



PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO ~ EL NIÑO

Lessons and Recommendations from the 2015-2016 Crisis

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, agricultural losses alone has been estimated to have cost somewhere between 5 to 12 billion Philippine pesos (107 to 257 million US dollars) as of August to July 2016.

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'¹, which effectively hindered local authorities from responding to the needs of affected communities.

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.

However, the recent experience has demonstrated that current policies are geared more towards addressing **rapid onset emergencies**, such as typhoons and earthquakes, over **slow onset emergencies**, such as severe droughts caused by El Niño².

Learning from this recent experience, the following actions³ 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 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.

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 climatic events like El Niño.

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

4

COMELEC should act on the Election Ban.

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.

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.

As the government begins the process of crafting the next Philippine Development Plan (PDP), NEDA and all agencies must treat climate change and disaster risk reduction as a cross-cutting priority. 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 local infrastructure and enhance their adaptive capacities.

¹Section 261 (v.), Article XXII of the 1985 Omnibus Election Code

²The 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)

³The 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.

