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Philippines: Social Protection Systems Help Mitigate Disaster and Climate Risk

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Countries can respond to natural disasters better and assist victims faster if robust social protection systems are in place - World Bank Group
The Government of the Philippines and the World Bank Group hosted the first regional conference to capture lessons on how countries could better respond to natural disasters through robust social protection systems. The event - which brought together experts and policy makers from 17 countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia and the Pacific regions-concluded that linking social protection and disaster and climate risk management systems is prudent public policy that could lessen the impact of and build resilience to these risks.
"Countries in Asia and the Pacific region are amongst the most prone to disaster and climate risks - and these natural calamities have devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, especially for the poorest and the most vulnerable. However, worldwide experience shows that post-disaster recovery and resilience can be greatly helped if there are robust social protection systems in place," said Arup Banerji, the World Bank Groups Senior Director and Head of Global Practice, Social Protection and Labor. "The World Bank Group is proud to co-host this conference with the Philippines lead social protection agency, the Department of Social Welfare and Development. We learned how the existing Pantawid Conditional Cash Transfer Program, which has become an integral part of the Philippines Social Protection Systems, helps the Government respond to victims of last years Typhoon Yolanda. With a delivery mechanism already in place, countries can target their post-disaster humanitarian efforts better and channel them faster."
Lessons from half a dozen countries around the globe highlight the merits of planning ahead and linking social protection and disaster and climate risk management systems. A better, more rapid and affordable system can help mitigate risk and respond quickly to disasters, thereby preventing increases in poverty, and protecting the governments fiscal health.
Typhoon Yolanda was recorded to be among the strongest in history to ever make landfall, with over 8000 casualties and close to 200 severely affected municipalities in the Philippines. About 3 million households with almost 13.5 million family members were affected directly. Over a million houses were damaged or destroyed. The total damage and loss has been estimated at almost US$13 billion. The loss of jobs, livelihood, houses and productive assets immediately pushed about half a million households into poverty, while those that were already poor were pushed deeper into destitution.
"Before Typhoon Yolanda struck, the Philippine Government had already put in place various social protection programs aimed at empowering the poor. But the typhoon was a gamechanger; it tested the resiliency of our people and stretched government disaster response system and social protection structures to the limit," said Corazon "Dinky" Soliman, the Philippine Secretary of Social Welfare and Development. "In the first critical days after the disaster, it was the network of implementers of our Pantawid Conditional Cash Transfer Program and the leadership in municipalities that we were able to mobilize. The database of the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction helped us in identifying families that could be enrolled for various rehabilitation programs, such as the cash-for-work and cash-for-asset rebuilding. From our experience with Yolanda, convergence with other programs is real and is a practice implemented at different levels. "
The experts highlighted the following issues in the 3-day workshop:
- Social protection, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation share the common objectives of reducing risks, lessening the impacts of and building resilience to shocks. There are various tools and instruments available to prepare for and respond to disaster and climate risks, such as through public works programs and benefit transfers which can be adapted and scaled up to respond to disasters.
- Disaster risk financing and insurance is a key component in building a countrys financial resilience to disaster. A country is financially resilient when its government and people can manage the financial impact of disaster and climate change risk without compromising sustainable development, fiscal stability, or the wellbeing of families and communities.
- The scaling up of social protection systems will require technical infrastructure, such as the readiness of existing national identification systems, linkages between existing targeting systems and disaster response, data management systems for delivery of cash and kind benefits, and information technology tools to facilitate these processes.
"The Philippines provides a rich experience for other countries facing similar challenges with disaster and climate risks. It is encouraging to see the Governments commitment to this agenda and to continually improve its existing social protection systems by making it resilient to disaster, while ensuring that it responds rapidly to the consequences of disasters," said Motoo Konishi, World Bank Country Director for the Philippines. "To do this, the Department of Social Welfare and Development has converged its three flagship programs - conditional cash transfer, community driven development and livelihood support - to make them an effective tool in making households more resilient to disasters."

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