

Heart Of Mary Villa Appeal Fund

An Appeal Sponsored by
Off-Highway Research

November 2009

In the Wake of Typhoon Ondoy

The Philippines are used to typhoons, with up to 15 battering their way through the country every year. But Super Typhoon Ondoy was the worst that had been experienced for over 50 years, flooding large areas of Manila and Luzon, killing more than 600 people and directly affecting the lives of over 4 million others. The long term damage to communities and the economy is still being calculated.

The Heart of Mary Villa, a Catholic mission that runs a well known orphanage and retreat for pregnant women, was particularly badly affected. It is located in the slums of Malabon, a Manila suburb that lies below sea level, and is consequently very prone to natural disasters, especially typhoons. The scale of the damage caused came as little surprise.

The resulting flash floods, caused by huge quantities of water whipped up by high winds, crashed through two of the three flood defence walls, each 100 metres long, and three metres high. The high tide mark of two metres (12 feet) of standing water stayed for two weeks. This gradually ebbed away, leaving in places mud and garbage a metre deep - and the huge clean up operation then started.



Sisters Lorenz and Susan receiving Off-Highway Research's donation

Amazingly no lives were lost, and all the babies and their carers were rescued by boat very quickly. They were transferred to church accommodation several miles away, safe from contaminated water and the spread of disease. Everything on the ground floor was destroyed - furniture, documents, bedding, computers - and the staff were transferred to the second floor where they now live. And will probably remain there for the next 6 months before they can move back again.



The babies' nursery, now locked and empty



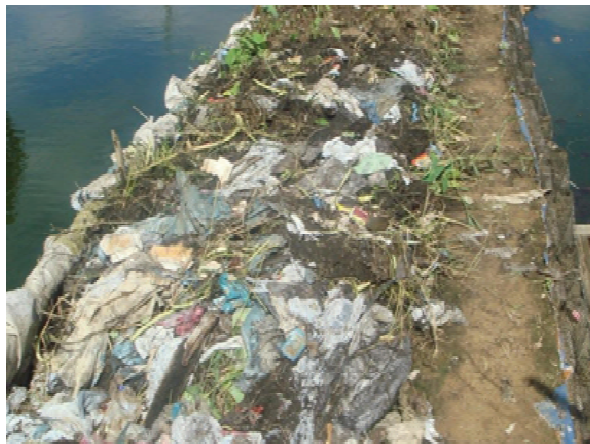
Stagnant water, 6 weeks after the typhoon

My Visit on 7th November

I arrived at the Heart of Mary Villa on 7th November to be greeted by Sisters Susan and Lorenz. The scene was sad and depressing, but one can only imagine what it must have been like six weeks before. The previously green, lush gardens were a depressing brown; many of the palm trees had been uprooted, and the smell was overpowering: rotting vegetation, garbage, and dead fish.



Dead fish in the fishponds



Tonnes of rubbish that still need to be cleared up



Uprooted palm trees

It was very evident that a huge amount of clearing up had already been done, largely by local volunteers and the staff whose normal duties were cooks, gardeners, and drivers. They had shifted and cleared large areas of mud and debris, and most of the facilities were superficially operational.

But on closer inspection things were not all well. Whilst most of the water had been pumped out, there were still a lot of stagnant pools that were breeding bacteria; whilst the basic infrastructure was sound, much of the cladding - especially anything made of wood - was rotting; all records and documents had been destroyed, along with the six computers that the Charity had donated last year: except for one vital laptop that had been spared that contained the orphanage's database. That was one blessing, anyway.

To Relocate or Not?

Over the years it has been often questioned whether or not to relocate the orphanage. It is situated in a low lying area, and has been badly flooded five times in the last decade, this being the worst. It will doubtless happen again, so it would be logical to move the whole institution to a new and safe location.

Yet there are powerful arguments that support staying in Malabon. Many adoptive parents, and their adopted children have a close emotional bond with the physical bricks and mortar of the place. 'I know that my mother walked down this path' is a persuasive argument to stay; the 30 or so carers and ancillary workers could not move to another location, and the Heart of Mary Villa has been a central part of the local community for the past 52 years.

So it has been decided to rebuild, and stay.



The flood water peaked at 1 metre above my head

What Needs to be Done Now

After the last major flood in 1999, Off-Highway Research sponsored the building of a huge wall that would act as a major flood defence. It was good to see that this survived Typhoon Ondoy, and prevented even greater damage.

Two other walls that had been built earlier were not so effective; one was destroyed by the floods completely, and another was so badly damaged that it will have to be demolished. Both will have to be replaced.



One of the flood defence walls that needs to be urgently replaced

I have looked at the reconstruction plans, the bill of materials, and the outline of what needs to be done. Here is a summary of what we are faced with:

- **Rebuilding and construction of flood defences**

- Pesos1.7 million (\$36,414, £21,717, €24,493)

- **Redecorating and refurbishment**

- Pesos1.5 million (\$32,130, £19,154, €21,611)

So, we are faced with a total construction bill of Pesos3.2 million. Not too much in 'our' terms, but one that is quite out of reach of the Heart of Mary Villa, and a huge amount in Filipino terms. Together, I am quite sure that we can meet this target; Off-Highway Research has pledged to donate 50 per cent of this sum over the next 12 months, and will endeavour to raise the balance through its friends throughout the world.

Anything that you can offer, however, small, would be enormously appreciated. If everyone on this circular gave \$50, we would reach our target with ease. So if you can help, please let me know - the Heart of Mary Villa would be delighted to hear from you.



Donations from around the world



'And the floodwater came up to here'

In the last 10 years Off-Highway Research has raised almost \$500,000 for the Heart of Mary Villa, of which around \$30,000 has been donated since the October typhoons. Our task now is to find another \$50,000 to restore the situation to near normality. That amount would rebuild the flood defences to prevent anything like this happening again, would pay for the restoration of all water and electrical services, and would ensure that the buildings are in a fit state to live in again, both for the babies and the staff that look after them.

This is a huge task, but I am sure that together we can do it, and I look forward to your continued support to achieving our target. Below are two ways you can donate, either by cheque or by electronic transfer: whatever you can give I will add another 20 per cent, so let's see what we can achieve together before Christmas.

My kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Cheques to:

Heart of Mary Villa Appeal Fund
c/o Off-Highway Research
35 Great James Street
London WC1N 3HB
England

Wire Transfer to:

Heart of Mary Villa Appeal Fund
HSBC Bank Plc
1 Woburn Place, Russell Square
London WC1H 0LQ, England
Sterling Account #: 51378163
Sort Code: 40 06 07
IBAN # GB93MIDL40060711229761