

**ORGANIZING FOR RELIEF
(FOCUS ON DSWD's ROLE AND CONTINUING EXPERIENCE)**

Milagros I. Llanes

Assistant Secretary

Department of Social Welfare and Development

Batasan Pambansa Complex Constitution Hill,

Quezon City

Introduction

According to Mr. Webster, the verb "organize" means to arrange by systematic planning and unified effort. Thus, the term "organizing" denotes purposive, orderly and concerted action, while the term "relief" includes any or all activities necessary to help or alleviate the conditions of persons, families, and communities which may be affected (i.e., displaced or distressed) and are suffering from the effects of a disaster/calamity. Relief is ordinarily seen as consisting of mass feeding, emergency housing or temporary sheltering, provision of missing-person-tracing services, and provision of other forms of assistance designed to meet the basic needs of the victims. A recent addition is the provision of "psychological or emotional relief" thru the use of a preventive stress management strategy known as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing or CISD.

On the other hand, the managerial context of the term "organization" and "organizing" emphasizes specification of tasks, grouping or dividing them and ensuring their coordination. In this regard, a noted authority on management wrote:

"Whenever several people are working together for a common end, there must be some form of organization, that is, the tasks must be divided among them and the work of the group must be coordinated. Dividing the work and arranging for coordination make up the process of organization . . ." (4)

By fusing these basic concepts one arrives at a working definition of "organizing for relief" as the process of a) identifying the different tasks involved in disaster relief, b) grouping, dividing or distributing them among the participants in the whole endeavor, and c) seeing to it that these tasks are coordinated and integrated for maximum efficiency in achieving the objectives of the relief efforts.

The 1990 earthquake, typhoon "Ruping," the killer flood of Ormoc and the continuing disaster brought about by the Pinatubo eruption last year and indication of the proneness of the country to all kinds of disastrous hazards.

Every year in this country, a number of major disasters occur, causing untold human suffering, great tragedies, social displacement, economic dislocation of families, community losses and destructions. Large numbers of distressed individuals and families, mostly the bottom poor, are pushed into even greater dependency. For them are needed immediate provision of basic necessities of like, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, comfort giving or psychosocial debriefing. A large proportion of these people are no longer able to provide for themselves; they are buried in their losses brought by the disasters. Immediate help has to be extended to them to prevent their further breakdown and dysfunctioning.

Realizing the implications of these disaster situations, the government has carried out a program to insure disaster prevention, mitigation preparedness and appropriate relief assistance to hasten the restoration and recovery of disaster victims.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development is the government agency chiefly responsible for ensuring prompt, adequate and appropriate relief for disaster victims in the country. Its past record in this regard has been one of faithful adherence to the mandate given to it. Surely, there have been defects and weaknesses in the system it had employed. But one major characteristic of its over-all approach to the relief and rehabilitation of disaster victims is its ability to adapt to the changing needs and demands of the situation. The relatively recent spate of mega-disasters which has hit the country has provided the Department with ample opportunities to demonstrate its capabilities for change in administering disaster relief services.

Three main sub-topics relative to disaster relief efforts in the country are: a) the context within which DSWD has pursued its disaster relief efforts; b) the main principles, policies and over-all approach which guide it in undertaking these responsibilities, and c) the more relevant challenges, issues and concerns which it has confronted in the past and may yet confront in the future even as it continues to perform its role in the Philippine relief system.

THE CONTEXT OF DISASTER RELIEF

To successfully expound or appreciate fully the rationale, objectives and methodology of organizing for disaster relief, one must have a sufficient understanding of the context, the over-all framework or the set of interrelated factors and events to which relief, as a process and organized undertaking, belongs. Two such contexts or settings which are fundamental to the proper appreciation of the processes involved in relief organizing and relief provision are the (1)

"Disaster Management Cycle", also known as "Disaster Management Continuum", and (2) the "Institutional Setting" in which relief is being planned, organized and provided.

The Disaster Management Cycle

W. Nick Carter in his book *Disaster Management: A Disaster Manager's Handbook*, provides two formats of the disaster management cycle. Figure 1 shows the basic format, and Figure 2 the alternative format.

Figure 1 shows the components of the whole cycle: Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Disaster Impact, Response, Recovery, Development, then back to Prevention . . . and so on. The point to emphasize in this presentation, is that ". . . disaster and its management is continuum of inter-linked activity; it is not a series of events which start and stop with each disaster." (2)

A brief word on each of the key segments of the cycle is given below, based largely on Mr. Carter's discussions. (2).

