

FLOODING IN THE PHILIPPINES

CASE STUDY

Philippines factbox

**Population: 96 million
(approx)**

**Population living below
poverty line (on less than
US\$1.25 per day): 18%**

**Life expectancy at birth:
69 years**

Adult literacy rate: 95%

Data from undp.org and worldbank.org



Christian Aid's *Big River Rising* resource is a multimedia documentary on flooding in the Philippines. You can view this at christianaid.org.uk/big-river-rising

Background

The Philippines, in south-east Asia, is an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands located between the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Its varied natural landscape is matched by a turbulent economic and social history. For a short period, after the second world war, the country was the second wealthiest in south-east Asia, but by the 1960s its economy had stopped growing. Now the economy is moving from one based on agriculture to one based more on services and manufacturing, and economists predict that the Philippines will become a major global economic power by the mid-21st century. However, wealth and development is very unequally divided among the population, and nearly one-fifth of the people in the Philippines live below the poverty line.

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Environment



Christian Aid/Amanda Farrant

- Its tropical location makes the Philippines very rich in natural resources and biodiversity, but also prone to disasters. The country is located in a region known as 'the ring of fire'; a 25,000-mile stretch of geophysical activity around the Pacific basin. The ring of fire is home to more than 75 per cent of the world's volcanoes and experiences around 90 per cent of the world's earthquakes – the result of plate tectonics and the movement and collisions of lithospheric plates in this region.

Disaster in the Philippines



Christian Aid/Amanda Farrant

- Disasters in the Philippines are not one-off events: the country is prone to regular flooding and typhoons. Around 20 typhoons strike the Philippines each year, causing widespread damage and destruction. When extreme weather occurs in the Philippines, it can cause widespread flooding, flash floods and landslides, which heap more destruction on people who are often still trying to recover from the previous disaster.

Flooding in August 2012



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- It had already been raining for 10 days in the Philippines when torrential rains began to batter down in the evening of 6 August 2012. For two and a half days the rains continued to batter the country and, as the flood waters rose, 4,000 homes were destroyed, 15,000 more were damaged, and more than 100 people lost their lives. Rains like this often continue for several months across the monsoon season; in August 2012 the rains were stronger than usual. Shortly after, tropical storm Helen directly struck the Philippines, heaping further misery on people already struggling to cope with disaster. Close to 1 million people fled to evacuation centres during August 2012.



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- These repeated disasters affect poor communities the most. In poor urban communities, people's houses were destroyed. People living in informal settlements (slums) are particularly at risk during and after disasters. In the Philippines, informal settlements, where the poorest people live, are often located along river banks and in other areas at risk from flooding. People living in these settlements face an impossible situation: if they stay, they risk drowning, but if they leave then they risk being prevented from returning to their homes or having all of their belongings stolen by looters.

The emergency response



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- The most urgent need during severe flooding in the Philippines is to get people at risk to safety. Christian Aid's partners provide rescue boats and life jackets to the most vulnerable areas. People escaping flooding will also need temporary shelter, food, water, bedding, soap and medicines. These are regularly provided by Christian Aid's partners, who provide emergency supplies to the poorest and most vulnerable communities when disaster strikes in the Philippines.

Preparing for future disasters



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- Christian Aid's partner the Centre for Disaster Preparedness (CDP) trains local communities in skills to cope with disaster. These include developing evacuation plans and warning systems. A network of trained 'hazard watchers' monitor the river level: they alert other people in their community when the river level rises and they are at risk from floodwaters.

Working together



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- In an area where disaster often strikes, it is extremely important that people work together as a community to support each other. In some parts of Metro Manila, people risked their lives to stay in their flooded homes and guard their possessions because they were afraid of looting. Christian Aid's partners try to engage the whole community in developing disaster plans so that people feel empowered to help each other at times of disaster. Disaster plans include drawing maps to identify the houses and people most at risk and making sure that these people are evacuated first.

