

A beneficiary from Brgy. Renibon in Pigcawayan, North Cotabato, receives one of 270 carabaos being distributed by the ICRC in Central Mindanao as income-generating support for vulnerable families.

ICRC/C. Lee

NEWSLETTER

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STAYING STEADY, STANDING READY

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Looking back on the year, the world has witnessed the eruption of turmoil in several countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. With countless civilians exposed to dangerous situations, the ICRC and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies quickly acted to provide neutral and impartial assistance. Operations in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen grew rapidly, alongside the organization's biggest operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. While some situations have improved, the work must continue to ensure the safety of people. In Libya, for example, explosive remnants of war remain on the ground, harming civilians. We also remember the plight and courage of people in Japan who faced a terrible earthquake, tsunami and the Fukushima disaster last March.

Economic downturns marked 2011, with the crisis hitting the United States and more recently, European countries. This had implications on the budget of the ICRC, which, as a humanitarian organization depends largely on its donor countries.

The Philippines also had its share of struggles. Clashes continue to occur despite the ongoing peace negotiations. These hostilities, however, are not exclusive to Mindanao and take place around the country in varying degrees but with some constancy.

Despite these challenges, the ICRC assures that it is here to provide neutral and impartial assistance to Filipinos affected by internal armed conflict. Though ICRC activities in the Philippines had to adjust to budget pressures, we maintained our core operations by prioritizing programs directly assisting conflict-affected people and improving conditions in places of detention.

SUPPORT FOR LIVELIHOODS

In Central Mindanao, for example, farmers who had been affected by displacement in 2008 were happy to receive valuable tools to help increase their yield. Around 100 hand tractors or kuligligs and nearly 300 carabaos were given to the most vulnerable families (*story on page 2*). The project is complemented by trainings and donations of rice or vegetable seeds and tools to ensure the beneficiaries sustain this boost to their livelihood.

Remaining a concern for the ICRC are civilians affected by hostilities between the government and the New People's

Army. Caught between a rock and a hard place, these "sandwiched" populations have been struggling over the years with displacement, fear, lack of development caused by clashing interests. In Surigao del Sur, about 1,100 affected families received vegetable seeds and tools in June to help provide income and food on their tables. Now glutinous corn and vegetables like short beans, *pechay* (Chinese cabbage) and *upo* (bottle gourd) are growing in their fields or backyards, and the families are reaping their benefits (*story on page 3*).

In the Visayas, the ICRC distributed rice seeds and food assistance to vulnerable communities in Las Navas, Northern Samar, this month, supporting communities in increasing their agricultural production in an area affected both by armed conflict and disasters.

About 1,300 residents from Brgy. Mabini, Basey, Western Samar, now have safe drinking water from a spring-catchment project inaugurated in August. Residents in that remote barangay used to travel 1-2 km to get water from unprotected sources; now, they only walk a few steps to 17 tap stands built in their community to get clean drinking water. A similar water project to benefit 5,000 people is ongoing in Marcelo, Calatrava, Negros Occidental province. A 35-km water-network extension project, which aims to bring drinking water to 11

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ICRC

PLOUGHING THROUGH: SUPPORTING FARMERS' LIVELIHOODS IN CENTRAL MINDANAO

Under the sun in Central Mindanao, Langga is tenaciously pushing through tough, hilly terrain to help put food on her family's table. Her efforts, along with those of others like her, will enhance livelihoods in communities that have been affected by conflict over the years in the area.

Amidst such aspirations, those who know her best describe Langga, which is a term used for loved ones (meaning "dearest" in Ilonggo dialect), as a hard worker. And no doubt she is, precisely since she is a carabao (water buffalo)—also known as the "best friend" to Filipino farmers.

Langga is among the 268 animals being distributed by the ICRC in several communities of the region during the last few months of this year. Below she tells us more about how and why.



"To make sure we are young and healthy, all of us have undergone extensive checks by an experienced veterinarian working with the ICRC. At 2 ½ to 3 years old, we are at the optimal age to be trained to work the fields and help out in other ways. He gives a presentation to the farmers about how to feed us properly and keep us healthy. This will help them to take good care of us."



"The exciting moment comes when the ICRC officially introduces us to our new farming families. Our contribution is the first phase of the project. Farmers and their families will gradually get more support, in the form of corn seeds, farming tools, post-harvest facilities and agricultural training next year."