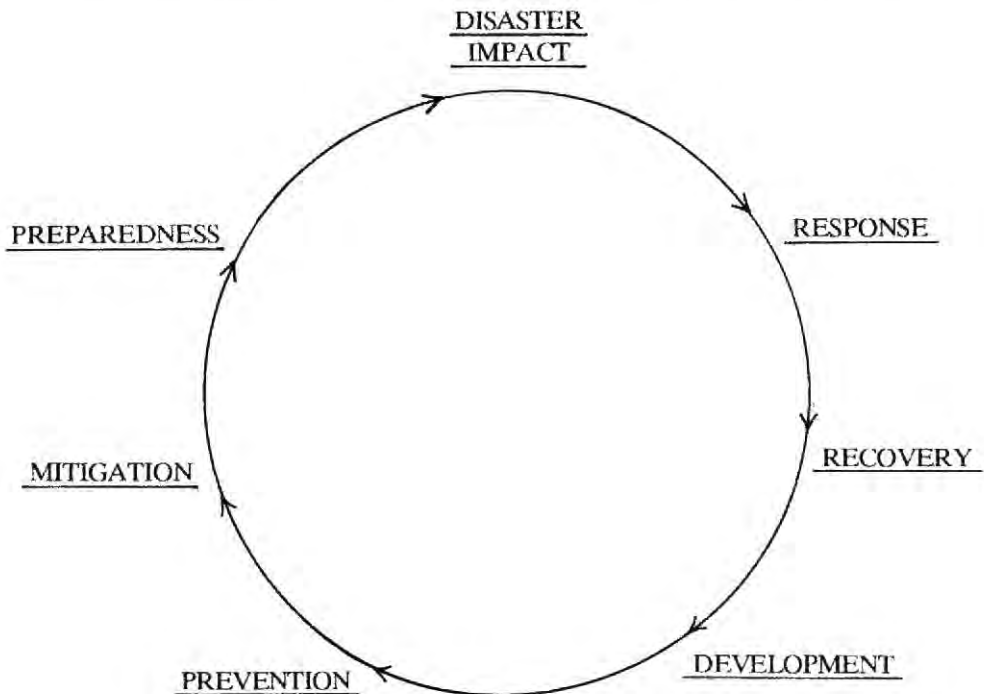


Figure 1. Basic format of the disaster management cycle.

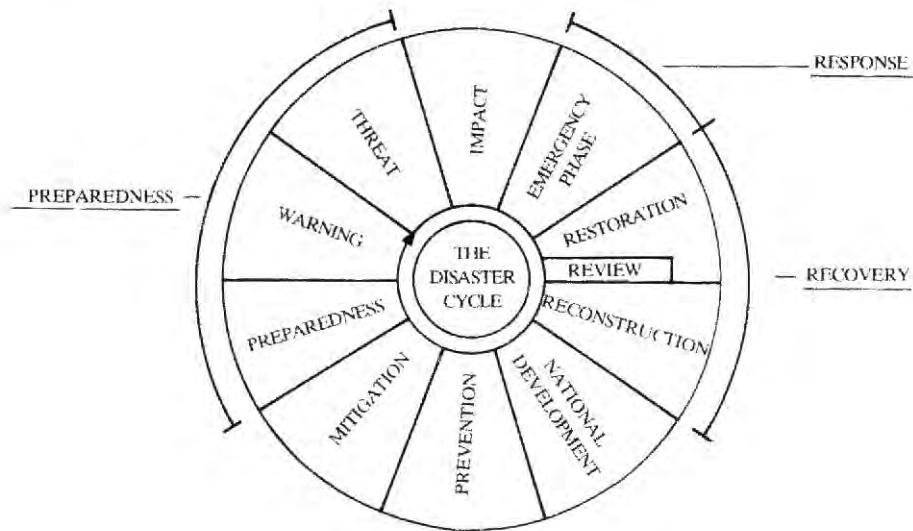


Figure 2. Alternative format of the disaster management cycle.

Disaster Management Cycle

Segment	Brief Description
1. Prevention	Action designed to impede the occurrence of a disaster event and/or prevent such an occurrence from having harmful effects
2. Mitigation	Action usually in the form of specific programs intended to reduce the effects of disaster on a nation or community (e.g. development and applications of building codes, zoning laws, etc.)
3. Preparedness	Measures to enable government, organizations, communities and individuals to respond rapidly and effectively to disaster situation
4. Disaster Impact	The point in the cycle at which a disaster event occurs
5. Response	Measures usually taken immediately prior to and following disaster impact, and are mainly directed towards saving life and protecting

- property, and to dealing with the immediate disruption, damages and other effects caused by the disaster (This segment is also sometimes called Emergency Response.)
6. **Recovery** The process by which individuals, communities and the nation are assisted in returning to their proper level of functioning following a disaster (Three main categories of Recovery measures are: Restoration, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction)
7. **Development** The segment which provides the link between disaster-related activities and national development (The linkage is intended to ensure that disaster results are effectively reflected in national development plans and policies, and that national development does not create further disaster problems, exacerbate existing ones.)

