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STORIES FROM PEACEBUILDING & HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS

PHILIPPINES



Funded by
European Union
Humanitarian Aid

ACCESS

Assisting Most Vulnerable Communities and Schools
Affected by Complex Emergencies Access Quality and
Timely Humanitarian and Disaster Preparedness Services

ACCESS (Assisting the Most Vulnerable Communities and Schools Affected by Complex Emergencies in Accessing Quality and Timely Humanitarian and Disaster Preparedness Services) is a multi-year, multi-sectoral project funded by the European Union and implemented by consortium members ACCORD (Assistance and Cooperation for Community Resilience and Development), Action Against Hunger Philippines, CARE Philippines, Community Organizers Multiversity (COM), Humanity & Inclusion Philippines, Integrated Mindanaons Association for Natives (IMAN), Leading Individuals to Flourish and Thrive (LIFT), Mindanao Organization for Social and Economic Progress (MOSEP), Nagdilaab Foundation, National Rural Women Coalition (PKKK), Notre Dame of Jolo College, Oxfam Pilipinas, Philippine Relief and Development Services (PHILRADS), Plan International Pilipinas, Save the Children Philippines, Simon of Cyrene Community Rehabilitation & Development Foundation, and UnYPhil-Women

Damage from Severe Tropical Storm
Trami (Kristine) in Camarines Sur.
© Mia Brusola/ACCORD

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A woman and her husband now rely on dried fish for income, after frequent floods made it impossible to farm their land. Cash assistance helped them buy food, water, and a new fishing net. © Ariel C. Lalisan/Oxfam Pilipinas

In **Mindanao**, the Philippines' southernmost island, communities grapple with the compounding effects of conflict, displacement, natural hazards, and climate-induced disasters.

This photo series brings into focus stories from across the region: **children returning to school after floods, indigenous groups navigating displacement due to conflict, individuals obtaining birth certificates for the first time, and humanitarian aid reaching the most remote communities.**

It primarily features moments from the **EU-funded ACCESS Project** but also showcases

other EU-supported initiatives, offering a glimpse into the collective, complementary efforts of humanitarians working on the ground, united in their goal of building resilience in the most at-risk, least-served communities.

At its heart, these images celebrate human resilience. Amidst overwhelming challenges, the strength, dignity, and hope of Mindanao's communities shine through. As viewers, we are called not only to bear witness to their struggles but also to recognize the necessity of continued support and solidarity with those enduring these crises.



Top: A Moro woman speaks to ACCESS staff as part of the project's efforts to restore primary healthcare services in crisis-affected communities. ACCESS also offers mental health and psychosocial support through community sessions and individual counseling. © Abdul Alim Talusob/Action Against Hunger Philippines

Clockwise from left:

1 - ACCESS distributed waste bins to partner schools in Lanao del Norte and del Sur to help protect 2,854 children from health risks amid ongoing emergencies. © Save the Children Philippines

2 - A schoolgirl smiles as she lines up with her classmates during a distribution of school supplies in Agusan del Sur. After nearly two years of disrupted learning due to the pandemic, students were eager to return to school and reunite with friends. © Bernadette Uy/ACCORD

3 - Teenage girls smile with gratitude after receiving menstrual hygiene kits from ACCESS. © Save the Children Philippines

4 - To support children affected by flooding and landslides in Davao de Oro, ACCESS distributes back-to-school kits, including raincoats, to help them continue their education. Hazards like flooding frequently disrupt classes and damage essential school items such as books, bags, and uniforms. © Action Against Hunger Philippines

5 - Women carrying their children and essential items walk through a village in Datu Saudi Ampatuan during a simulation exercise on anticipatory action for armed conflict in 2024. The exercise aimed to strengthen local preparedness and response strategies in the face of potential conflict. © Plan International Pilipinas

Mindanao in Focus: Resilience in the Margins, Hope at the Center

Early morning fog envelops a convoy of *habal-habal* (motorbikes modified with outriggers to carry more goods and people) transporting goods to a conflict-affected area in San Luis, Agusan del Sur. Remote communities, vulnerable to both natural and human-induced hazards, face significant challenges in receiving aid. Despite difficult access, humanitarian efforts strive to reach these last-mile communities where the need is greatest. © ACCORD-CARE Philippines



