El Niño coincided with the campaign period of the national and sub-national elections, impacts were further aggravated by complications arising from the 'election ban', which effectively hindered local authorities from responding to the needs of affected communities.

While the Climate Change Act (RA 9729, as amended) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (RA 10121) both mandate government to reduce the risk of climate impacts through anticipatory actions, the recent experience has demonstrated that current policies are geared more towards addressing rapid onset emergencies, such as typhoons and earthquakes, over slow onset events, such as severe droughts caused by El Niño.

Learning from this recent experience, the following actions must be pursued in the next three to six months by the government, led by the Office of the President, to address outstanding needs and set the course to strengthen the national climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction frameworks in order to better prepare for, and respond to, slow onset emergencies.

1. NEDA, AS HEAD OF THE EL NIÑO TASK FORCE, SHOULD RE-CONVENE ALL MEMBERS TO FULLY ASSESS THE PREVIOUS RESPONSE, MINDFUL OF THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE RECENT EL NIÑO CRISIS.

Member-agencies of the El Niño Task Force formed by President Benigno Aquino must be re-convened by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), as head of the task force, to evaluate actions they have taken vis-à-vis the reported damages and assess their response according to the Roadmap to Address the Impacts of El Niño (RAIN). Outstanding food and livelihood assistance must be mapped out to ensure all affected populations, including fisherfolk and especially women, are able to fully recover.

The differential impacts of the El Niño crisis hit farmers and fisherfolk hard, especially in highly vulnerable areas. Farmers in Region XII, ARMM and SOCKSARGEN suffered significant crop losses resulting to widespread hunger, while fisherfolk in Eastern Visayas reported decreased fish catch resulting to loss of income.

Government agencies, led by NEDA as chair of the El Niño Task Force, must review whether interventions, including food, livelihood and other humanitarian assistance, stated in the RAIN were indeed implemented. The Task Force must also review El Niño recovery plans to ensure that these help communities cope with medium- and long-term El impacts by improving irrigation infrastructure and providing alternative sustainable livelihood options. Task Force members should also review whether beneficiaries were properly selected and assisted.

2. THE NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT COUNCIL (NDRRMC) SHOULD REVIEW DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RESPONSE POLICIES TO CLARIFY PROTOCOLS IN RESPONDING TO THE IMPACTS OF EL NIÑO AS A SLOW ONSET CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTER.

While the government has 'tried-and-tested' mechanisms in place to effectively address rapid onset disasters like typhoons, the NDRRMC should spearhead the review of its mechanisms in responding to slow onset disasters and cyclical climactic events like El Niño.

During the recent El Niño, the response of national and local authorities – both in terms of policy and program interventions – invariably resulted in massive crop losses. Farmers were left to plant in December despite knowing that crop losses would occur by January to February 2016. Seeds and seedlings were offered in February 2016 when the rains have already stopped.

The declaration of an *imminent state of calamity* should be explored along with other specific revisions needed in the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (RA 10121) and the Climate Change Act (RA 9729, as amended) to improve authorities' ability to respond to slow onset disasters.

3. NEDA AND NDRRMC SHOULD REVIEW INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Climate and disaster risk reduction issues must be resolved within the institutional mechanisms provided by law.

The Climate Change Act and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, and their respective national frameworks, created institutional mechanisms to address climate change impacts and disasters. Government must review whether the previous administration's creation of an El Niño Task Force was able to effectively deliver results, as compared to using existing governance mechanisms, such as the NDRRM architecture: Did the creation of an ad-hoc coordinating body result in more confusing coordination mechanisms? Would it have been more prudent to course anticipatory actions through the NDRRM Council and the respective regional and local DRRM councils?

The NDRRM architecture should be enhanced and properly funded to effectively respond to all types of emergencies.



A dried-out corn field in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato in February 2016. (Credit: Oxfam/Airah Cadiogan)

4. COMELEC SHOULD ACT ON THE ELECTION BAN.

Proper policy reforms must be considered should the next El Niño crisis again coincide with an election period.