At what segment of the cycle is relief undertaken? As presented in Carter's book, relief is an activity done within the "Response" segment. Hence, the time-point in which it takes place is immediately prior to and following impact. However, in DSWD's recent experience with the July 16, 1990 earthquake and the Mt. Pinatubo victims, the relief assistance provided by the Department can now be actually classified as a) Immediate or Short-Term Relief Assistance, and b) Continuing Relief Assistance. The former is in line with the past and more traditional notion of "relief" while the latter is a relatively new development as far as the DSWD is concerned. It has become a necessity due to the protracted stay of many victims in evacuation centers and tent cities (or staging areas prior to resettlement), and the considerable length of "adjustment" period needed by families following their relocation in a new community or homesite. During this extended period, food and other basic necessities have to be provided. But based on the foregoing discussion of the disaster continuum, this latter period is already well within the "Recovery" segment. Hence, it is now appropriate to regard relief as falling within both the Response and Recovery segments.

A corollary question may be posed: When does organizing for relief take place? By the very term used, "organizing" activities are preparatory activities which ideally should be undertaken well before the need for relief comes. Actually, they should be a part of the pre-disaster planning integrated in the Preventive and the Preparedness phase and should naturally follow or be in conjunction with the preparation and maintenance of up-to-date counter-disaster plans. However, some organizing or re-organizing activities are done after a disaster has

struck, in which case the timeliness and effectiveness of disaster response are greatly reduced to the further detriment of the victims. According to Carter, "... the effectiveness of response operations will depend vitally on the general background of preparedness which applies. This includes various aspects of policy direction, planning, organization, and training." (2)

Institutional Setting for Relief System

Aside from the disaster management continuum, there is an institutional context within which disaster relief is administered. But "institutional context" is meant the framework of laws, government policies, networking and coordinating arrangements and mechanisms, and similar considerations, existing in the country.

On June 11, 1978 Presidential Decree No. 1566 was issued strengthening the Philippine disaster control capability and establishing the national program on community disaster preparedness. It stresses correctly the development of self-reliance by promoting and encouraging the spirit of self-help and mutual assistance among the local officials and their constituents. It also stresses the need for optimum coordination and joint efforts for disaster management at all administrative and operational levels.

The over-all framework of this program is the national calamities and disaster preparedness plan. Its objectives are: "to save lives to prevent needless suffering, to protect properties and to minimize damages."(5)

This decree also provided for the creation of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) which is the "... national organization for emergencies, the organization that will provide the vehicle for a concerted and coordinated disaster control effort from the National down to the Regional, Provincial, City, Municipal and Barangay levels."(5) As a member of the National Disaster Coordinating Council, the DSWD (being the welfare arm of the government) is tasked to provide leadership and coordinate services relative to relief and rehabilitation assistance to displaced/distressed families during disasters. As a line department, it is also the principal agency of government tasked with providing relief and rehabilitation services for the victims. Records show the DSWD actually accounts for 50 to 80 percent of relief assistance rendered per disaster episode. Figure 3 shows the functional organizational chart of the Disaster Coordinating Council at the national, regional, provincial and municipal levels. As noted earlier, the DSWD holds the chairmanship of the two committees of Relief and Rehabilitation.

The Disaster Coordinating Council set-up is the primary venue by which the national government formulates policies and guidelines and orchestrates disaster management in the country. It also provides the mechanism for coordinating and integrating the relief efforts among government agencies, between GO's and NGO's, and between the national government and the local government units.

"Inter-Agency" Organizing for Disaster Relief. At the national and regional levels, top-level coordination and leadership for the whole gamut of disaster-