Clockwise from left:

1 & 2 - In hard-to-reach areas like Pagalungan, Maguindanao del Sur, timely support can make all the difference. Through anticipatory action, ACCESS helped families prepare before conflict forced them to leave. © Yasraf Gayao/Action Against Hunger Philippines

3 - A resident affected by the armed conflict in Northern Kabuntalan receives a live chicken as food aid. Providing live rather than dressed poultry was more practical since most residents do not have refrigerators. © Humanity & Inclusion Philippines-Community Organizers Multiversity

4 - An Indigenous woman in Mindanao poses with her newly acquired birth certificate. Indigenous peoples in geographically isolated areas often struggle to access government services due to the lack of essential documents like birth certificates. This gap also increases their vulnerability to abuse and violence, especially in conflict-affected areas where proper identification is crucial for protection. © ACCORD-CARE Philippines

Bottom: Residents of Northern Kabuntalan help each other cross a flooded area. Heavy rains brought by the Southwest Monsoon in July 2024 inundated eight villages in Mindanao, affecting over 3,000 families. © Plan International Pilipinas

Strength & Survival in a Season of Storms

Stories & photos by the ACCESS Consortium

From September to November 2024, a string of powerful typhoons—Yagi (Enteng), Trami (Kristine), Kong-rey (Leon), Yinxing (Marce), Toraji (Nika), Usagi (Ofel), and Man-yi (Pepito)—swept across the Philippines. The storms brought torrential rains and record floods, displacing communities for prolonged periods, claiming lives, and damaging livelihoods.

In **Batangas**, a father watched helplessly as his home and his family were swept away. In **Nueva Ecija**, a grandmother spent five months in a temporary shelter, scavenging scrap to keep her family fed. In **Camarines Sur**, a man living with paralysis survived by climbing onto his roof and waiting days to be rescued.

These are just some of the stories from communities supported by the EU-funded ACCESS Project. They reveal not only the damage left by the storms but also the quiet strength of survivors and the role of timely, dignified humanitarian aid in helping them begin again.



UNIMAGINABLE LOSS. Sanny Mendoza, 42, was among those devastated by Severe Tropical Storm Trami (Kristine) in Agoncillo, Batangas in October 2024. He lost his wife and son as their home was swept away by raging floodwaters. © Jet Ines/Save the Children Philippines

A Father's Strength to Rebuild His Life After a Super Typhoon

Story by Jet Ines/Save the Children Philippines

AGONCILLO, BATANGAS — Losing your loved ones is never easy, but witnessing them fighting for their lives right before your eyes is an entirely different kind of pain.

Sanny, 42, thought it was just another day of enduring heavy rains—something he had grown used to since settling in Agoncillo, Batangas. But the heavy rains brought by Severe Tropical Storm Trami (Kristine) were unlike anything before, and Sanny and his family quickly realized this was no ordinary storm.

Sanny, who was outside their house evacuating their pigs, did not anticipate that there would be another, even stronger surge of floodwaters—one that would engulf their home and leave devastation in its wake. "The first flood reached up to our knees, then up to the windows. Then came another massive flood, this time with soil and debris," he said.

Before he could make it back inside, the raging flood, now mixed with big rocks and tree logs from the mountains, swept through their house. Panic set in as he heard the desperate cries of his family trapped inside.

"If my nephew hadn't helped me, I might not be alive either. I was about to run to my wife, children, and my mother, but he held onto me and never let go. When I saw my house being carried away by the flood, I just lay down on the ground—I couldn't do anything," he said.

For Sanny and most residents of Agoncillo, as well as other parts of Batangas devastated by Severe Tropical Storm Trami, it was their first time experiencing a flood of such magnitude. "We just experienced that though, when the volcano erupted. It also flooded but it wasn't that big. So it's our first time to experience a flood like that. It was really big," he explained.

Sanny is just one of the more than 7.9 million people—or two million Filipino families—affected across 17 of the country's 18 regions. Approximately 684,900 individuals have been displaced.

Now, Sanny lives with his four-year-old child—the sole survivor in his family, after the storm took the lives of his loved ones. He shared that his child would not have survived either if they hadn't stayed with a sibling, narrowly escaping the collapse of their home.