National government must explore policy options provided by law so that anticipatory action against future El Niño events may be mounted without having to be constrained by election bans that effectively restrict service delivery to those severely affected. These policy options must include long-term solutions that may be triggered by a joint resolution between the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), NDRRMC and CCC, or if warranted, remedial legislation.

5. GOVERNMENT MUST INVEST ON LONGER-TERM RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION AND BEEF UP CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FINANCE TO BUILD THE RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES AGAINST NATURAL AND HUMAN-INDUCED DISASTERS.

National and local governments must secure funds and regular budget allocations to address the impacts of the recent El Niño and to enhance adaptation actions of local communities.

During the recent El Niño, regional line agencies were not clear on where to source funds to finance interventions identified in their respective response plans, hence preventing them from responding in an adequate and timely manner to the needs of affected communities.

As the government begins the process of crafting the next Philippine Development Plan (PDP), NEDA and all agencies must ensure that proper planning to respond to El Niño and climate change as a cross-cutting development priority is undertaken.

Concomitantly, domestic and international sources of climate change adaptation finance must be identified, monitored and beefed up to enable climate-vulnerable local government units and communities to implement programs and projects that would improve the climate-resiliency of their infrastructures and enhance their adaptive capacities.



Vegetables like eggplants wither during the drought in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato in y 2016. (Credit: Oxfam/Airah Cadiogan)

1 Report on Damages Caused by El Niño, Department of Agriculture, July 15, 2016

2 Section 261 (v.), Article XXII of the 1985 Omnibus Election Code

3 The UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) defines slow-onset emergencies as events that “do not emerge from a single, distinct event but one that emerges gradually over time, often based on a confluence of different events.” A common example is droughts caused by a strong El Niño. In contrast, rapid onset disasters are those that arrive without warning (e.g., earthquakes) or with a few days warning (e.g., flooding, typhoons)

4 The recommendations were informed by national and regional consultation forums conducted among national agencies, regional line agencies, local governments, academe and representatives from farmers and fisherfolk associations between January to April 2016, and interviews with affected community members and local government officials in North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat between February to April 2016.

I. IMPACTS OF EL NIÑO

El Niño has caused a global crisis that has put 18 million people all over the world in need of urgent assistance, while up to 50 million are facing hunger, disease and water shortage if left without support. Humanitarian aid ranging from food assistance, health and livelihood support are urgent interventions that must be implemented within three to six months and beyond, while livelihood recovery, food security and poverty alleviation measures for long term actions must be done to address the full impacts of El Niño.

In the Philippines, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported crop losses due to El Niño amounting to Php 15.2 billion (325 million US\$). However, it considered the damage to be “minimal,” with then DA Secretary Proceso Alcala citing that the El Niño crisis did not result to price hikes. Moreover, compared to previous El Niño years, the total damaged area for 2015-2016 was less.

Table 1. Total Damaged Area (Source: DA)

El Niño years	Total Area (in hectares)
1997/98	677,441
2010	555,102
2015/16	373,491

The DA further reported that the regions most affected by El Niño based on production loss are the Northern Mindanao (Region 10), Western Visayas, (Region 6) and SOCCSKSAGEN (Region 12).

Table 2. Most Affected Regions (Source: DA)

Region	Production loss (in billions of pesos)
Northern Mindanao (Region 10)	2.462
Western Visayas (Region 6)	1.9
Soccsksargen (Region 12)	0.748

According to the El Niño Task Force, chaired by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), as of 11 May 2016, a total of 15 provinces, seven cities, 58 municipalities and two barangays have declared a state of calamity due to El Niño. Region 12 has the most number of LGUs declaring a state of calamity with 34 (including two barangays), followed by Region 9 and Region 6, both with eight, and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao at six

Table 3. Most Number of ‘State of Calamity’ by Region (Source: NEDA)

Region	Provinces	Cities	LGUs	Total
XII	4	4	26	34
IX	1	1	6	8
VI	1	0	7	8
ARMM	2	0	4	6

Also according to NEDA, the province with the most number of declarations of a state of calamity was Cotabato Province with 12 LGUs, followed by South Cotabato with 9 and the Province of Iloilo with 7.