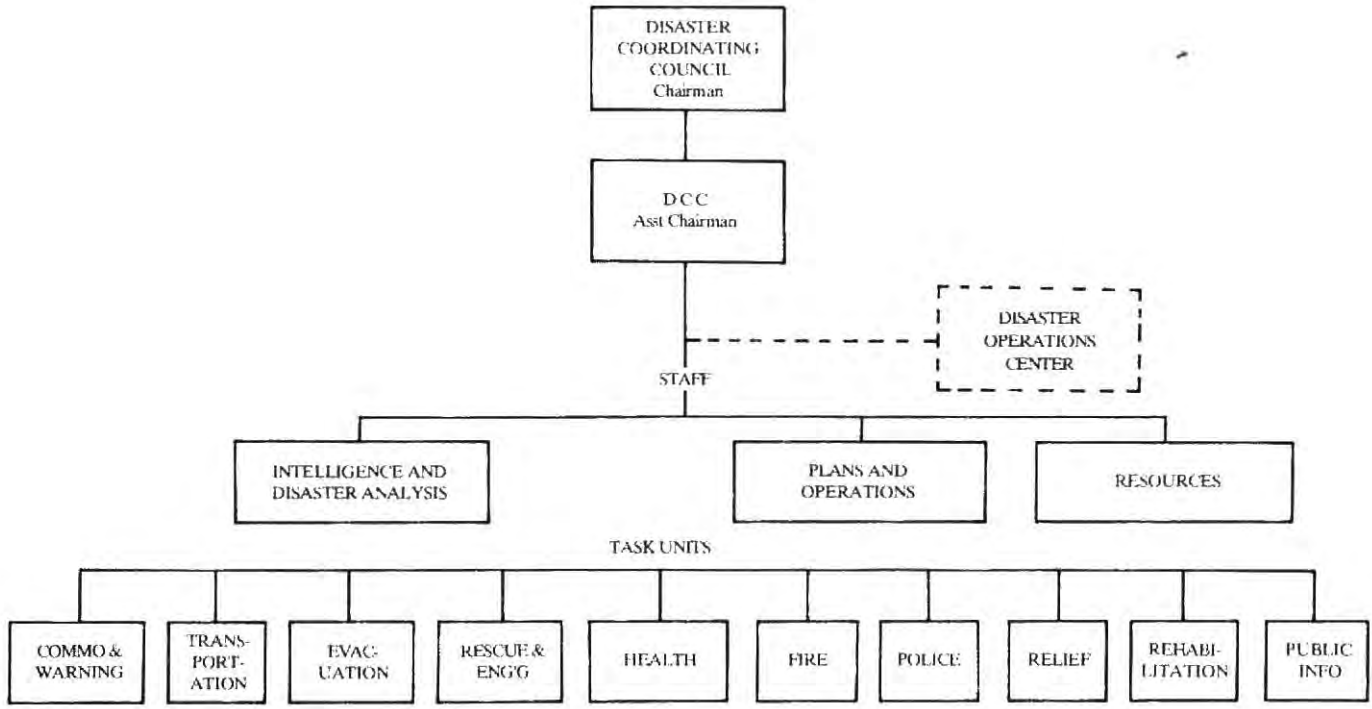


Figure 3. Organization of Disaster Coordinating Councils (Regional, Provincial, City and Municipal Levels).

managing activities within the Disaster Coordinating Council set-up is exercised by the Department of National Defense. At the provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels, responsibility for over-all coordination and leadership is laid on the shoulders of the elected local government executives (LGEs), namely: Provincial Governors, City and Municipal Mayors, and Barangay Captains.

A given reality, however, is that the level of organization, activeness, preparation and readiness of these LGE-led councils varies widely from one local government unit to another. It therefore follows that the quality of even the most basic disaster response (i.e., relief assistance) varies also widely from one locality to another. The DSWD, in collaboration with other members of NDCC and NGOs involved in disaster management, has given particular attention to organizing and training the lowest level and most numerous of such councils – the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council (BDCCs), Figure 4 shows the organizational structure of the BDCC.

Over the years, the DSWD has conducted a total of 2,305 disaster preparedness seminar workshops for these BDCCs. The Department attaches great importance to making the BDCC's active and operational because it is convinced that the first line of disaster response actually comes from the lowest level, especially in regard to the more immediate measures, such as search, rescue and evacuation, and relief.

The bottom line, however, is that the level of "being organized, trained and active" still varies greatly from council to council. This, in fact, is the biggest factor in the continued assumption of key operational roles by national agencies, like the DSWD, in ensuring that adequate and timely disaster response is provided.

DSWD Structure for Disaster Relief. The gap noted among the local-level coordinating councils relative to their disaster-response tasks, on the one hand, and their actual capabilities, on the other, has provided the main impetus for DSWD's maintenance of an internal, multi-level organization for disaster response. Hence, at the national level, DSWD's own disaster response is being managed thru the existing Central Office – Provincial Office – City/Municipal Office structure.

