

Mindanao (Philippines) typhoon Temblin/Vinta: flooding, landslides and human made disasters

Saturday 30 December 2017, by [Al Jazeera](#), [GOTINGA JC](#), [McBRIDE Rob](#) (Date first published: 27 December 2017).

We are reproducing below several Al Jazeera articles on the disastrous consequences in Mindanao of typhoon Temblin/Vinta. ESSF has received and endorsed a call for financial solidarity from Mihands coalition. For more information, please go to article 42742: [Typhoon Vinta/Tembin - New Disaster in Mindanao \(Philippines\): An urgent call for financial solidarity](#)

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Philippines landslides: A disaster waiting to happen

There was an inevitability about the devastating flooding and landslides that hit the southern Philippines on Friday and Saturday.

At least 200 people are known to have died as Tropical Storm Tembin, known locally as Vinta, brought torrential rain to Mindanao, the second largest island in the country.

Tembin hit Mindanao less than a week after Tropical Storm Kai-Tak, known locally as Helen, struck Luzon and the Visayas, dropping 813mm of rain on Borongan City. This is more than one month's worth of rain.

Inevitably there were fatalities, and around 40 people lost their lives as a result of flooding and landslides.

The rainfall from Tembin was much less, at around 200mm - yet the death toll was five times greater, with many people still missing.

So what are the factors that cause a storm such as Tembin to have a seemingly disproportionate effect on the southern Philippines?

Firstly, tropical cyclones rarely hit Mindanao. Only around 10 percent of the annual rainfall here

comes from these weather systems. Tropical storms and typhoons are largely confined to northern Luzon and the eastern Visayas. Mindanao is within six to nine degrees north of the equator - too close to generate the “spin” in the atmosphere to generate these cyclones.

Weather events that only rarely hit an area tend to have a much greater effect, partly because people are less prepared for them, and partly because the landscape is more vulnerable.

The second factor that makes Mindanao vulnerable is the human population. This has increased by 30 million in the last 30 years across the country, to reach 101.7 million in 2016. More people require more land and more resources.

Rising sea temperatures

Logging, much of it illegal, has been a major factor in the changing of the landscape across the island. Trees bind the soil; when they are removed, the soil is loosely bound and prone to rainfall-induced landslides.

Thirdly, the Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries on Earth to tropical cyclones. Those cyclones are becoming “more extreme and causing greater amounts of devastation”, according to several studies, including one from the University of Sheffield in 2016.

Although this study focused on wind intensities, rising sea surface temperatures across the Pacific, as a direct result of fossil fuel burning, are likely to make rainfall heavier too.

Although Mindanao is only hit by a tropical storm or typhoon once every 12 years or so, there is a significant threat of another major system approaching the island over the New Year.

Computer forecasts suggest that another major system could approach the island on New Year’s Day. It is still early days, with great uncertainty, both in the storm’s track and its intensity. But if it does materialise, it will be a major body-blow to the island’s recovery efforts.

AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES

* AL JAZEERA. 24 Dec 2017:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/philippines-landslides-disaster-waiting-happen-171224085532572.html>

Philippines storm: ‘never experienced a flood like it’

The tropical storm that hit the southern Philippines on Friday and Saturday has left at least 200 people dead and many homeless.

The island of Mindanao was the worst hit. The local administration there has been criticised for not doing enough to help.

A survivor from Tubod town, where an entire neighbourhood was destroyed, told Al Jazeera that they have ‘never experienced a flood like it’.

Al Jazeera's Rob McBride reports from Tubod Town, Southern Philippines.

Rob McBride, 26 Dec 2017

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/philippines-storm-never-experienced-flood-it-171226155149831.html>

Marawi: condition of displaced people worsened by storm

The conflict to retake the city of Marawi from separatist, ISIL-linked fighters in October has left thousands displaced.

Their plight has been made even worse now by the floods from Tropical Storm Tembin.

The government of the Philippines is setting up more than 600 temporary shelters for some of them, and President Rodrigo Duterte has promised to find a lasting solution to the conflict.

Al Jazeera's Rob McBride reports from Marawi, Southern Philippines.