Advocacy and campaigning



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez-Noda

- 'Advocacy' means helping people to speak up for their rights, represent their interests and obtain the services they need. Christian Aid's partners also work with government agencies, non-government organisations, people's organisations and communities to increase the level of disaster preparedness and emergency response in the poorest areas of the Philippines.
- Scientists believe that climate change is partly responsible for making extreme weather events, like the heavy rain that causes severe flooding in the Philippines, more frequent and intense. Christian Aid campaigns at a global level to reduce carbon emissions to try to limit climate change.



Flooding in the Philippines: eyewitness account

Emma Wrigley, a Christian Aid staff member, was in the Philippines in August 2012 when monsoon rains battered Manila. This account is taken from her blog.

'Waking up this morning in my Manila-based hotel, I was relieved to hear the rain had finally died down.

'Since I arrived in the Philippines just over a week ago, the skies have been consistently dark, the streets eerily quiet, and torrential rain has been pelting down, only stopping momentarily. I was scared, not for myself, but for the people whose homes were being destroyed.

'The riverbank communities of Manila are used to the annual monsoon season, but this year, thanks to driving winds from tropical storms, a lot more rains have hit. I'd witnessed the Marikina river steadily swelling over several days, and I knew these people were in a bad, bad situation.

'Even though the area is deemed a danger zone, these communities still set up home there, in make-shift houses with little more than plywood for shelter. For people without a steady income, this is their only option. They have nowhere else to go, can't afford rent, and have to build their homes on the only land available to them.

'A river monitor, trained by one of Christian Aid's partner organisations Centre for Disaster Preparedness, carefully checks the water levels – if it gets too high, the community needs to evacuate. Yesterday, I witnessed people grabbing their belongings and racing to evacuation centres as their houses were crumpled by the thrashing waters. Yet, fearing they wouldn't be able to return to the land if they left, some men stayed,

climbing on to the roofs, kicking away debris swept along in the torrents to protect their fragile homes. One woman stood screaming at her husband to get down and leave with her, but he wanted to stay until the bitter end.

'Returning to the community this morning, everywhere is just brown. Homes have been flattened, and people are wading around in deep mud, trying to rescue whatever they can. Yet after a slight break, the rain has returned. Soon the river will be raging again, and the community will need to flee once again.

'I also visited an evacuation centre this morning: a basketball court, filled to the brim with more than 600 people, families sleeping side by side, children everywhere. Local government workers are providing hot food; a godsend for these poor communities whose lives have been turned upside down.

'Another result of the floods is the many pigs that are now rushing around the city streets, which is a sight to see. Many indigenous communities keep pigs, rearing the females to breed, and selling any males for meat. They also can help predict bad weather, as they scream when the water gets too high, and many families keep a pig close by. Now, pigs huddle together everywhere, as families have brought them on to higher grounds to keep them safe.

'And as I wade around in gloopy knee-deep mud, I watch the people come together, just doing what needs to be done to save their community. I feel immensely proud that Christian Aid partners have provided the people we've met with evacuation and rescue training, helping them to take control in this hazardous environment and saving many lives. With this knowledge and guidance, they will be able to slowly rebuild their lives.'

Christian Aid's partners continue to support people dealing with and preparing for flooding and typhoons in the Philippines.

Look at the **Philippines case study** (christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary) and the **Big River Rising** resource (christianaid.org.uk/big-river-rising) and then answer the following questions.

- **Why do people build houses close to dangerous rivers in the Philippines?**
- **Why is flooding so common in the Philippines?**
- **Why is the community of Banaba especially vulnerable?**
- **What is the role of a flood monitor/hazard watcher and why is it important?**

- **Why is it important to get the community involved in flood preparation?**
- **What were the immediate impacts of the August 2012 flooding in the Philippines?**
- **What were Christian Aid's priorities when this happened?**
- **In what ways is it suggested that climate change might impact on the Philippines?**