While direct relief operations are handled by the field offices (municipal, city, provincial and regional offices), the national headquarter (Central Office) provides vital support and coordination activities. The need for such an intra-agency and coordinating mechanism is usually highlighted in times of major disasters affecting simultaneously two or more regions or a large number of individuals, families and communities. Then, too, the wide magnitude of resulting disaster effects (which admittedly are difficult to correctly project) normally leads to a situation of resource inadequacy. As stockpiles of relief commodities in the disaster areas are consumed and the funds of responding field offices are depleted. Central Office acts swiftly to ensure timely replenishment of funds to purchase and/or augment relief supplies. Moreover, the spate of large-scale disasters, which has hit the country over the past two years, has also caused the Department to adopt a scheme for

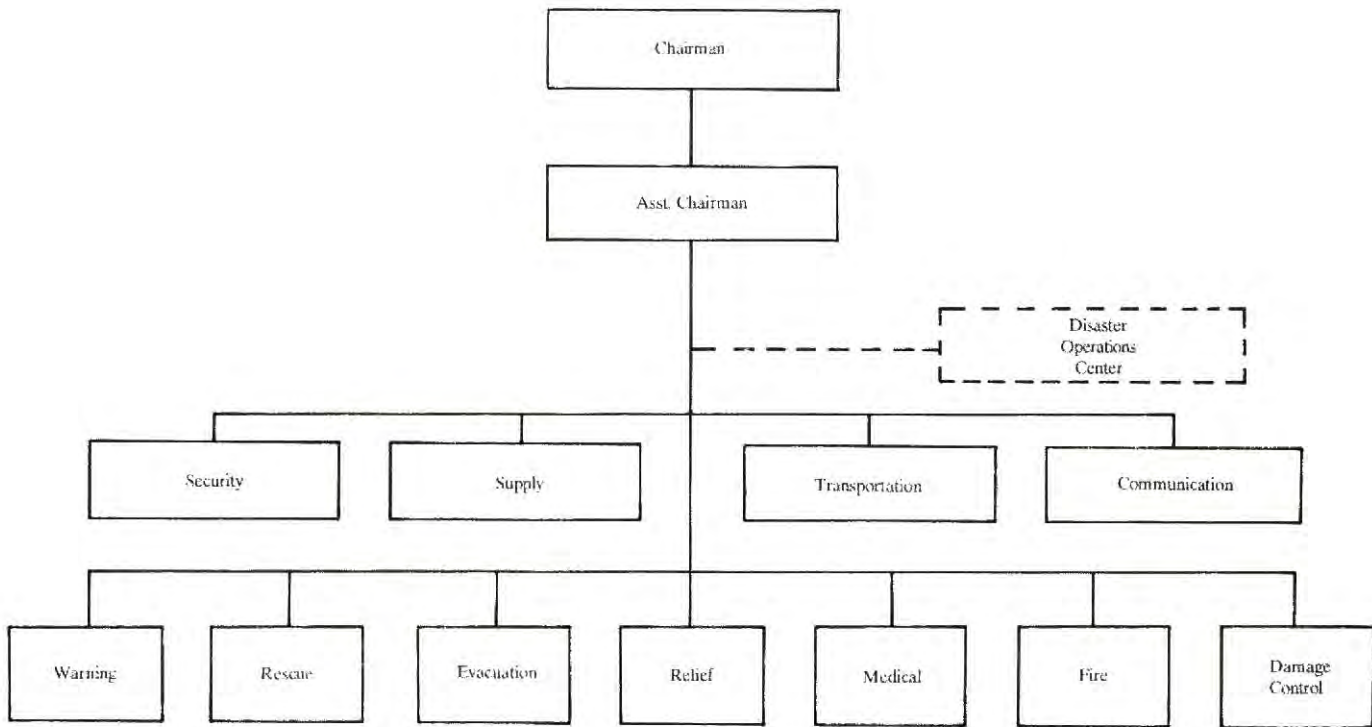


Figure 4. Organization of Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council.

optimizing deployment of its most precious resource for relief efforts. This resource is its manpower which includes top level officials, middle managers and direct service workers.

During the 16 July 1990 Killer Earthquake, the high-intensity type of continuous relief efforts for days and weeks necessitated a system of manpower reinforcement. Under this scheme, manpower from relatively unaffected branches and regions is assigned to the disaster-stricken areas. This reinforcement staff augments the local personnel complement which has become numerically inadequate relative to the size of affected population and communities. It also serves the purpose of temporarily relieving "battle-fatigued" workers conducting relief efforts.

The Ormoc Tragedy of 1991 brought to the fore the need for manpower reinforcement. The tragedy resulting from widespread and very sudden flooding practically immobilized the entire DSWD workforce assisting the whole city as well as the city population. Consequently, their own response capability was, for a time, reduced to almost zero. Outside reinforcement had to be dispatched to the area not just to help but to take over for a time the office management and directly oversee relief operations.

The more complicated and protracted tragedy of Mt. Pinatubo eruption has further strengthened the demand for this manpower reinforcement scheme. In DSWD's recent history, this scheme is by-far the most potent measure the Department has installed to ensure continuing effectiveness of manpower directly handling relief operations. At this point the Department has already "organized", installed and operationalized the system. Hence, future relief operations, especially for major disasters, will certainly be facilitated by this existing scheme.

