



Rising from the Rubble: Rebuilding Communities after the Mindanao Earthquake

Malasila Elementary School in Makiilala, North Cotabato province served as an evacuation site for those affected by the Mindanao earthquake. Photo taken on 05 Nov. 2019 - ACCORD

In 2019, a 6.9-magnitude earthquake in Mindanao forced thousands of families to leave their homes and livelihood sources behind. More than a year later, many affected families from far-flung areas are still staying in evacuation sites, unable to go back to their communities.

Immediately at the onset of the earthquake emergency, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations supported displaced families through the “The Life Saving Humanitarian Assistance to People Affected by Mindanao Earthquake”, a project implemented by a consortium of non-government organizations in partnership with the local government units in Cotabato and Davao del Sur provinces.

Putting the “human” in humanitarian response

The Mindanao earthquake response addressed the urgent needs of vulnerable households most affected by the earthquake in terms of food and emergency livelihoods, shelter, WASH, and health and protection services. In delivering the life saving assistance, participation by women and men, boys and girls, older people, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups in all phases of implementation was ensured. Risk reduction and resilience-strengthening elements were also consistently integrated in humanitarian response's components and activities. By ensuring that humanitarian response is participatory and inclusive, and that risk reduction and resilience is mainstreamed, sustainability of project components and activities is enhanced. Addressing the immediate and life-saving needs of vulnerable households most affected by the earthquake also provides the foundation of building community resilience.

Resilient livelihoods

Barangay Malongon in Magsaysay municipality used to depend on banana farming as their main source of income. The earthquake destroyed their farms and gardens, leaving community members without livelihood.

Applying lessons and good practices from past livelihood recovery initiatives, such as after typhoons Bopha (Pablo) and Haiyan (Yolanda), a communal form of undertaking livelihoods was introduced to households prioritized for assistance. The idea was initially met with skepticism. Some community members were hesitant since the approach was new to them, while other had previous bad experience from joining cooperatives.

To address the skepticism and encourage participation, local government unit representatives were mobilized to lead discussions on the respective merits and disadvantages of communal and individual livelihood actions. Past experiences and lessons were cited to serve as guidance.

“These [negative comments] give us further strength to overcome all challenges, do the best that we can, and make our cooperative grow,” said Marivic Hamtig, one of the leaders of the cooperative supported by the project.

Once a communal livelihood has been selected, members undergo training on resilient livelihoods, financial literacy, leadership and development, as a precursor to pooling of resources provided by the project as financial capital.

Starting the cooperative also benefited their community during the pandemic, because their neighbors no longer have to go far and risk exposure when buying essentials, a thing that they cherish dearly.

“Our goal is for everyone to benefit from this coop - that is the plan. We are striving and working harder to improve our services,” she also said.

RIGHT: Glendel Hernan, president of the Malongon Evacuees Consumer Cooperative (MEECO) with Marivic Hamtig, a woman leader of the cooperative.

BELOW: A coop-run store supported by ECHO is seen full with stock and ready to serve.



Building better, safer homes

During Typhoon Haiyan and Bohol Earthquake responses, localized Building Back Safer (BBS) techniques were developed to address the need for appropriate knowledge in repairing or rebuilding homes. For the Mindanao earthquake response, these simple, replicable, and easy-to-follow building techniques were provided to help families ensure their temporary shelter or rebuilt houses will not be affected by future hazard events.

“The house construction demonstration has given us ideas on how we’ll make something similar (to the demo house) behind us, that even when we go back to our old settlement areas, we would be able to build a new one with the BBS tips applied,” said Rodell Condino, a camp manager from Barangay Darapuy in Bansalan, Davao del Sur.

One of the common reasons homes were destroyed by the earthquake was due to poor construction and insufficient quality materials. To further maximize assistance, construction

materials were bought in bulk to lessen the cost and ensure that all required materials were purchased, and to simplify delivery arrangements required to bring the materials to these communities. Information tarpaulins on the BBS process were posted around the evacuation site to serve as guidance.



“I am certain that this house will be sturdy and safe come any disaster, whether it be earthquakes or typhoons. We are safer here compared to our temporary shelters,” said Jesus Villarosa, one of the beneficiaries of the project from barangay Darapuy in Bansalan, Davao del Sur.



ABOVE: A Building Back Safer information tarpaulin posted in Barangay Kisante in Makilala, North Cotabato guides community members as they construct a house during a training demonstration.



During the needs assessment the lack of sufficient WASH facilities like latrines and handwashing stations was one of the pressing concerns expressed by the community. These structures were also built in consideration of inclusivity and ease of use by vulnerable community members, such as women, persons with disabilities, and older persons.

Hurdling over the pandemic's challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic shut down many establishments and forced national and local governments to enforce strict travel and gathering protocols, resulting in more challenges in implementing the project.

The implementation strategies of the humanitarian response had to be adjusted to address the new threat facing communities affected by the earthquake.

Traveling to and from different barangays, municipalities became more difficult because of quarantine protocols.

Despite this, project implementation continued while employing travel strategies and close coordination with beneficiary municipalities. Strict measures were followed to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Aside from including face masks, face shields, alcohol, and hygiene kits to items being distributed, observing proper hygiene was also promoted, along with raising awareness about COVID-19, what are its symptoms, how it spreads, and how to control and prevent its transfer. Expertise of Regional health units (RHUs) and nurses were tapped to discuss and contextualize these topics in laymanized terms, so communities could easily understand health jargons.

Ensuring sustainability for years to come

Emphasizing participation, inclusion and mainstreaming risk reduction and resilience in the humanitarian response meant coordination with the local government (LGU) does not only mean joint activities but in fact a more active role in the response, being the duty-bearer. For this project, the LGUs assumed a more active role in monitoring construction of shelter and WASH facilities, and in collaborating with the project implementers.

The humanitarian response focused on restoring and improving the lives of the affected population by involving them in every step of the solution-making process by fostering relationships with the beneficiaries.

The importance of viewing humanitarian aid as building relationships with the beneficiaries instead of creating solutions from a top-down approach fosters critical thinking and ownership over these gains.

Ensuring participation of women also led to them taking on leadership roles. Women are stepping up to take leadership roles in their cooperatives, and are participating in the BBS trainings. This brings positive impact on how these communities think of new initiatives in these projects.

Learning how to create policies in the implementation and maintenance of these projects were also transformational, according to the beneficiaries. For example, maintaining the newly constructed latrines led them to create additional policies on how to ensure sanitation.

“We were definitely given notice and a vision. We learned a lot from the trainings, meetings, and orientations. 100% of the community cooperated because they were given additional ideas and learnings - this has given us further hope. We learned that we, as a community, should be participative or hands-on whether or not aid arrives for us, everyone should be working together,” says Condino, contemplating on how the project has changed their community.



ABOVE: Camp manager Rodello Odessa stands in front of a demo unit that they observed being built. He said that he will try to replicate and make sure their shelter will follow the design of the model, to ensure it could withstand other hazards.

RIGHT: A child fetches water from the restored water system in Barangay Alta Vista.



The “Life-saving Humanitarian Assistance to People Affected by Mindanao Earthquake” is a consortium project of CARE Philippines, ACCORD, and Action Against Hunger.

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