In terms of the number of affected farmers, the DA’s Report on Damages Caused by El Niño dated 3 May 2016 shows that Northern Mindanao (Region 10) was the most affected with 78,762 farmers, followed by Western Visayas (Region 6) at 60,970 farmers.

Table 5. Most Number of Affected Farmers - Region (Source: DA)

Rank	Region	No. of Farmers Affected	Production Loss (PhP)
1	X	78,762	3,659,558,50
2	VI	60,970	1,969,156,060
3	XII	60,646	1,729,486,492
4	ARMM	33,170	164,282,465
5	IX	15,051	675,593,061
6	CARAGA	8,659	208,816,703
7	XI	6,901	123,182,918
8	IV-B	5,836	252,073,280
9	III	5,532	1,736,814,211
10	CAR	4,405	106,504,823
11	V	2,514	64,229,316
12	I	1,806	108,920,028
13	II	544	1,312,814,211

As of the end of July 2016, no inter-agency report on the impacts of El Niño 2015-2016 has been released, neither have consolidated data showing the depth and extent of the impacts of the recent El Niño been made available by NEDA as chair of the El Niño Task Force. Indeed, the recent response has yet to be fully assessed and it is not yet known whether all affected populations have been properly assisted towards full recovery.


It is also important to highlight that no data on the damages of El Niño on fisher folk are available. This is despite anecdotal evidence shared by fisherfolk in Eastern Visayas (Eastern Samar and Leyte) pointing to decreased fish catches resulting to significant income losses. Fisherfolk organizations have also cried for humanitarian and livelihood assistance as a consequence of the El Niño cycle, which has increased water temperatures and caused fish to find cooler and deeper waters. The fisherfolk must be represented in any full assessment of the government's recent El Niño response.

II. SLOW RESPONSE TO SLOW ONSET CLIMATE EVENTS

The Philippine bureaucracy has a robust set of policy responses to rapid onset disasters, such as a typhoon, triggered by ex ante interventions, such as early warning systems and pre-deployment of logistics for immediate response, and post-disaster activities triggered by the declaration of a state of calamity from the local to national levels. The declaration of state of calamity is premised on the assessments of extent of loss and damage a typhoon brings as it travels across Philippine territory. Table 7 below shows the usual DRR cycle and the Response and Recovery actions especially from national government agencies, triggered by the declaration of a state of calamity by LGUs.

Table 7. DRR cycle for a rapid onset event (typhoons)

Climate Hazard	Impact Chain	Ex Ante Actions		Post Disaster Actions	
		Prevention/Mitigation	Preparedness	Response	Recovery
Typhoons	Flooding and gale force, loss and damage in agriculture, reduced farmhold incomes	Early warning	Pre-emptive evacuation Crop diversification, climate-smart agriculture	Humanitarian Relief Food assistance to farmers, farm inputs support for new cropping	Post-disaster needs assessment and recovery



However, for a slow onset event like El Niño, the country's policy responses are less clear. Table 8 shows that, while an El Niño crisis rages with impacts that are already known (i.e., that they would inevitably lead to massive loss and damage in agriculture), national and local authorities could not and did not act with urgency – for example, by assessing which areas would potentially suffer huge losses and ensuring irrigation facilities are properly working or water storage facilities are in place while rains were still present, or providing alternative sources of livelihood for farmers and fisher folks that would likely get affected. Instead, local governments had to wait until they have reached States of Calamity to begin their response phase, resulting to massive crop losses and widespread hunger.

Table 8. Current DRR cycle for a slow onset event (El Niño 2015-2016)

Climate Hazard	Impact Chain	Ex Ante Actions		Post Disaster Actions	
		Prevention/Mitigation	Preparedness	Response	Recovery
Increase in temperature	Drought, loss and damage in agriculture, reduced farmhold incomes	Early warning	Information drive for affected LGUs Creation of TF El Niño and RAINs, but interventions not timely	Humanitarian Relief Food assistance to farmers, farm inputs for new cropping 15.2 B crop loss	Post-disaster needs assessment and recovery