Despite the immense loss, Sanny draws strength from his child, knowing that they must move forward together. Each day is a struggle, but he remains determined to provide a sense of normalcy and security for the only family he has left.



BURIED IN MUD. Once a thriving farmland, this area in Brgy. Banyaga, Agoncillo, Batangas now lies covered in thick mud from the flash floods. What was once a housing community was completely devastated by Severe Tropical Storm Trami (Kristine). © Jet Ines/ Save the Children Philippines

"Now, while I try to make a living, I also take care of my child. Everything I do is for her. And somehow, I still dream of rebuilding our home," he said.

"My child used the cash assistance to buy groceries and some school supplies," he added, emphasizing how even the smallest support made a difference in rebuilding their lives.

For recipients like Sanny, the cash-for-food assistance not only provided immediate relief but also gave them a sense of dignity and control over their recovery. Being able to choose and purchase their own necessities meant they could prioritize what mattered most for their survival and well-being.

With the help of organizations like Save the Children, he hopes to slowly rebuild not just their home, but also their future. Though the pain of losing his loved ones lingers, he chooses to hold on to hope—one small step at a time.

"Thank you to Save the Children, in a way, I am now more ready to prepare to heal from what happened, it might be difficult, but at least, there is something I can give to my child now," Sanny said. ■

Weathering storms & scarcity: A grandmother's life after Typhoon Yagi

Story by Greggry Bautista & Tanya Mariano/CARE Philippines



Leonila Tamayo, 61, holds a recommended food list provided by ACCESS, designed to help meet her family's nutritional needs during recovery. © Greggry Bautista/CARE Philippines

LICAB, NUEVA ECIJA — When Typhoon Yagi (Enteng) hit northern Luzon in September 2024, it added to the persistent flooding already affecting communities in Nueva Ecija. In Poblacion Sur, the water didn't drain easily. The fields stayed submerged, and homes were surrounded by thick mud and stagnant water. In November 2024, another powerful typhoon, Man-yi (Pepito), barreled through the province, prolonging people's displacement.



Leonila supports her family by collecting and selling scrap. Displaced by Typhoon Yagi and forced to live in a temporary shelter for five months, she continues to work each day to provide food and support her grandson's education.
© Greggry Bautista/CARE Philippines

Providing for her family in uncertain times

Leonila Tamayo, 61, evacuated with her family of five to an old public market being used as a temporary shelter. They ended up staying for five months while waiting for conditions to improve. Their farmland couldn't be planted, and even the seeds they had been keeping were destroyed.

Her husband, once a farmer, has lived with diabetes for years. His legs are swollen and he struggles to walk, and he hasn't been able to work since he was diagnosed. To help provide for the family, Leonila collects junk—bottles, scrap metal, discarded items—and sells them to earn enough for food and her grandson's school expenses. On some days she earns ₱300 (€5), on others closer to ₱1,000 (€16). A sidecar she bought three years ago through a small loan helps her move the materials she gathers. Two of her children also work as porters and farm helpers to help the family get by.

A region struggling to feed itself

The aftermath of the successive storms created a dire situation for families across Central Luzon, especially in farming communities like Leonila's. Livelihoods and food security were severely disrupted. Rice-producing households were hit hard, with flooded plots, damaged assets, and a sharp drop in rice prices all combining to limit incomes and reduce food access. Many families had no choice but to borrow money at high interest just to meet basic needs. As purchasing power dropped, some households were eating

only twice a day, relying on cheap and less nutritious food. The situation threatened both short-term survival and long-term health, particularly for children and pregnant women. Immediate food and livelihood support became essential.

Cash-for-food assistance

After receiving emergency support in the form of cash for food through the EU-funded ACCESS Project, Leonila went straight to the store and bought rice, chicken, mung beans, and some condiments.

It was Leonila who made the spending decisions. She followed a recommended list of food from the ACCESS project, which prioritized items that would support her family's nutritional and caloric needs. She said the cash helped cover their daily essentials and kept them from skipping meals.

The drive to keep going

But even with the assistance, she didn't stop working; she saw it not as a replacement, but as a supplement to her daily efforts.

