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Philippines solidarity

Ormoc, Palompon, Villaba – the initial phase of relief operations is completed, the financial campaign continues

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Fourth information report on our campaign of solidarity with the victims of super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines. December 7, 2013

The financial campaign

On Friday, December 6, 2013, we made a new transfer of 1,000 euros to support the Mi-HANDS campaign, "Mindanao Solidarity for Typhoon Yolanda Survivors".

So far, we have sent a total of 12,000 euros to Mi-HANDS - or 12,500, taking into account the two other small contributions mentioned in the previous information point (help for the rebuilding of houses of the members of the tricycle workers' union of Tacloban, and also for the reception of refugee families in Manila).

The action of Mi-HANDS is concentrated in the north of the island of Leyte, one of the areas most devastated by the super-typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. We have already reported on the arrival of relief supplies in Ormoc. Since then, teams of activists from Mindanao have also gone to Palompon and Villaba.

In Palompon

A big lorry had been hired to deliver aid – nearly 1,200 batches of food, hygiene products ... – from Iligan (Mindanao) to Ormoc (Leyte). It was expensive to hire, so now it had to be done without. Consequently, the teams of activists got up at 4 a.m. so as to make in the course of the day three trips to Palompon, each round trip taking two hours. By nightfall (18 hours), it had been done.

On 30 November, aid was destined for 413 homes in the locality of Sitio Kalag - itan, in Lat-osan Barangay (Palompon municipality), alongside the main road and easy to get to. However, as in the most remote villages in Ormoc, no government aid had yet been distributed in the area and the population had received only one visit from a private institution.

Apart from some services (transportation, laundry...), the main economic activity is agriculture. Because of the devastation, most – if not all – workers have lost their jobs. Local authorities submitted an incomplete list of families to help, drawn from the electoral register. Rather than stick to it, a list of beneficiaries was drawn up directly with the local population.

All three teams completed their tasks without any particular difficulty: distribution of relief consignments, medical care and psychosocial therapy for children aged 7 to 10 to allow them to express their feelings in the aftermath of the super typhoon and their hopes: some said they wanted to become teachers, doctors or nurses to help people in need...

In Villaba and Ormoc

On 2 December, 542 households were targeted to be helped, in three locations: 124 homes in Bangkal, in the municipality of Villaba, further north, 373 in Curva and 45 in Tambulid (both in Ormoc City). A big day lay ahead: the volunteers got up again at 4a.m....

Help? The people did not really believe it, fearing that it was only a publicity stunt or just a minimal distribution of aid. So families were content to send their children get the little that would be available - children who had to call their parents for help, because they could not carry the batches of aid, which each contained 5 kilos of rice, a kilo of lentils, dried fish, tinned food, cooking oil, salt, soy sauce and hygiene products they were not hoping for! People were delighted, the quality and quantity of goods distributed were greatly appreciated.

For people willing to be treated, the Mi-HANDS medical team had to first explain that oriental medicine would be used: acupuncture, herbal remedies... 142 people received treatment.

80 children and young people aged 4 to 17 participated in psychosocial activities, with the backing of their parents: expressing themselves through games, getting to know one another, preparing themselves to better face up to disaster situations...

On December 3, the activities began at 6 a.m. - 5 barangays in Ormoc City had to be supplied in the morning, 281 households distributed as follows: Alegria - 23 homes; San Pablo - 63 homes; Luna - 30 homes; Punta - 25 homes; Sitio Su-ong -140 homes.

Psychosocial activities concerned this time dozens of children and young people from 1 to 17 years old. However, it was difficult to find suitable locations for these activities (and medical care), while continuous rain did not help things.

The aid provided by Mi-HANDS during these days was much greater than anything that had previously been distributed and the population was not sparing in its thanks to the donors and volunteers. The latter, for their part, had a very rich human experience.

One stage closes, another opens

One stage in the campaign is closed, that of bringing the first level of aid. All those who had gone to Leyte returned to Iligan, where they met up with, on 4 and 5 December, those who had remained mobilized in Mindanao, so as to draw up together a balance sheet of the work that had been carried out, and then consider the next steps.

A quantified balance sheet

Mi -HANDS Teams intervened in six barangays located in a city and two municipalities. It was originally planned to distribute aid to 1,042 homes, but it was actually 1,168 families who received relief.

In total, 522 people received medical care, including 270 women and 252 men; 563 children and young people participated in psychosocial activities, including 212 girls and 351 boys.

The funds raised for this first stage of the campaign amounted to 1,325,000 pesos (30,813.15 dollars or 24,537.04

euros). The expenditure (an initial estimate) was about 1,310,000 pesos (24,259.26 euros). A more detailed financial statement will be provided later.

The origin of the funds received is as follows:

ESSF, for a total (at the time) of 11,000 euros.

Local loans totaling 800,000 pesos (14,814 euros).

Funds collected locally, amounting to 54,000 pesos (1,000 euros).

Other international solidarity groups have appealed for donations, such as partners engaged in development work in Belgium, Luxembourg and the United States, but they have not yet sent money.

Donations in kind have not been included in the balance sheet. For example, NADA has provided 5,000 needles for acupuncture. This material aid will also be detailed later.

Recommendations

All the teams of activists met up by the sea near Iligan, for two days. After a little rest, well deserved, the participants discussed in workshops the lessons learned from the experience and presented a series of concrete recommendations:

• A small team must return as soon as possible to Ormoc to prepare the next stage of the campaign – “early recovery” – involving choosing a centre of operations and making a more precise study of the conditions and needs.

• Training more volunteers in how to organize aid, in psychosocial activities, in medical assistance, as well as “social investigation” on the basis of which activities can be properly planned.

• Strengthening the capacity of members of the communities concerned to play an active role in the reconstruction of their living environment. This is particularly important, because in all these areas there were no active social movements. There were probably groups of parishioners, but they did not survive the devastating typhoon.

• Continuing to collect financial resources, logistical and material support, both locally and with international partners.

• Sending emergency doctors, nurses and midwives to address the risk of epidemics, especially in evacuation centres.

Once the exchanges were completed, the activists took advantage of the sea to relax...

This is only the beginning ...

In many ways, the solidarity campaign initiated by Mi-HANDS has laid the groundwork for the future. It relies on a mobilization of activists and not on heavy administrative structures and full-time apparatuses: it is truly a “horizontal”, popular solidarity between two regions (Mindanao and the Visayas) and it is directed at people who were not previously known, whereas in the Philippines, this type of non-institutional aid generally concerns only relations, family members.

The phase that is opening now is crucial to sustain the links originally established and to help rebuild lives, in order to encourage the formation of local social movements able to defend the rights of grassroots communities. But this is a difficult step, among other reasons because up to now aid from the government has been completely lacking: if it existed, it would at least be possible to demand that it be distributed equitably...

On the international front, as we have seen, Mi-HANDS hopes to receive support from partners in Belgium, Luxembourg and the United States ... but for the moment, concrete financial assistance is only coming from the campaign initiated by ESSF. Let us hope that this will change, but it is our responsibility to pursue the effort of solidarity that has been undertaken.