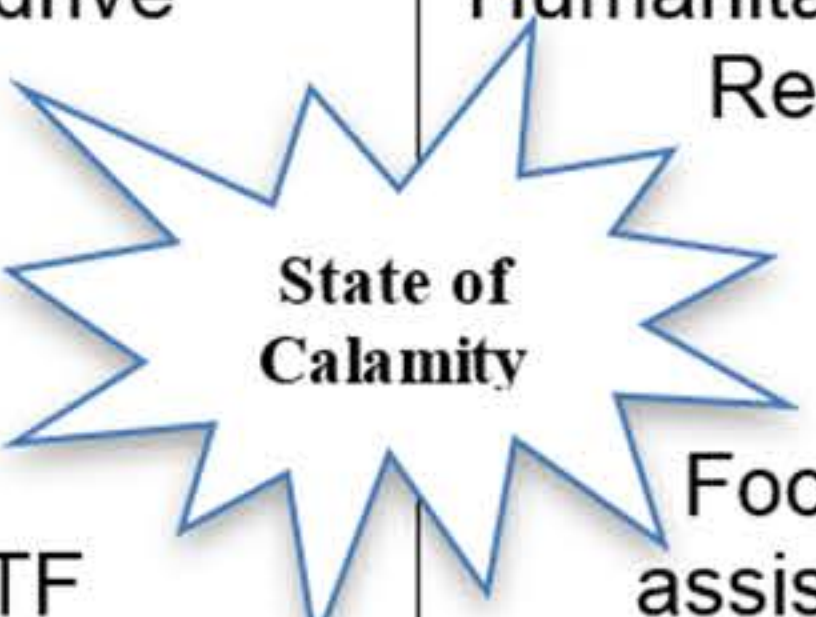


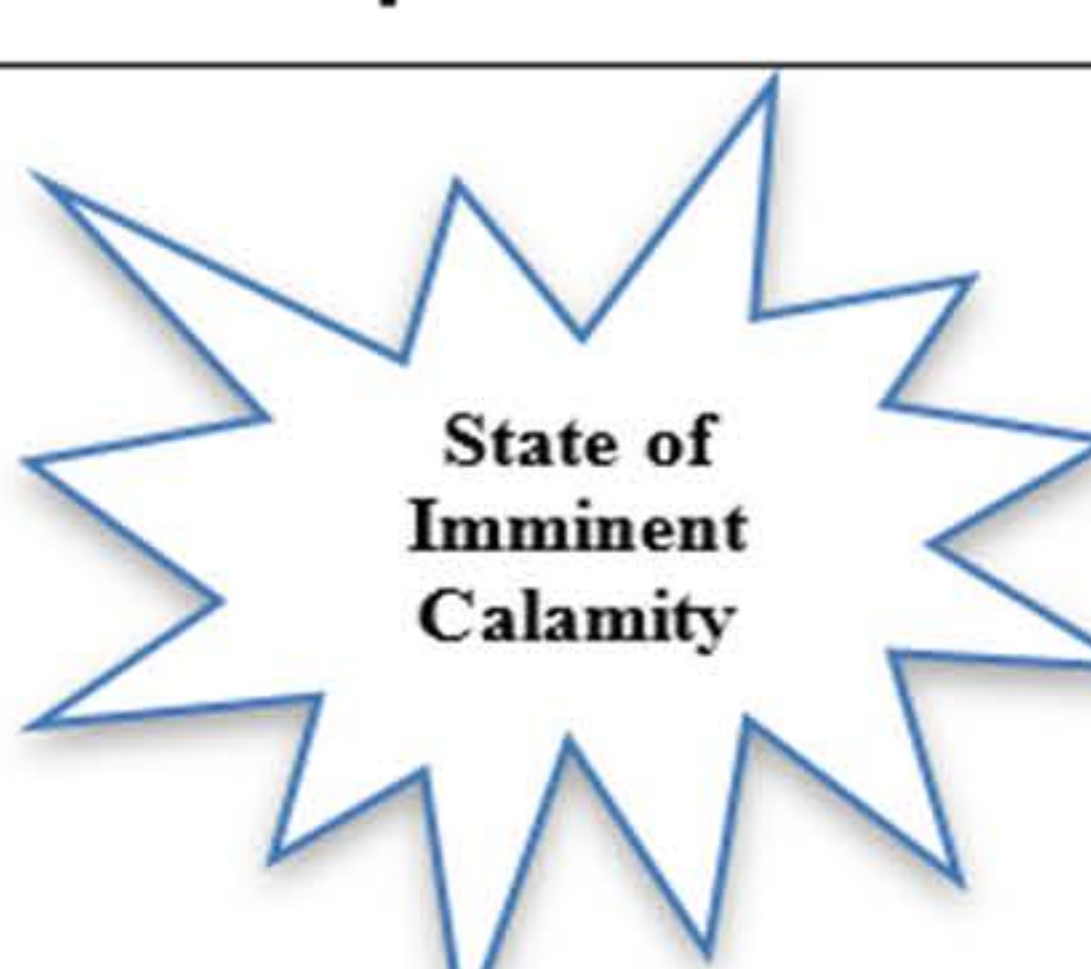
Table 9 shows a proposed anticipatory DRR cycle, which would require a modified set of response policies and protocols tailored specifically for an El Niño event. These set of proposed policies and protocols for slow onset emergencies are part of the proposed amendments to the NDRRM Act (RA 10121) that have been deliberated on during the previous Congress as part of the Act’s sunset review.

