



Mainstreaming Gender and DRF:

EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED GENDER IDENTITIES IN DISASTERS IN RURAL/URBAN COMMUNITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Research Report (June 2021)

Given its geographical location, the Philippines is one of the countries in Asia that is most prone to disasters. In fact, the Philippines placed 5th as the most vulnerable country on disaster risk implications for development capacity on the 2015 Global Assessment Report of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction while consistently ranking in the top 4 among the countries in the world hit by the highest number of disasters for over 20 years. Recognizing the adverse impacts of disasters in the economy and human capital, the Philippine government has predicted a yearly PHP 177 billion losses due to disasters.

START Network defined disaster risk financing as an integration of the elements of science-based risk modeling, contingency planning, and pre-agreed financing to prompt humanitarian funding in situations that meet the threshold. Disaster risk financing also entails access to reliable funds whenever a crisis hits which can result in an improved timing, coverage, and design of humanitarian action, and at the same time, support improved emergency preparedness measures.

In terms of gender equality, the Philippines, as compared with other countries in the world, ranks medium to high based on Gender and Development Index, and Gender Gap Index. Despite these achievements, during the onslaught of both climate and disaster risks, women, men, and other gender identities still tend to remain vulnerable. Thus, in disaster risk financing, it is essential to consider gendered needs and the contexts of populations that benefit from it. START Network recognizes the importance of experiences as a learning mechanism to devise ways to help in improving disaster preparedness, access to information, and early action given the gendered needs of people.

i ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Disasters have been part of the lives of Filipinos. For a year, the Philippines is hit by an average of 20 tropical cyclones. Aside from the risks that disasters may bring to people, the areas of their communities where they are living amplified the risks especially during the onslaught of disasters. Women, men, and members of LGBTQIA+ from vulnerable sectors are aware of the risks in their respective communities. Due to their experiences from past typhoons, they were able to adapt and adjust their way of living in order for them to survive and protect their family.

Information is a vital part of surviving disasters especially typhoons, flash floods, and storm surges. The country has improved a lot when it comes to information dissemination before, during, and after a disaster hit. Communities in the country have their systems of information dissemination as to their community members.

Narratives of Missing Voices participants prove that community-level information dissemination systems are in place. Aside from mainstream sources like television, radio, and social media, and the internet, there are existing community-level information systems in place like public addresses, also called bandilyo in some communities, house-to-house through street-based leaders informing community members of the incoming typhoon.

Community-level systems give the community members the directives on possible actions to be done whether they need to prepare and evacuate from their homes. Community organizations in their barangays also engage in information dissemination maximizing the use of social media and other existing platforms to widen their reach.

As soon as the information from the local government reaches me, I prepare by packing our important things and the needs of my two children. I also prepare them. We evacuate as soon as the local government tells us so.

A mother of five, she has a hearing impairment while one of her children has a developmental delay. A full time housewife to her fisherman husband, but due to inadequate income, she also sells fish and vegetables, and does laundry and cleaning jobs in nearby communities. She lives in an urban settlement community with her family.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

With the experiences of past typhoons and their adapting behaviors, the Missing Voices interviewees are aware of how to prepare before the typhoons strike. Most of them do disaster preparations which include preparing their belongings, securing their properties, and if there are available funds and resources, buying stocks and supplies.

Missing Voices participants commonly assign each of their family members a role when it comes to disaster preparedness. In some households, women, specifically mothers, supervise the logistical preparations such as go-bags, food, medicines, and transportation going to the evacuation sites. In other households, women have the deciding power over the needs of the family when they prepare before and during disasters. On the other hand, men of the households are assigned to ensure their homes can stand the typhoon, protect their livelihood and properties when disasters hit, and share the decision-making with their spouses.

The roles of women in disaster preparedness also include finding enough resources to prepare. To ensure the safety of the family members once evacuated, part of the preparedness checklists of women is to either buy their basic needs and/or have spare money while staying at the evacuation center through any known means. Examples cited were taking loans from convenience stores, bartering services for goods, and committing their cash transfers. In case they fail to secure what they need, they simply rely on assistance provided by the government or non-government organizations.

How do we prepare if we don't have resources? Even if I wanted to prepare, if I don't have the money to buy food for my family, I can't do anything. If we ever go to the evacuation center, I don't want us to simply rely on the relief. The only thing we can do is to just save ourselves. That's the last thing that we can do.

A transwoman living in an urban settlement and a flood-prone community. She is the breadwinner of the family working in multiple jobs as a live-streamer, and an entertainer. She juggles her jobs to support her family.

Part of disaster preparedness is knowledge on disaster risk reduction. Women and members of the LGBTQIA+ are mostly the participants of training on these topics, with some of them participating in information dissemination, and direct rescue and evacuation center management. However, some of the Missing Voices – women with disabilities, elderly, farmer-women, women living in far-flung communities, and pregnant/lactating – have difficulty in attending and participating in training and community initiatives because of their limited capabilities and prioritization of their family's economic needs.



