CRS PHILIPPINES
EMERGENCY
CAPACITY BUILDING
2008-2009

Typhoon preparedness

Disaster risk reduction training builds resilience among Philippine communities vulnerable to flooding caused by severe tropical cyclones

The Philippine province of Eastern Samar, on the island of Samar, sits astride a typhoon belt, and its badly damaged highways and potholed roads are evidence of its repeated battering. In 2007 and 2008, a series of typhoons hit the region, and already chronically poverty-stricken communities suffered delays in relief assistance, compounded by the inaccessibility of highways.

In early 2007, in the town of Llorente, homes, possessions and livelihoods—livestock and rootcrops—were swept away when the river swelled to three times its size. A year later, there was even more serious flooding, which set back the little progress the people had managed. Then, in June 2008, Typhoon Frank hit the region, affecting about 3.6 million people across 49 provinces. During the severe cyclone, more than 500 people lost their lives.[1]

Photo: Laura Sheahen/CRS

Residents in flooded Sapang Bayan village in Bulacan province cope with a fifth day under water. CRS' emergency capacity building training aims to reduce the vulnerability of similar communities.

Traditional coping mechanisms failed

The people were used to limited flooding but their usual coping strategies—such as building their homes 15 feet above ground—were not enough for the duration and magnitude of the flooding, which reached 30 feet in some areas. Three villages were temporarily displaced, with little or no access to basic services, to food, water, or adequate shelter.

Annie Anwa, 47, lived in one of the hardest-hit villages and the mother of eight had to rely on church aid and the help of local officials to rebuild her house, which had been destroyed.

While a joint local government and church effort provided communities with food, fuel, medicine and materials to rebuild homes, and the National Food Authority delivered rice, a wider response at a provincial and national level was limited and delayed, showing that the country was not fully prepared for large-scale disasters.

"The key is to strengthen the province's and communities' ability to prevent human and economic losses through contingency planning and disaster preparedness mitigation," said Ian Mosquisa, social action director for the Diocese of Borongan, whose responsibilities include the implementation of a relief and rehabilitation program and other development services.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been working in the Philippines since 1945 and has long been providing immediate relief assistance to families affected by natural disasters and, in late 2005 and early 2006, with the wider aim of building resilience to disasters among the Philippine people, implemented a series of emergency capacity building workshops, offering training in basic emergency preparedness and response to staff of diocesan social action centers. Staff representatives from 65 of the Philippines' 85 such centers attended the courses, which were conducted in partnership with the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. In late 2008, representatives from the remaining 20 centers received the training, and advanced training followed the basic courses in 12 high-risk areas.

Training and tools

In these more disaster-prone areas, in early 2009, CRS and NASSA conducted a three-day **Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction** training workshop on theories and tools, shifting the focus to community empowerment in the 12 social action centers. Seventeen people from these centers participated. This project aimed to reduce the vulnerabilities of these communities, and develop and strengthen their capacities in emergency preparedness and response, disaster risk reduction, mitigation and humanitarian response, through capacity building training in the social action networks.

Training covered emergency preparedness and response approaches, procedures and standards, and focused on how to organize and carry out emergency

1 *Typhoon Frank Devastates the Philippines*. July 18, 2008. CRS newsroom. http://crs.org/newsroom

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responses by applying Sphere[2] minimum standards. It included field practice in which participants split into two teams and went to two villages in the Diocese of Calapan, which was chosen as the pilot area because it is highly vulnerable to flooding, and it had already initiated some disaster management activities after the earlier training. The groups acted as facilitators and, with 66 community participants, underwent a series of focus discussions on hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessment, and drafted community action plans. A simulated emergency was used to build skills and knowledge. The activities generated strong support among some local officials who helped draft the community action plans, and offered support in resource mobilization and the supervision of action plan implementation.

NASSA and CRS developed an evaluation tool to assess the application of knowledge and skills gained during the training. **Participants reported that the concepts were comprehensive as well as concise and easily understood, and that the practical field simulations offered immediate application of the theories and helped them consolidate the lessons. Facilitators also gave examples of field experiences to illustrate some of the concepts.**

Co-ordination was established among diocesan commissions, parishes and local government units, and plans were made to provide copies of the disaster risk reduction action plans to local government for integration into municipal disaster codes.

One of the most noticeable positive impacts reported after the training was on subsequent relief distributions, which went from being crowded, wasteful and disorganised, to being systematic.

Lessons learnt and challenges

(a) Training approaches **tailored to real situations** generate greater involvement among participants. (b) There is a need for the creation of diocesan/parish **emergency teams**, especially in flood- and landslide-prone areas. (c) CRS training in DRR, and recruitment of **committed volunteers**, should be ongoing, especially in more vulnerable areas but (d) there is a lack of, or limited, **funds to build capacity** for wider community awareness on emergency preparedness and response training workshops. (e) There is a need to engage more communities in planning, monitoring and evaluation to make them more engaged in disaster response, and to **encourage independent initiatives**. (f) Learning continuity and **sustainability** is a key challenge: Besides normal staff attrition, a NASSA restructuring meant that none of the trained staff remained with the organization, thus removing an opportunity for trainees to become trainers. One aim is to create a pool of trainers to conduct ongoing workshops and planning. (g) There is a need to create **clear working structures** with functions outlined for various actors and coordination among partners. (h) **Adaptive measures** to counter the effects of climate change should be considered to minimize disaster effects.

Photo: Laura Sheahen/CRS

Students at Saint Paul University in Manila pack thousands of CRS-funded items to deliver to flood victims. CRS provides immediate relief and its disaster risk reduction training sessions aim to equip communities for emergency preparedness.

Built-in disaster risk reduction

In Eastern Samar province—as climate change continues to manifest itself in unpredictable and extreme weather conditions in villages like Llorente—the concept of community involvement and sectoral cooperation for disaster management has found a home within the diocesan structure, and the church is engaging with government, academics and other key agencies. The project has enabled diocesan social action center partners to take concrete steps to institutionalize disaster preparedness and aim at backing it with sustained funding and full-time staff. The social action center of Borongan Diocese—where the town of Llorente is—intends to infuse disaster mitigation strategies into a broader process of diocesan, parish and community planning, and integrate advocacy on sustainable agriculture and ecological protection as ways of reducing disaster impact. After the CRS-NASSA capacity building training in disaster risk reduction, the diocesan social action center began incorporating the concepts and principles into its own disaster management approaches. A programme proposal was submitted to CRS and NASSA specifically outlining strategic policies aimed at reducing risks and building resilient communities.

CRS' emergency preparedness and response strategy includes strengthening local capacities to mitigate the impacts of disasters by improving response capacities to reduce loss of lives and livelihoods. Similar training is carried out throughout CRS programs and is tailored to individual country needs, taking into account the hazards communities face and their existing capacities.

The training sped up and systematized information exchange between villages and the diocese, and between the diocese and donors"

Ian Mosquisa
Social action director, Diocese of Borongan

2 *The Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, is one of the most widely known and internationally recognized sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in life-saving areas of humanitarian response. The Sphere Project is a voluntary initiative that brings a wide range of humanitarian agencies together with the common aim of improving the quality of humanitarian assistance and the accountability of humanitarian actors to their constituents, donors and affected populations. The Sphere Project (2011) *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.*

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