

Responses to questions as provided by

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1. What has been the economic, social and environmental impact of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon on the Philippines? Which sectors have been affected the most?

As expected, the 2015/16 El Niño indeed had impact on all three areas: economic, social and environment. But the intensity of such impact was not that severe as we feared sometime in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2015 when PAGASA, the country's weather and climate authority, started to inform the public of the El Niño phenomenon that has been observed and monitored since the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2014 was going to intensify to mimic the features of the 1997/98 where huge production losses were incurred (for rice up to 28% lower than the normal production years), hunger and deaths especially in remote areas and outbreak of diseases.

Despite the reported losses in agricultural production, the sector most affected, supply of commodities including rice to date seems to be sufficient as indicated by the stable food prices and food price inflation maintained at low levels. Rice production as of the end of 2015 was estimated to be about 10% lower than production in normal years and not as high as the 28% experienced in 197/98.

Likewise, there have been no reports of disease outbreaks, even in the areas that declared State of Calamity. Neither were there issues in relation to the availability of water supply for drinking. Incidence of forest and grass fires were reported in various drought affected provinces including Mt. Apo in Davao and Mt. Kitanglad in Bukidnon but which were immediately contained. On the supply of energy, Mindanao indeed experienced power shortages because the region's great dependence on hydroelectric power that was affected by the low water level in Lake Lanao.

2. What forecasts and warnings were available and how has the Philippines prepared itself to reduce the El Niño-related risk?

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services (PAGASA) is the key agency that provides regular advisory on weather and climatic outlook and as such rainfall, thunderstorm and flood warning. Sometime 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2015 when PAGASA was for certain El Niño is going to intensify, the agency started to release regular bulletins and conduct weather and climatic outlook forum.

In August 2015, President Benigno S. Aquino III issued an Executive Order that constituted the El Niño Task Force and designated NEDA as lead to formulate an Action Plan to address the impact of El Niño. The NEDA convened a series of inter-agency meetings to discuss and finalize the Roadmap to Address the Impact of El Niño (RAIN). RAIN consists of sets of interventions/activities aimed to mitigate the impact of the El Niño in four areas: i) Food security; ii) Energy security; iii) Health; and iv) Safety. The action plan includes sets of interventions for 67 (including Metro Manila) provinces projected to experience from dry spell to drought conditions with their corresponding budget. The action plan was presented and approved by the President sometime in December 2015.

When alert was made regarding the El Niño event that would be as strong (or even stronger) than the 1997/98 El Niño, the Food Security Committee immediately met to assess the most likely supply and demand situation of rice on those periods of drought. NFA was then advised to import rice to ensure enough stocks that will buffer rice production decreases.

Nationwide campaign was also launched to inform people about El Niño, its possible impact and how they could help to reduce the impact, especially in relation to saving water.

Regional El Niño Task Force were also activated to monitor the situation and inform projected beneficiaries about the available government program and assistance.

3. What are some lessons learned from your country's experience?

- *Logistic difficulties.* Some of the identified RAIN interventions such as cash-for-work and provision of family food packs, are considered prohibited acts during election period (Election ban). In this regard, there is a need to explore partners who could undertake this assistance. In addition, poor/inadequate road transportation facilities limited effective RAIN implementation in remote areas/uplands. Poor infrastructure facilities that limited assistance and information regarding government assistance to reach the more remote areas.
- *The current design of disaster/risk assistance/management programs is not suited to address the needed responses for slow-on setting events like El Niño.* The current design of cash-for-work program covers only up to 15 days work. A family food pack is good only for up to 3 days. The adverse impact of El Niño, however, is expected to last much longer, perhaps by 1-2 months. If the intervention is intended for 30 days, then there should be two cycles of the cash-for-work program, and 10 cycles of the food distribution component.
- *Funds that are accessed for disaster risk are not designed for responding the needed mitigation interventions.* In conjunction to the limitations of disaster risk programs is the limitation on the use of available funds like the Quick Response (QRF) Fund and the

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (NDRRM) Fund. QRF is appropriated for the relief, aid and rehabilitation of communities and areas affected by man-made and natural calamities. As such the use of the agency's QRF is primarily used for reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged structures. It was partly used by agencies for the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, for example in the case of NIA. El Niño is not expected to result in damages to other physical infrastructures or even houses. Moreover, not all agencies are provided with QRF. On the other hand, the processing requirements to access the NDRRM Fund could not also respond to the needs of RAIN and this has been exacerbated by the absence of "special" procurement process, even in cases when an area is already declared under a state of calamity. The available "small value procurement" policy, which also takes a month or so to process, could only cover very limited number of beneficiaries. Some RAIN interventions require capital outlay, like the firefighting equipment needed by the Bureau of Fire Protection, which takes even longer time to procure.

- *Strengthen coordination with local government units.* Given that some services are devolved to the LGUs, there is a need to strengthen coordination with LGUs in order to ensure that all affected areas are reached by government interventions as well as make the distribution system more efficient. LGUs are also needed for the monitoring and vetting of affected beneficiaries and hence the effective distribution of assistance.

#### 4. What should be the role of the UN and the international community?

UN and the international community could help both in terms of enhancing logistic support especially when a situation such as this comes in a time when election ban is imposed. Help from these partners could be in terms of extending additional food packs and distributing them to affected beneficiaries. Because of the election ban, agencies have been extra careful to ensure that assistance is not politicized.

Considering their extension arm, development partners could help the government reach the more remote areas for the relief/assistance distribution, to inform about the El Nino phenomenon as well as the assistance available from government especially the cash-for-work for those who could not cultivate their farms and/or fish.