DSWD's RELIEF OPERATIONS SYSTEM: GOVERNING PRINCIPLES, AGENCY POLICIES AND OVER-ALL APPROACH

Within the agency setting, the DSWD prepares for, organizes and conducts its disaster relief operations in accordance with a number of widely accepted principles, internal (or agency) policies, and approach.

Main Guiding Principles

In organizing its relief operations, the DSWD adheres, as far as possible, to the following key principles:

Principle 1: The survivors are themselves the primary resource in the relief process.

Pertaining to this tenet, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) holds the view that "The primary resource in relief process, is the

grassroots motivation and collective efforts of survivors, their friends and families. Assisting groups can help, but they must avoid doing anything best undertaken by the survivors themselves.”(8)

Principle 2: The expressed needs and choices of the victim population are the main determinant of the relief efforts to be conducted.

The words of a noted disaster management authority echo this truth in not so many words:

“ . . . Disaster relief efforts must fundamentally be directed to meeting the expressed needs of the victim populations. They must be enfranchised and given choice in the relief process. Further, any collective mechanism for the improvement of relief activities must be based on the evaluation and critique of the victim population. Mechanisms must be developed which tie donor agencies to the judgement of the supposed object of their activity.”(7)

Principle 3: Effective Relief Assistance may justify centralized preparedness planning but implementation of relief efforts and other forms of disaster response is best pursued in a decentralized setting.

This principle is clearly enunciated in a fairly recent work of Aysan and Oliver who comment:

“ . . . A distinction must be drawn between the necessity for centralized preparedness planning and the equal necessity for decentralised implementation at the local level. Sectoral and ministerial conflicts threaten effective policies. If decision-making at local levels is taken to central government, there is a weakening of the authority of local officials Centralization also results in both human and material assistance flooding the area from central sources, thus reducing the opportunities for the revival of the local economy, or for local officials to take responsibility for their own structures.”(1)

Principle 4: Relief effort should be undertaken not only with short-term considerations in mind but with a view to fostering, or at least not hampering, the long-term development of the nation as a whole and the affected population and communities in particular.

Koenigsberger says:

"Relief Assistance" "if poorly managed can create unrealistic expectations and long-term dependency. Therefore, it can prove to be a serious obstacle to subsequent developmental assistance. A major reason for this state of affairs is the excessive aid that normally goes into relief assistance, whilst reconstruction, and preparedness and mitigation are starved of the necessary resources."(6)

The operation of the first principle is demonstrated by DSWD's heavy reliance on volunteers who are usually themselves residents in affected communities and victims of the disaster. This strategy greatly facilitates the relief efforts, extends significantly the manpower resources of the agency, and provides therapeutic effects upon the victims themselves. Moreover, aside from these largely pre-trained and pre-designated community volunteers, the Department likewise maximizes the active support of the victims themselves. Particular usefulness of this approach has been noted in large evacuation centers. A case in point is the current operation of the Clark Airbase Command Evacuation Center, better known as CABCOM, for Mt. Pinatubo victims in Mabalacat, Pampanga. A total of 1,091 evacuee-families are distributed among 9 barracks, 1 big gymnasium, 1 dispensary, 4 other smaller facilities, and 9 tents. The center is being managed by a 6-man DSWD team working in two shifts to ensure a continuous 24-hour supervision of center operations. It would have been a formidable task just to ensure an orderly distribution of food and other provisions for these evacuees, but because the evacuees themselves have been organized and allowed to choose their respective team leaders, the work has been simplified and the dignity of the evacuees preserved. Some 45 team leaders, representing an average of 24 evacuee families per leader, actively help distribute relief supplies among their respective groups. More importantly, they act as liaison between the evacuees and the center management (DSWD staff). Not only is relief distribution facilitated but a two-way communication between the evacuees and the DSWD staff has been greatly enhanced. CABCOM is a very convincing proof that relief operations can be pursued with efficiency and maximum participation of the victims themselves if the DSWD staff in-charge take the time to organize them and maintain their active participation in directly running the evacuation center.