Photos are not of the quoted and are from other Start Network-funded projects in the Philippines.

Despite factors hindering them to attend, they are willing to participate if there would be additional platforms devised for them. Using social media in conduct of training, and producing printed modules or pamphlets on disaster risk reduction are some of the suggestions they cited.

Women's livelihood activities are interrupted or impacted by typhoons and other hazards. Their capitals are lost as significant losses to their livelihood occur due to severe damage to their products, destruction of crops and fruit-bearing trees, and closure of small convenience stores. In addition, the pandemic also aggravated the adverse effects of typhoons and other disasters on the livelihoods and sources of income of people. It came to the point where some of the Missing Voices shell out their funds to support their fellow LGBTQIA+ who do not have enough resources to prepare.

People living with HIV (PLHIV) have lost their jobs since the pandemic, and while they get something from the health center, it's more difficult if there is a typhoon because they cannot go out. We try to help them with their daily needs, especially in check-ups and maintenance.

A member of LGBTQIA+ community who is a healthcare worker in their barangay near the river. His community is one of the flood-prone areas and described as an urban poor community. Aside from being a healthcare worker, he is also the focal person of LGBT-related programs in their community.

Women's personal needs, especially those who are lactating, caring for their children with special needs, and elderly women, are overlooked in times of preparation. These women are the ones making decisions, taking care of their family, and prioritizing the safety of their children and spouses who have mobility concerns.



Women are very much affected during disasters. If they lose their livelihood, they won't be able to feed their children. Women are more affected because they must think of ways to get food on their tables, so what they need is a livelihood that could address their needs during disasters. They need to save and prepare.

A community volunteer in an urban poor and coastal community, she lives in a community near the river where houses are often damaged by typhoons because of their physical conditions and the underlying economic conditions of people in their community.

EARLY ACTION

Recent experiences of typhoons coupled with the ongoing pandemic affected the actions of the Missing Voices participants. Women had to find other sources of income for their families to survive. The typhoons exacerbated their already marginalized conditions at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although participants value early action as an important preparedness measure, early action entails the availability of resources such as food and money whenever disaster strikes. Livelihood grants and training are essential early action activities to vulnerable communities.



Another difficulty is when we don't have enough money to buy our supplies. We rely on the pension given to us and it is usually given every 3 or 6 months. If a typhoon hits and we haven't received the conditional cash transfers from the government, I ask the convenience stores in our neighborhood to lend us some food that we could bring at the evacuation center.

An elderly living with her husband in a coastal community, both of them are relying on the pension that the government gives to elderly. Due to their age, she and her husband both suffer from difficulties in mobility.

People make prompt actions as early as the information reaches them. These actions include decision-making, informing family and community members, and helping secure their personal belongings and their livelihood. Further, decisions on early evacuation for those who needed transportation support and those living in far-flung communities were also made.

However, the elderly, women and children with disabilities have yet to participate in early action activities. The elderly, and women and children with disabilities shared that it was hard for them to join training due to their conditions. Moreover, in times of disasters, they mostly rely on authorities, local institutions, or their families to provide support when there is a need to evacuate.



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//// BARRIERS AND CONCERNS

Although continuous efforts are being done to mitigate the adverse effects of disasters on the vulnerable sectors of society, there are still barriers and concerns that need to be addressed. One of the concerns raised is that the assistance that they receive is mostly generic food and non-food items. The necessities of marginalized identities specific to their gender and health conditions are recognized but not all the time provided due to lack of resources and for some, lack of sensitivity.

Existing evacuation centers are not built to give the specialized needs of the marginalized identities. Evacuation centers are not giving the privacy needed by pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. Also, these centers are located in places that are far from the communities making it hard for pregnant women, persons with orthopedic disabilities, and elderly people to access.

Inadequate or lack of resources is also identified as a barrier. As mentioned, people know the importance of early action but what prevents them to do so is the lack of personal funds. Their key concern is that they could not execute preparedness measures without any savings or stand-by funds. In addition, the participants cited their inability to access social protection programs only relying on either government pension or cash transfers and other seasonal cash assistance. Some of them are not even aware of government insurance that they can utilize to support their needs in times of disaster.

Another barrier is the delay in receiving information or non-receipt of information. Their inability to access information from proper sources of information made it hard for them to conduct disaster preparedness and early action activities for both their family and livelihood to survive.

Further, existence of attitudinal barriers to beneficiaries of support and assistance from the government is also an identified concern. They are aware of the existing government programs but they are either shy to ask for help or think of themselves as burdens whenever asking for help from the government.

Lastly, political barriers due to different priorities from leaders at the community local government, lack of coordination and communication, and lack of resources are also seen as barriers.