Rob McBride, 27 Dec 2017

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/marawi-condition-displaced-people-worsened-storm-171227123253180.html>

Villagers struggle in aftermath of Philippines storm

Lanao Del Norte, Philippines - The village of Dalama in the town of Tubod now looks like a dry riverbed, except for the few houses that managed to cling to their foundations - pieces of wood and concrete lodged in the sand among logs and boulders. Here and there, people sift through the debris hoping to find something of value.

But they are not the owners - the owners are either elsewhere or dead.

Before Tropical Storm Tembin hit the southern Mindanao region of the Philippines on the morning of December 22, officials of the Tubod municipal government warned Dalama's residents to evacuate. The fear was that the village, located near a river on the slope of a mountain, could be wiped out by a flash flood or landslide.

That is exactly what occurred.

"It all happened so fast," the surviving villagers tell anyone who would listen.

“Not even five minutes. The entire village was gone before we realised what was happening.”

Of the 104 homes that used to comprise the village’s Purok-2A neighbourhood, only two remain standing after Tembin, or Vinta, as it is known locally. Rescuers have so far retrieved 32 bodies from the rubble, but they could not take names off the list of 13 villagers still missing because the corpses were disfigured beyond recognition.

‘Ignored warnings’

According to Vicmar Paloma, the local disaster management officer, many of the villagers ignored the evacuation warning because they had weathered past storms.

The people, Paloma said, were “campante” - complacent - because they had heard similar warnings before and nothing had happened.

“So they thought they could just stay. By the time they realised the danger, it was too late,” Paloma told Al Jazeera.

But Marilou Itum, a Dalama resident, believes there was little that could have been done. When she and her husband heard the warning, they first herded their swine into a place they thought was safe. She then went back home to get their eight children and her brother. By then, the flood had engulfed their escape route.

“I told my brother, ‘This is it. I don’t think we’ll get out of this alive.’ We were crying and we didn’t know what to do,” Itum told Al Jazeera as she failed to hold back tears.

In the end, they followed their feet in the other direction - away from the flood and towards the raging river. Luckily, they found an elevated outcrop from where they watched the onslaught of mud and boulders swallow up houses, including their own.

She should be grateful that her entire family is alive, she said. One of her neighbours lost 13 family members, including his parents and grandparents.

But every day, the miracle of their survival gets more and more overshadowed by dark thoughts about their future.

“I had a sewing machine with which I earned a living. I guess that’s gone, too,” she said as she pored over the heap of sticks and scraps that used to be her home. The flood had taken away the pigs they desperately tried to save.

“I don’t know what will become of us,” she said.

‘I can never go back’

Some 400 villagers now live in a nearby schoolhouse and spent Christmas there. Many of them admit not heeding the storm warning right away.

“We’ve heard warnings like those in the past and nothing happened,” Rosemarie Sarabillo told Al Jazeera. She and her three children now occupy a corner of a classroom, which they share with 10 other families.

Sarabillo and her family had a good life in Purok-2A. They were not rich but they were comfortable. But that, too, is now in the past.

She said she did now know whether the government or any aid group would help her family find somewhere to live. The one thing she did know was that Purok-2A of Dalama was no more.

"I can never go back there," she said, before she began sobbing.

A new beginning

With some 20 major storms passing through the Philippines every year, its people have gotten used to the stories of devastation and suffering that the worst of these rains leave behind.

Still, many communities are caught off-guard when they strike, despite considerable efforts by the national government to inform and equip people against calamities.

The challenging economic and security situation in the Mindanao region leaves its people particularly vulnerable, as was evident in Dalama.

The village lies on a mountainside a good hour's drive from the Tubod town centre. Much of the road leading to it is unpaved. There are no offices or factories for the people to work in - so they are mostly farmers. But they remain poor because they usually do not own the land they till, but rather work for landlords who live in the city.

Those who save up enough money to buy land do so where they can afford it, in places like remote mountain slopes and river banks. Others just become squatters.

Working hard to make ends meet, these people tend to live a simple life - and it's fair to say things like climate change and disaster mitigation are not constantly on their minds.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte visited Tubod on Wednesday, where he was briefed on the situation by local disaster management officials. Unlike his usual self, he looked glum and spoke mildly.

"We will help. That's why I'm here," he said.

"We're ending the year with a bang of sorrow and agony. I just hope that next year, Allah would be kind enough to give us a new beginning."

JC Gotinga, 27 Dec 2017

* AL JAZEERA NEWS:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/villagers-struggle-aftermath-philippines-storm-171227192004707.html>