Proposed amendments include the grant of the power to declare a state of imminent calamity to trigger interventions designed to avoid crop losses. This may be achieved through massive information dissemination targeting affected farmers, preventing them from planting in a given period due to the anticipated peak of drought conditions.

It should be noted that the trigger for Response and Recovery under current conditions are the loss and damage reports themselves in the agriculture sector. The declaration of imminent state of calamity would provide a more effective policy response to mitigate, if not altogether avoid, the risk of massive crop losses. This is a means by which government can truly pursue the principle of ‘building forward’ through climate change adaptation and disaster risk vulnerability reduction.

It is, therefore, imperative for the NDRRMC to immediately reviews its current policy and protocols and evaluate how these can be improved to better respond to, or avoid altogether, the worst impacts of El Niño as a slow onset disaster. Questions to guide the NDRRMC’s review include: What should the trigger point for authorities be to begin anticipatory actions related to averting losses related to dry spells and droughts? How can PAGASA predictions and warnings related to dry spells and droughts, particularly those caused by a prevailing El Niño phenomenon, be optimized by local government units to sufficiently prepare communities?

Table 9. Anticipatory DRR cycle for a slow onset event (El Niño)

Climate Hazard	Impact Chain	Ex Ante Actions		Post Disaster Actions	
		Prevention/Mitigation	Preparedness	Response	Recovery
Increase in temperature	Drought, loss and damage in agriculture, reduced farmhold incomes	Early warning, Climate modeling, downscaling of predictive models	 <p>Crop diversification, recalibration of cropping pattern from December to end of El Niño</p> <p>Anticipatory El Niño/RAINs planning and coordination thru <u>NDRRMC/DRRMCs</u> →</p>	Humanitarian relief Food assistance to farmers, farm inputs for new cropping	Post-disaster needs assessment and recovery planned and implemented
				<u>15.2 B crop loss avoided</u>	

III. INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS UNDER CC AND DRR LAWS

The NDRRM Act (RA 10121) and the Climate Change Act (RA 9729, as amended) both mandate the mainstreaming of DRR and climate change adaptation into all planning processes in government, not to mention policy, planning, budgeting, coordination and local implementation.

However, for the previous El Niño response, the government instead formed a new El Niño Task Force led by NEDA, contrary to the mandates of both RA 10121 and RA 9729. The creation of the Task Force consequently excised the policy and planning functions on climate change and disaster risk reduction from the very bodies mandated to deliver these, namely the NDRRMC and the CCC. As a result, confusion on the mandate of the Task Force vis-à-vis local government units adversely affected coordination, and further delayed implementation of El Niño responses, hampering delivery of much needed assistance to affected populations.