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barangays hosting 18,000 people, has started in Pikit, North Cotabato, alongside hygiene-promotion activities for the community. Upon completion in 2012, it will be the largest-ever such project by the ICRC in the Philippines.

ASSISTING THE VULNERABLE

We remain active in the jails and prisons, where the ICRC began its work in 1959 by visiting detainees identified with the Hukbalahap. While we continue to ensure the proper treatment of those detained in relation to the armed conflict, we have adopted an approach to address a problem affecting all detainees: overcrowding in jails and prisons. With the support of concerned authorities, the Call for Action initiative has helped enhance access to safe water and facilities like kitchens and infirmaries to around 32,000 detainees in 43 BJMP jails and four provincial jails. Over 30,000 inmates in seven pilot jails and prisons also benefit from the National Tuberculosis Programme, while work is ongoing to improve processing of inmates' cases in Manila City Jail and Tacloban City Jail.

The ICRC also continues its support to centers helping vulnerable groups. For Davao Jubilee Foundation, which assists amputees who include war-wounded patients, the ICRC helped build a gait-training area and is currently constructing a new workshop as Jubilee shifts to the latest technology. Meanwhile the kitchen, water and sanitation facility of the Zamboanga migration center have been rehabilitated while hygiene kits were given to hundreds of migrants returning home to Sulu and Zamboanga peninsula.

Disasters are also a perennial problem for a country prone to natural calamities. Aside from enhancing its capacity to respond to disaster, the ICRC supported the Philippine Red Cross on several occasions to assist victims of flooding in areas affected by armed conflict, such as in Cotabato, Compostela Valley, Davao and Samar. The ICRC also gave financial assistance to the PRC in their efforts to assist families in areas devastated by Typhoons Pedring and Quiel in October.

To highlight the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict and other situations of violence, we have further engaged the media

through two firsts: the Red Cross Award for Humanitarian Reporting held in May and a regional media conference on reporting on violence and other emergencies, which gathered senior editors from Asia-Pacific countries in October.

Our promotion of international humanitarian law continues to expand, both among weapon bearers and among civil society, including the academe. Seventeen schools joined this year's National Moot Court competition on IHL, now the largest competition of its kind in the country.

In 2012, the ICRC will continue to act on behalf of victims of armed conflict and vulnerable communities across the country. It will also continue its comprehensive program in jails to address humanitarian issues related to detainees.

Conflicts, disasters, even collapsing economies and governments may be unpredictable, but the ICRC and the Philippine Red Cross—our strategic partner in the country—will always stand ready to respond to the humanitarian needs of the Filipino people.





"With some of the landscape around here being mountainous, we work where no machine can."

My farmer, Romualdo Fernando, says that with my arrival, he can now plough 90 percent of his 5-hectare field. Previously, he could only prepare half of this area for crops because he had to do it all manually. Besides the small amounts of banana, cassava, corn and green beans he had already been cultivating, now with my help, he is planning to grow the delicious upland rice special from this region as well as other crops."



"To keep us healthy, barangay animal health workers have undergone training to monitor our health, manage minor illnesses, remove external parasites and give us vaccinations regularly. All the carabao in the community requiring a vaccination received one today—this prevents the outbreak of disease, which can spread among all of us quickly if one animal is infected."

"We also help our families in other ways. We are strong animals, so we can haul firewood, water, other essential goods and even people back home. We are also used to transport harvested crops to sell at the market, giving a boost to their income."

"During a day of hard work, we need to cool off in a bath twice a day. Luckily my barangay, Renibon, is situated by a river. For those that are located further away, the farmers make sure facilities for water are available for us."

Our farm is three kilometers away from the barangay center. 'I had the burden of products on my shoulders for 20 years, and now with the carabao, the weight is lifted,' said farmer Romualdo. 'I feel younger.'"

Carabao are not so resistant to heat, so it feels great. We are water buffalo, after all!"

GROWING GREEN IN SURIGAO DEL SUR

Around 1,100 families (5,500 residents) in two municipalities of Surigao del Sur affected by both conflict and disasters received livelihood assistance from the ICRC.

The project, implemented from June to December 2011, benefited families from Brgys. Mahaba and San Isidro in Marihatag, and Brgys. Diatagon and San Isidro in Lianga. Aside from being exposed to hostilities between government troops and the New People's Army, these remote communities were also affected by flooding caused by heavy rains early this year.