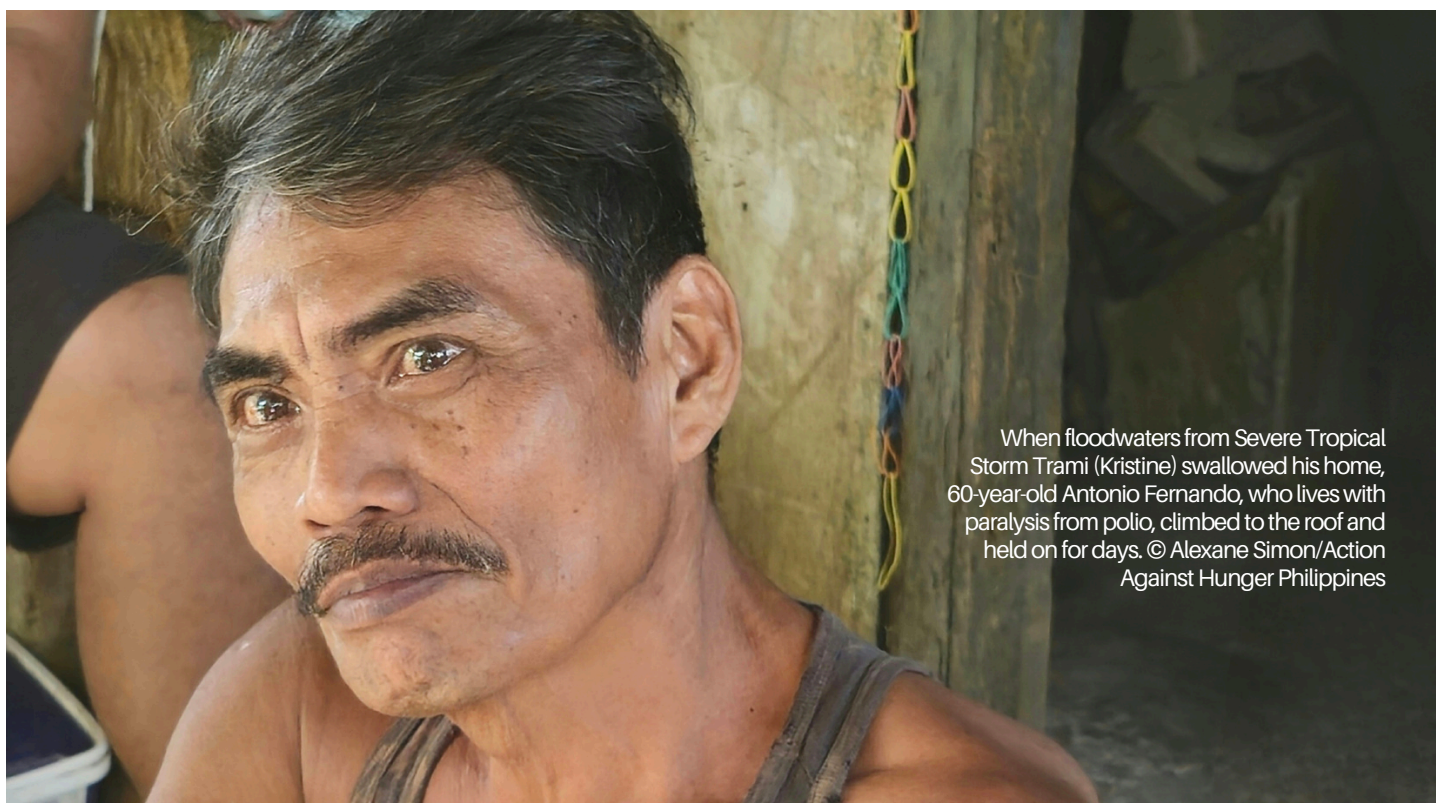
Like many communities that experienced protracted displacement because of 2024's successive storms, Leonila and her family spent Christmas in the evacuation area. It was not ideal, but it was safe. She had hoped to return home by the end of January and wished for a stretch of dry days, but not until February 2025, five months after being forced out of their house, were they able to do so.

And while humanitarian aid may not cover everything that affected families lose, it is timely, life-saving support delivered when families need it the most, helping them get back on their feet. ■

"I'm glad we received the cash-for-food assistance. It helped us augment our earnings," said Leonila.

