

On the 100th day since the start of the infamous Zamboanga siege last Sept. 9, member-agencies of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CWG) working group here visited the evacuation center at the Sta. Maria Elementary School to personally share information with the internally-displaced persons (IDPs) on the rehabilitation and recovery plans for them and to conduct an assessment on their information needs.

“We need to share with you accurate information regarding the government’s plan for your rehabilitation and recovery and the communications group has been coming up with strategies on how to best communicate,” said Sheila Covarrubias, city information officer to the more or less thirty IDP family heads gathered.

During the discussions, it was explained that eventually, the IDPs would return to their communities if they desire, however, they would have to be more patient since it will take some time in order to “build back better” communities.

Meanwhile, they will be transferred to temporary shelters in Tulungatung, Taluksangay and in others where their living conditions will be much better than in an evacuation center.

Other issues regarding livelihood, education and nutrition were also discussed and clarified.

The group will be also conducting similar activities for all the remaining evacuation centers in the city with the goal of averting miscommunication among the IDPs through constant dialogue and engagement with them.

Malou Eudela of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) emphasized that “information is just as important as food and other basic needs.”

“But more than just providing information, it is also very important to receive feedback from the audience, in this case, the IDPs,” she added.

“Tatanungin namin sa inyo kung swak ba talaga ang pamaraan ng pagbigay ng impormasyon sa inyo,” (We will ask you if the communication methods we provide are suited to your needs) Eudela explained, “and based on your responses, we will be devising the best communication methods for you.”

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were also distributed to the IDP representatives.

The CWG is composed of the City Information Office, Philippine Information Agency, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the International Organization for Migration, the UN-OCHA and other international humanitarian agencies.