"With the extra challenges these communities face, ICRC decided to help them create backyard vegetable gardens so they can find food on the days that they cannot access their farms because of clashes or insecurity," said Caroline Khoubesserian, ICRC delegate for Eastern Mindanao.

Local farmers were trained on techniques for growing organic vegetables to produce quality food and adopt environment-friendly farming practices. The 160 farmers were also taught proper seed selection for better yield, and storage techniques to ensure the availability of quality seeds for the next planting.

The training was followed by the distribution of glutinous corn seeds and assorted vegetable seeds like string beans, cowpea (short beans), okra, bottle gourd (*upo*) cucumber (*pipino*). Other seeds included eggplant, winged beans and bitter melon (*ampalaya*), *pechay*, bell pepper and tomato.

Tools such as shovel, pick-axe, sickle, long machete and sudsod (garden tool) were also donated to help the residents in planting the seeds and cultivating them in their farms or backyard gardens.

A few months after the distribution of seeds and tools, the beneficiaries are starting to see the fruits (or rather, vegetables) of their labor. Some of the crops like *pechay*, short beans and tomatoes have already been served as food on the table or provided additional income after being sold in the market.

Allison Lopez



A staff of Marihatag Sustainable Agriculture and Fishery for Economic Development (right) walks with a beneficiary to inspect her garden of eggplant and stringbeans in Brgy. San Isidro, Marihatag, Surigao del Sur. The ICRC collaborates with this organization under the LGU to teach organic farming techniques to the beneficiary farmers, and to monitor the project."

SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS JOIN OPERATIONAL LAW WORKSHOP

Military instructors from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) participated in a five-day workshop on operational law held October 17-21 at the AFP Commissioned Officers Club in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Organized to respond to significant developments in military operations, 27 senior officers from the Philippine Army, Navy and Air Force gained awareness of international humanitarian law (IHL), or the law of armed conflict, and the application of its concepts, legal norms and standards to the Philippine context.

The sessions also covered military involvement in law-enforcement operations, rules of engagement and legal frameworks, detention, and the conduct and direct participation in hostilities.



Martin McDermott, ICRC regional delegate to the armed forces in Southeast Asia, facilitates the workshop with legal adviser Evencar Cruz-Ferrer of the Manila delegation and officers from the AFP.

The workshop aims to integrate these norms into education and training courses to promote knowledge of IHL and its relevance to military operations.

MANAGEMENT OF TB TRAINING HELD IN CEBU CITY



A BJMP health staff collects sputum samples to diagnose suspected cases of tuberculosis among detainees. Ensuring identification of symptomatics is the first step in managing TB in jails and prisons.

Over 60 health care providers and wardens from 34 jails took part in a recent five-day training to enhance the management of tuberculosis in jails and prisons. The workshops were facilitated by the Department of Health (DOH), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) and Bureau of Corrections (BuCor), with technical support from the ICRC.

The Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) Providers Training for Doctors and Nurses in Detention, held November 7-11, incorporated the technical and operational guidelines for the management of TB in jails and prisons developed by the DOH, BJMP and BuCor.

The participants from the Central Visayas and Davao Region were familiarized with the current status, goals and targets of the National TB Control Program, and taught about the technical and operational management of TB control services. The training concluded with workshops on the development of infection control policy and action plans for 2012 specific to each of the pilot jails and prisons, and by visits to TB control implementation sites in civilian health facilities and jails.

ASIA-PACIFIC JOURNALISTS DISCUSS REPORTING ON VIOLENCE IN MANILA CONFERENCE

Journalists from a wide range of backgrounds from nine Asia-Pacific countries gathered in Manila on October 13-14 to share common concerns and best practices on reporting on violence and emergencies.

Some 50 senior editors and key journalists joined the ICRC to discuss media independence, ethics and accuracy in coverage, and the growing use and impact of social media. Veronica Pedrosa of Al Jazeera English, in her keynote speech, explored the role played by social media in contemporary conflicts.

The key conference outcome was the Manila Declaration, which embodies the participants' commitment to work toward "responsible and responsive" journalism, particularly to provide context and analysis. It also promotes the safety of journalists by supporting a safety code for media working on dangerous assignments.

The signatories to the Declaration agreed to set up an online forum aimed at promoting these principles, international humanitarian law, and practical suggestions related to reporting violence and emergencies.

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