Under the second principle governing relief efforts which the DSWD adheres to, the Department gives primary consideration to the needs and choices expressed by the victims themselves to determine the very content and even methodology of the relief efforts. To the extent feasible, the kind of relief goods being provided by the DSWD conforms to the expressed preferences, culture and customs of the victims population. Even the DSWD-developed Ready-to-Eat-food packages have been "pretested" for acceptability among various groups of target beneficiaries. Production of those items which proved unacceptable is dis-

continued. In the case of the Aeta evacuees whose preference for cassava and bananas became known through their own comments and feedbacks, efforts were taken to procure such supplies. Donors were likewise duly advised of such preference. Request for specific needs, like mosquito nets, cartons to lay on concrete floorings, wooden pallettes or "papags", water containers, -- and a host of other particular items not ordinarily procured by the Department or normally donated by donor organizations -- usually come to the attention of relief workers and administrators straight from the evacuees themselves. The key in all these is the opportunity given to the victims to verbalize or express their needs. This is where the importance of democratically chosen team leaders comes in. Also a potent tool for eliciting such information and establishing open communication channels is the use of general assemblies, small group discussions and team leaders' meeting, such as those being practised in the CABCOM evacuation center.

Number three principle refers to the maximum decentralization feasible in terms of the implementation of relief efforts. As stated earlier, the central headquarter of the Department provides support and coordinating services at the national level. At the regional level this function is generally replicated by the regional offices along with some direct implementing tasks. But responsibility for the bulk of direct relief operations is discharged by the provincial, city and municipal offices. Hence, over the past two decades the DSWD has resolutely, if gradually, pursued a build-up of capabilities of the field offices to immediately conduct relief operations on their own at the very onset of a disaster. The institution of stand-by funds, inventories and stockpile; the establishment of food-reserve centers; and the working out of arrangements with the National Food Authority so that field offices can readily withdraw needed rice from NFA warehouses in the localities are just some of the agency decentralization measures taken by the DSWD to greatly enhance effectiveness of its relief efforts. Adherence to the pragmatic approach of decentralized relief operations is the reason, to, why the Department has wholeheartedly supported the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991 and its impending full implementation by October of this year. This latter development, though, has a number of operational implications which will definitely affect future relief organizing and provision. The last section of this paper discusses issues and concerns pertaining to the future of the relief system in the country.

The fourth guiding principle for relief organizing and provision is comparatively the most challenging, if not downright difficult to abide by. To organize and implement relief efforts with due consideration to the long-term development needs of the nation as a whole, and to those of the affected population and communities in particular, involves reconciling some internal contradictions in the concepts being employed. As defined earlier, relief is an emergency response, falling within the ambit of crisis management, and necessarily dealing with the short-run. Development management, on the other hand, pertains to the more normal and deliberate sphere of management in which the timeframe being con-

sidered is the long-run or, at least, the medium term. Yet it is a valid contention that relief efforts should at least not hinder development efforts and this is where the DSWD has met with some very real problems in operationalizing the principle. A case in point is the implementation of the cash-for-work program for victims of Mt. Pinatubo last year. The program seeks to provide participating victims with a daily cash income at the rate of P50 a day working on such operations as sandbagging, small reconstruction projects, restoration of pathways and footbridges, and similar community projects for their own direct benefits. In one severely affected province, the program was met with indifference if not outright rejection by the target participants! Their reason? They felt no urge to work on such a low-paying job when they were already being fed in the evacuation centers in the first place. The danger of creating dependency among the victims, which if not prevented is indeed a far greater tragedy to the nation, is very real. This is the reason — that is often misunderstood by the victims themselves as well as by the media and the public at-large, including donor organizations and individuals — the DSWD consciously regulates provision of relief at the level of subsistence. Of course, the other reason is scarcity of resources and the uncertainty of just how long the emergency period will last. Yet the Department, especially the staff working directly with the victims, has been criticized for adopting an operating policy that when a group of victims had been served by a responding group or organization the DSWD withholds provision of the equivalent supplies from its stock. Fortunately, it would seem that more and more NGO's working with the Department are seeing the validity and rationality of this policy.

Consideration for possible detrimental effects on the economy has been responsible for the DSWD's adoption of a policy that would protect the country's agricultural sector. For instance, the DSWD has been assuming the cost-differential accruing to the purchase of local rice by World Food, an international agency actively supporting the relief efforts for Mt. Pinatubo victims. The price of local rice is substantially higher than the prevailing world market price. DSWD could actually accept cheaper foreign-purchased rice, but the foregone local revenues would have been a big loss to the local farmers.

Then, too, DSWD has been implementing the policy of local purchase of relief commodities, encouraging the procurement of needed items, as far as possible, within the region or provinces directly affected by the disaster.

Agency Policies on Relief Organizing and Provision

Many of the operating policies of DSWD governing the conduct of relief assistance have already been mentioned in the immediately preceding section. These policies are:

1. Maintenance of close coordination and joint efforts with other government agencies, particularly the LGUs.
2. Maximization of resources and support of NGO's.

3. Provision of relief to meet subsistence requirements.
4. Observance of prioritization in meeting relief needs.
5. Observance of self-determination rights of victims and donors.
6. Preference for locally-produced or locally provided items in the purchase of relief commodities.
7. Deference to duly elected local government executives.
8. Observance of maximum transparency and accountability.