It is worth noting that the NEDA Director General is also the Vice Chair for Recovery and Rehabilitation under the NDRRM Council. The NDRRMC also includes the CCC, and both agencies have roles to play in addressing the devastating impacts of El Niño, including mobilization of national climate financing in relation to climate budget tagging to ensure a responsive national budget for rehabilitation in the aftermath of El Niño. These mechanisms were not put into action during the recent response.

IV. EL NIÑO AND THE ELECTIONS

A game changer for the recent El Niño crisis was its co-incidence with the campaign period of national and local elections.

Aside from being a distraction to local chief executives, the campaign period meant the 'election ban' was in place. This ban prohibits government officials from releasing, disbursing or expending public funds or implementing aid distribution programs 45 days before a regular election unless they secure an exemption from the Commission of Elections (COMELEC).

According to Oxfam's El Niño assessment report, the election ban was the most oft-cited reason by local government officials for the delay in food distribution and cash subsidies. Some LGUs applied for a certificate of exemption from the COMELEC but it was not acted released in time to prevent the worst impacts.

NEDA, as chair of the El Niño task force, also reportedly requested for an exemption from the COMELEC. However, its request was not acted upon.

While this matter is moot and academic for the recent El Niño crisis, anticipatory policy mechanisms including a joint resolution among the NDRRMC, the CCC and the COMELEC, or remedial legislation if warranted, should be formulated, especially given how projections show that the next El Niño crisis is likely to once again co-incide with the next national election period.

V. LONG-TERM REHABILITATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FINANCE

In September 2015, six months before the impacts of the recent El Niño were expected to peak, the Task Force El Niño led by the NEDA crafted the RAIN together with corresponding roadmaps at the regional level to be carried out by regional line agencies.

However, regional agencies have stated that they needed clarification as to fund sourcing for their respective regional roadmaps, whether there will be budget augmentation and/or supplementation.

Although then Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary Abad issued instructions for national agencies to source funds for El Niño interventions from their own Quick Response Funds (QRFs), in addition to looking at their own savings for augmentation, the operationalization of regional roadmaps remained largely unclear for regional line agencies.

During the National Forum hosted by UP CLRG and Oxfam in August 21, 2016, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) cited that the DBM had not approved its request for an El Niño response fund of Php 6.7 billion.

Equally relevant was the fact that, by law, the DSWD can only mount El Niño response in affected regions once an LGU declares a state of calamity. However, the agency mentioned that despite this, they were compelled to extend assistance to El Niño-affected LGUs, even if some of them have not yet declared a state of calamity.

-
- i. For more detailed assessments of the impacts of El Niño, see Oxfam's El Niño Rapid Assessment Report (May 2016). The Rapid Assessment Report was formulated after conducting focus group discussions and key interviews with affected communities in select municipalities North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces.
 - ii. Based on data shared by the Balangiga Fisherfolk Association in Eastern Samar, and on anecdotal evidence provided by the Tacloban Fisherfolk Association.
 - iii. Section 261 (v.), Article XXII of the 1985 Omnibus Election Code.
 - iv. See Oxfam's El Niño Rapid Assessment Report (May 2016).

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), as chair of the El Niño Task Force, must indeed clarify this and other outstanding concerns together with the Department of Budget Management (DBM).

As the new government begins the process of crafting the next Philippine Development Plan (PDP), NEDA and all agencies must ensure that proper planning to respond to El Niño and climate change as a cross-cutting development priority is undertaken. Concomitantly, domestic and international sources of climate change adaptation finance must be identified, monitored and beefed up to enable climate-vulnerable LGUs and communities to implement programs and projects that would improve their infrastructures and enhance their adaptive capacities.

Specific funds for research and development must also be undertaken to fine tune and downscale climate modeling for future El Niño events, in pursuit of the principle of building forward for the future through climate change adaptation and disaster risk vulnerability reduction.

DENNIS G. DELA TORRE, Research Fellow for Climate Change & Disaster Risk Reduction, Center for Local and Regional Governance, National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines. Contact: dgt.clr@gmail.com

ERWIN GASPAR A. ALAMPAY, Ph.D., Director, Center for Local and Regional Governance, National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines. Contact: eaalampay@up.edu.ph / +63(2)9257422 Fax +63(2)9283914, www.localgov.up.edu.ph

