

Integrated Risk Management and the Philippine Red Cross

Author/Researcher:
Philline Cruz

Background

The municipality of Mainit is a 4th class municipality with a total population of 25,596 (NSO Census 2010). It is located in the southern part of Surigao Del Norte Province in mainland Mindanao. It lies along the country's fourth largest and deepest lake, Lake Mainit. The Municipality of Mainit is practically surrounded by mountain ranges, separating it from neighbouring municipalities. These mountain ranges contrast the flat lands of the villages along the lake shore of Mainit making it highly vulnerable to hydro-meteorological hazards such as rain-induced landslides and severe flooding. Most of these villages can only be reached through a one hour drive along a muddy-rough road that is impassable during the rainy season. Locals do a detour through Lake Mainit on motor boats, a quicker and cheaper route from the town proper. Prolonged floods are encountered in these outlying communities between the months of November to February. Heavy rains during these months combined with overflow from Lake Mainit and excess water from the upstream watershed causes severe flooding that can last for several months. This annual flooding isolates villages and compromises the security of the communities and their livelihoods. Crop and rice production is usually affected leaving communities with limited resources for food and shelter. With the enactment of R.A. 10121 in 2010, the local government of the outlying *barangay* in Mainit implemented risk reduction measures and adaptation efforts, such as dredging, cattle distribution, bamboo planting and organic farming. However, these short term solutions remained ineffective after one flooding and required costly and continuous repair.

- Strong community involvement is key in resilience building
- Community based organised and non-partisan groups like the Red Cross 143 is an enabling factor for sustained program implementation despite political differences and boundaries
- The Integrated Risk Management approach towards building community resilience helped the Philippine Red Cross reach and be partners with public and private companies to further save lives, livelihoods and the environment
- Climate-smart and ecosystem-based projects, like the Bio-Intensive Gardening (BIG), is an effective, approach to help local communities have sustainable and profitable livelihoods through backyard vegetables and crops cultivation
- Successful small-scale mitigations are effective awareness raising campaigns for environmental protection, inspiring wide range of communities

In response to the futile short term solutions, through the Philippine Red Cross – Surigao Del Norte (PRC-SDN) Chapter, five high-risk *barangay* in the Mainit Municipality were chosen as partner communities for the Partners for Resilience (PfR) Program in the Philippines. PfR is an alliance of five Netherlands-based humanitarian, development and environmental organisations, which aims to strengthen resilience of different communities through capacity building, community-based risk assessments and the formation of partnerships with different key stakeholders and government agencies. PfR works towards an integrated approach of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Ecosystem Management and Restoration (EMR). This is reinforced with the eight key principles that serve as the building blocks for implementation at the household, community and landscape levels:

- 1) working on different timescales;
- 2) recognizing geographical scales;
- 3) strengthening institutional resilience;
- 4) integrating disciplines;
- 5) promoting community self-management;
- 6) stimulating learning;
- 7) focusing on livelihoods; and
- 8) forming partnerships.

In the first few years of the PfR implementation, PRC-SDN was able to document accounts of good practices and lessons learned in accordance to each key principle. In 2014, they were able to publish a book titled, “Creating New Paths towards Resilience”, which showcased different stories on the PfR’s first implementation years in the Philippines and Indonesia. In the case of Mainit Municipality, the documentation focused on the promotion of community self-management, wherein communities were able to participate in conducting Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments, preparing their community plans and facilitating their own community drills. This case study is a follow-up

story intended to identify further PfR principles that have been accomplished two years after the first documentation.

PfR and the work of the Philippine Red Cross

Through the PfR’s experience, PRC has deepened its understanding on empowering communities, which goes beyond the usual relief operations, medical missions and other humanitarian aid that the organisation provides. This has entailed building the capacity of PRC not only to respond and prepare for disasters but also to better understand and address underlying causes of risks. Strong community preparedness through “early warning, early action” is a goal of every community that PRC is working with. It is the same case with PfR communities in Surigao del Norte.

The impact on the PfR communities is clearly evident. People were engaged and developed a sense of responsibility not only for their own families but for the whole community. Local officials in most of the PfR *barangay* admitted that before PfR, there were no organised preparations or risk reduction activities that involved the whole community. People just accepted that floods occur and each year their situation would worsen, where they continuously become victims of such hazards. With limited resources, knowledge and skills, people only prepared for their own families.

Nevertheless, when PfR came in 2011, all of this gradually changed. All of the orientation of concepts, community-based risk assessments, skills training and strong community involvement prompted a sense of ownership and empowerment that built confidence and competence amongst the members of the community. Changes in outlook and the difference in how people reacted in emergencies were notably apparent even to the average community member. Communities have become unified and prepared in disseminating information properly and they have organised evacuations and early warning systems. In putting the concepts of risk reduction into practice, the *barangay* officials’ commitment and persistence has been pivotal in driving communities into action. The community drills implemented in the PfR communities have become a benchmark,

which other municipalities and *barangays* would like to achieve for themselves. Organised drills have properly laid-out evacuation and emergency plans with an 80% community participation rate. Local ordinances from the *barangay* level up to the municipal level have enacted to support mainstreaming these plans and protocols and ensure their continuous implementation and improvement. There has been dialogue between PRC-SDN and a few other municipalities in the province with regards to replication of the risk reduction activities within their communities.

