

Alert

Philippines

Drought and dry spell hits 58 provinces in the Philippines

Geneva, 10 May 2016

1. Brief description of the emergency and impact

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration on September 30, 2015 announced that a mature “strong” El Niño has prevailed in the Pacific Ocean affecting the Philippines. 14 provinces in Luzon and 12 provinces in Visayas experience dry spell, while drought is expected to be experienced by 6 provinces in Luzon, 3 provinces in Visayas, and 23 provinces in Mindanao. As of February 2016, the drought has already caused P5.32 billion worth of damages to the agriculture sector alone. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has reported that at least 100,000 fisher folk are also affected by drought through fish kills and red tide.

The worsening effects of El Niño are still felt by 43% of the county despite recent but sporadic rainfall in the country. In early April, around 3,000 farmers severely affected by the drought in South Cotabato province protested the lack of government support; this led to a violent dispersal, which left 1 dead and 13 injured. Drought has been experienced since the last quarter of 2015 in more than 40% of the country, according to partner reports of Christian Aid, Lutheran World Relief, and HEKS Swiss Church Aid covering. Hunger is rampant as it is directly correlated to the halt in farming and fishing production as the primary source of rural sustenance and income. Disease has also become prevalent due to malnutrition and access to potable water. Market prices for food and other necessities remain the same; but income opportunities among partner communities have drastically declined due to extreme heat and dried up water sources. Crop cycles have practically failed since July 2015, and this is expected to continue in the next months due to dry and infertile land, and the expected intense rains post-drought. After El Niño, La Niña or intense monsoon activity is expected to occur (<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/02/26/1556983/pagasa-warns-la-nina-year>), which may result to continued halt in production of agriculture and aquaculture products.

2. Why is an ACT response needed?

It is expected that El Niño shall return to moderate conditions by mid-2016 (May-June-July 2016) but the effects of the drought are expected to last over the next three to four months. The Philippine Government is prevented from directly implementing aid projects due to the provisions of the Omnibus Election code which ban the release of public funds 30 days before the national elections (May 9, 2016) and 45 days after. This has slowed down, and in some areas, prevented a timely emergency response from the government. The ACT Philippine Forum intends to focus on emergency response to reduce the suffering in drought-affected areas.

3. National and international response

P19B has been committed by the Philippines government in 2015 to combat the ill effects of El Niño; but these funds are largely for ongoing programmes on El Niño, with a minimal amount for emergency response. As mentioned above, disbursement also remains problematic. The Department of

Agriculture has released the amount of P848 million to its regional field offices for programmed interventions against El Niño. It has also released P842 million in Quick Response Funds to combat El Niño as it intensifies (<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/564840/money/economy/dbm-releases-p842m-to-increase-quick-response-funds-for-el-nino>).

4. ACT Alliance response

ACT Philippines Forum members Christian Aid, ICCO Cooperation, HEKS, Lutheran World Relief and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines continue to gather information from their local partners or networks within the affected areas. Christian Aid supported a local partner for a small response in Mindanao.

5. Planned activities

Assessment reports and information from partners/networks indicate that an emergency response is needed. Christian Aid has already supported a local partner for an initial response in Mindanao. Subject to the availability of resources, ACT Philippines Forum will do follow-up assessments and plan specific responses.

6. Constraints

Philippine Government units including the Department of Social Welfare and Development are prohibited from releasing funds directly to beneficiaries forty-five (45) days preceding the Philippine National Elections and thirty (30) days after the national elections. They are required to course funds through the Philippine Red Cross, subject to the supervision of the Commission on Audit or its representatives as prescribed by Art. XXII. Sec 261. O. of the Omnibus Election Code (<http://comeleclaw.tripod.com/bp881.pdf>). This process is causing delay in the delivery of services by the government to their intended beneficiaries.

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