The over-all approach, therefore, of the Department in undertaking its relief efforts is the maximization of the use of "external" resources (equipment, manpower, materials and even funds) which other agencies of government can provide to the total efforts. After all, the needs of the affected population are always far greater than the capabilities of the DSWD, or even of the entire government machinery, to adequately respond to. The approach is also characterized by the setting of "subsistence standards" as the limit in valuing or controlling the amount of relief assistance to be provided to the victims. The rationale for this has been amply discussed above. Currently the amount being used in the Pinatubo area is P55.00 per family per day.

For similar reasons the Department utilizes a system of priorities for attending to the needs of the affected population. As a general rule, the DSWD gives priority to affected persons who are in evacuation centers. Next are those who have to evacuate their own homes and are temporarily staying in the homes of friends and relatives.

To the extent feasible, the rights to self-determination of both victims and donors are observed. In the case of the former, their preferences and expressed needs are given a high consideration in determining the particular relief supplies to provide. Their own plans for the future beyond their stay at the evacuation centers are also respected. In the case of donors, their preference as to which group or center to serve is respected. At the very least, the DSWD staff concerned requests coordination and offers guidance and suggestions as to which groups or centers (especially the comparatively underserved centers or areas) the donors may wish to serve.

In recognition of the mandate and ultimate accountability of the local government executives, the Department sees to it that their primary leadership role is upheld. Related to this point, the DSWD also carefully observes maximum transparency in its decisions and transactions relative to the conduct of relief efforts. Also, to ensure the highest level of accountability the Department puts a high premium upon efficient records-keeping both for government funds and more importantly, donated resources.

CHALLENGES, ISSUES AND CONCERNS

It may be concluded that in terms of the general or national framework there is already an existing organizational set-up governing the Philippine relief system. Admittedly, however, at the sub-macro level, organizing and re-organizing for relief shall remain a major function or task of disaster-managing organizations. Moreover, a number of developments and salient issues confront the existing relief system. This paper believes that these concerns must be promptly addressed to ensure a proper working of the system in the decades to come. Foremost among these concerns are:

1. Devolution of relief operations function to the local government units;
2. Emergence of a trend towards mega-disasters in the nation; and
3. Executive/Legislative initiatives to strengthen the National Disaster Coordinating Council, particularly the creation of a body to serve as secretarial to the council.

Of the three, the issue with the most immediate import is the effectivity of the Local Government Code of 1991 this October. One of the devolved functions from the DSWD to the LGUs is the conduct of relief operations. The devolution of this particular function is explicit in the case of the Provinces and Cities, but rather implicit in the case of the municipalities.

The assignment of relief operations function to the LGUs is an important issue because of two factors: 1) the perceived lack of readiness, preparation and capability of the local government executives to manage disasters; and 2) the understandable apprehension of the entry of more political considerations in the conduct of relief operations.

Starting the year 1990 there seems to have been established in the country a trend for mega-disasters, or calamitous situations characterized by a very high number and proportion of affected population and communities. It is really not difficult to see why this is so. One very obvious reason is the rapid increase in population growth; thus, the increase in human settlements which are exposed to natural hazards. Another valid reason is the high degree of environmental degradation in the country. The other and most cogent reason is the unbridled worsening of the poverty situation. These three factors must have certainly increased many times over the level of vulnerability of the Philippine population. The role of poverty in heightening the proneness or vulnerability of a nation to wide-magnitude disasters has been a key theme of current literature linking disaster management to development efforts. The words of one respected author in this regard are very instructive:

"The increase in disaster potential is one result of the cycle of poverty common to developing countries. The roots of poverty, which are also the predominant roots of vulnerability, are the increased marginalization of the population caused by a high birthrate and the lack of resources (or the failure of governments to allocate resources) to meet the basic human needs of an expanding population." (3)

How current moves of Congress to legislate the replacement of the National Disaster Coordinating Council set-up in the country will prosper is an important consideration in the future of the relief system in the country. It would seem that indeed the time has come to reexamine and reform the existing system for administering the disaster management program, especially the relief aspect. The effectivity of the devolution is one big impetus. But the more important consideration is an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the NDCC and the lower-level councils in overseeing and directing the total disaster efforts.

The foregoing discussions point to a need to really take stock of the Philippine relief system. This paper holds the view that certain proactive actions must already be taken in the face of the changes in the Philippine situation. Changes, however, are needed to ensure that future organizing of relief and the actual implementation of the relief efforts shall indeed serve the best interest of the nation not only in the short-run perspective of disaster relief but well beyond.

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