Red Cross 143 and the PfR program in Mainit

Political differences have always been one of the biggest challenges in the implementation of programs in the community. The local elections of the mayor and *barangay* officials in May and October of 2013 were slightly untimely for the program, which was in its third year of implementation. This caused delays in implementation as the newly elected officials needed to be oriented and re-trained. It was important that the Program gained the support and commitment of the newly elected officials to lead the Program implementation in the community.

In the case of PRC-SDN, they were able to utilise the Red Cross 143 program as a common ground to continue the harmonious implementation of the PfR Program in the communities. PRC-SDN has appreciated the spirit of volunteerism and strong leadership of the local officials as one of the facilitating factors in achieving the PfR goals. Volunteerism in the community has continued to surpass political differences that usually hinder the implementation of projects in other communities. Local officials, old and new, were able to work hand in hand to provide services even beyond their duties.

Discovering unfamiliar territories

PRC, being the largest and go-to humanitarian organisation in the country, provides assistance to protect the lives and health of people. PRC has also provided disaster relief activities and DRR programs to help improve the capabilities of different communities. With PfR’s integrated

risk management (IRM) approach, the institutionalisation of CCA related information within the organisation has further enhanced the basis of its DRR programs.

However, “ecosystem management and restoration, was totally beyond the organisational expertise of PRC,” according to Marilou Talinting, the Chapter Administrator of PRC-SDN. Although PRC also provides disaster rehabilitation related programs such as early livelihood recovery programs for disaster victims, they are only limited to short-term immediate interventions such as cash grants. At first, PRC-SDN was very cautious to get involved with environmental issues concerning the province, as mining and logging has long been the practice of the people and private companies in Mindanao.

Through the years of PfR implementation in the area, PRC was able to explore these boundaries as new learning opportunities to further protect lives, livelihood and the environment. PfR paved the way for new partnerships, cooperation, and understanding on how to better work with various stakeholders in the community. EMR opened its doors to engage in dialogue with the mining companies. This provided both parties the opportunity not to treat each other as opponents but as possible partners in building resilient communities.

Small-scale mitigation program goes BIG

The Bio-Intensive Gardening (BIG) recently became the key activity in *Barangay* Quezon. BIG is a small-scale mitigation activity that was implemented in most of the PfR communities. BIG aims to rebuild and maintain soil fertility through nutrient cycling, diversified cropping and deep-bed preparation on small-scale plots. It contains a diverse range of indigenous crops

which minimises the chances of pest outbreaks and preserves indigenous seed varietiesⁱ. BIG was initially implemented to aid malnutrition and food security in communities, especially in times of disaster. Mr. Gaudencio Mundano, the newly elected *barangay* captain of Quezon, clearly saw the learning potential of BIG, which also matched his pre-identified reforestation project, “Panayak-pan Ecological Park” in Lake Mainit. BIG was first implemented in communities at the *purok* (subdivision of a *Barangay*) level, then as it progressed to street blocks, the *barangay* made it into competition. Not only has it become income generating for households that sell the excess vegetables they harvest, but it has also developed unutilised land in the communities. *Barangay* Quezon is currently conducting its three-month feeding program where ingredients are sourced from the community’s own bio-intensive gardens. In terms of reforestation, an additional 5000 seedlings will be planted in the month of April just in time for the planting season.

The bio-intensive gardening as well as the tree planting activities in the community have helped increase awareness not only in the people of *Barangay* Quezon but also in the wider range of communities that they have inspired. These activities have earned various

kinds of recognition of the *barangay* and officials right up to the regional level. This recognition serves as a credential of an effective and investment worthy community and moreover a community that promotes resiliency.

During the first years of PfR implementation, communities in Surigao del Norte focused on PfR principles such as strengthening institutional resilience; integrating disciplines; promoting community self-management through capacity building activities and organisational management. Through the years, PRC-SDN moved to focus on other PfR principles such as, working on different timescales; stimulating learning; focusing on livelihoods and forming partnerships.

In the small-scale mitigation bio-intensive gardening project alone, PRC was able to improve its work with the addition of these four principles. The project has proven to be beneficial for both communities and the organisation in terms of providing livelihoods to community members, improving malnutrition, ecosystem preservation and beautification, and new opportunities to gain and strengthen partnerships, as well as garnering recognition for the success and good practices manifested through the program. This encompasses the effectiveness of PfR’s view of giving importance to trainings, increased knowledge, and changing the mind-set of people as a strong foundation for long-term solutions.

Indeed, PfR’s IRM approach helped both the organization and communities have better access to information, experience and new approaches to build their resilience in the short, medium and long terms. These initiatives also set the bar higher in implementing risk reduction activities and livelihood programs that will both benefit households and ecosystems.

Municipality of Mainit, Surigao Del Norte
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i (IIRR, International Institute for Rural Reconstruction)
<http://journeytoforever.org/iirr.html>



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