Holding on: Antonio's fight for survival & hope

Story by Alexane Simon / Action Against Hunger Philippines



When floodwaters from Severe Tropical Storm Trami (Kristine) swallowed his home, 60-year-old Antonio Fernando, who lives with paralysis from polio, climbed to the roof and held on for days. © Alexane Simon/Action Against Hunger Philippines

MINALABAC, CAMARINES SUR — In a span of only a month, from October to November 2024, the Bicol region, particularly Camarines Sur, endured the devastating impact of six consecutive storms, the most destructive being Severe Tropical Storm Trami (Kristine) and Typhoon Man-yi (Pepito). While the region is no stranger to typhoons and flooding, residents had not witnessed floods of this magnitude in over 30 years.

In some municipalities, floodwaters rose to more than six feet—exceeding the height of an average person—submerging homes and forcing residents to seek safety under desperate conditions.

One of the hardest-hit municipalities was Minalabac, where the devastation was not only due to the strength of the torrential rains but also its proximity to the Bicol River, which overflowed and unleashed powerful flood waves. In this area, floodwaters reached rooftops, leaving residents with no choice but to fight for survival.

Among the survivors is Antonio Fernando, a 60-year-old man from Barangay Bagombong who lives with paralysis due to polio. His story is a powerful testament to resilience, survival, and the impact of humanitarian assistance.

Strength & Survival in a Season of Storms

A nightmare unfolds

On October 23, as Severe Tropical Storm Trami battered the region, Antonio found himself trapped inside his home. When a flood alert was issued in anticipation of rising waters, his wife was evacuated to the *barangay's* (village) designated evacuation center in Bagongbong, Minalabac. Antonio, however, chose to stay behind, unable to imagine that the water would rise so high—something that had not happened in over 30 years.

Soon, he found himself alone, struggling to escape, and fighting for his life as floodwaters rapidly engulfed his home. As the water surged, he realized the gravity of the situation. Summoning all his strength, he broke a window and managed to climb onto the roof—his only chance of survival.

"I tried my best to climb the rooftop while the water was rising rapidly," he said.

For days, he was stranded on his rooftop and waiting to be rescued. He fought for his life, enduring the fear of drowning, exhaustion, and isolation. Through it all, and according to him, his will to survive and his wish to see his wife again gave him the strength to hold on. Rescue came after a few days when the water started to subside.

Our actions

Following the storm, Action Against Hunger's Mission Emergency Response Team (MERT) was on the ground, responding to the immediate needs of affected communities in Camarines Sur. In the initial phase of the emergency response, our team activated a rapid response mechanism through the EU-funded ACCESS consortium project, and in less than 48 hours of the flooding, we were able to provide essential water and hygiene kits to displaced families in Camarines Sur.



A delivery truck carrying aid from the ACCESS project makes its way through floodwaters in Camarines Sur just days after the flooding started. © Brian Kae Enriquez/Action Against Hunger

Since then, Action Against Hunger has continued to support survivors like Antonio through ACCESS, providing cash-for-food assistance to help meet essential nutritional needs in this time of crisis. The cash assistance is expected to ensure a daily intake of 2,100 kcal per person for 30 days. Antonio's family received around ₱9,000 (€145) by December 2024.

This support provided Antonio's family with much-needed relief, helping them meet their basic needs and regain a sense of stability during the holiday season.

Rebuilding lives, restoring dignity

Despite the challenges he faced, Antonio remains grateful—not just for surviving the storm but for the compassion and support that helped him and his family move forward.

Still marked by this traumatic experience, Antonio admits that he now has a lingering fear

"We are so thankful for the help extended to us by Action Against Hunger and [the EU] for this financial assistance. We were able to celebrate the Christmas season with a smile and hope that there are still people who care for us."

of floods. However, with resilience, he hopes to return to farming and continue leading a simple life, making the most of the resources available after the disaster.

Above everything, Antonio shares his gratitude for the support they've been receiving: "We live a simple life, and we're grateful for whatever comes our way," he said. ■



The Action Against Hunger team, together with members of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office of the Municipality of Minalabac, transport emergency hygiene and water kits via boat to an evacuation center hosting 20 displaced families in Minalabac, Camarines Sur.
© Brian Kae Enriquez/Action Against Hunger



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