



Building disaster-resilient communities

A success story from barangay Tablon

The Philippines is one of the countries most at risk of natural disasters in the world. At least 60% of the country's land area is exposed to natural hazards, and 74% of its population of more than 100 million is vulnerable to their impacts. Through the 'Ridge to Coast Rain to Tap' (R2CR2T) project, the Philippine Red Cross works with the inhabitants and local governments of hazard-prone barangays of Cagayan de Oro City to strengthen their disaster resilience.

When Esmeralda Blanco received the call about the incoming flash flood on the evening of July 13th 2021 she immediately went into action. As a volunteer member of the newly formed Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) team of barangay Tablon, Esmeralda rushed towards the low-lying area along the riverbank to assist in the rescue operation. Guided by team leader Vicente Flores, all volunteers knew their roles and responsibilities. While the most experienced members entered the neck-high water with ropes and buoys to pull residents to safety, Esmeralda and the others remained on higher ground to control the traffic and organize shelter and food for the nearly 300 evacuated families. Although there was damage to belongings and 43 homes, the operation went smoothly and there were no casualties.

Bordered by two rivers and the coast, Tablon has seen its fair share of floods and typhoons. Yet despite the evident risks faced by some of the barangay's 18,000 inhabitants, a clear plan and dedicated local team for preparing for and responding to disasters had long been lacking.

Strengthening local capacities

Barangays are the smallest political units in the Philippines, comparable to the neighborhoods and suburbs of a city or the villages that make up a larger municipality. Since 2018, the Philippine Red Cross has been working with residents and governments of Tablon and four other hazard-prone



A flooded area of Tablon the day after the July flash flood.
Photo by Jimmy Macabana



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Red Cross 143 volunteers during a VCA problem tree analysis activity

“Through the VCA activities I understood which areas of the barangay are most vulnerable to storm surges and floods. We did a recorrida [awareness activity] in those areas and I was able to explain to the residents about the risks they face and the evacuation procedures.”

– Esmeralda Blanco
Red Cross 143 volunteer

barangays of Cagayan de Oro City to strengthen local capacities for disaster risk reduction and management. The intervention is part of the 6-year R2CR2T project, which aims to improve flood resilience in the Cagayan de Oro River Basin. The project is co-funded by the Dutch Government through the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW).

Esmeralda, team leader Flores and 16 other residents of Tablon volunteered to join the new DRR team, which the Philippine Red Cross set up in each of the project barangays. They attended an intensive community-based disaster risk reduction and management training as well as a first aid and basic life support course, which equipped the participants with the tools, knowledge and skills to prepare for and rapidly respond to emergencies in their area. The DRR team is part of the ‘Red Cross 143’, a program through which the Philippine Red Cross aims to create and sustain a well-trained team of at least 44 volunteers in all 42,015 barangays in the country.

Understanding disaster risks

A key strategy to improve disaster preparedness was the conduct of a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA), a participatory process designed to help communities understand the risks they face and identify available capacities to cope with these risks. Over the course of several months, Tablon’s Red Cross 143 team collected firsthand data through a range of field activities, such as transect walks, direct observation, mapping exercises, focus group discussions and interviews with residents. After data collection, the identified risks were analyzed and ranked based on probability and impact.

The main disaster risks found for Tablon stem from six natural and human-induced hazards: pandemic, flood, fire, vehicular accidents, storm surge and landslide.

Participatory planning

The findings from the VCA activities have been used to develop a 3-year Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (BDRRMP). Barangays are required by law (Republic Act 10121) to develop a BDRRMP and update it every year, but often lack the capacities to tailor this plan to the specific local needs and conditions. The Philippine Red Cross supported a committee composed of Red Cross 143 volunteers, the barangay captain and other barangay officials to draft the plan in a participatory manner using the findings from the field. The resulting BDRRMP contains a detailed list of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery activities, and clearly defines stakeholder roles and responsibilities. In accordance with the same Republic Act, barangay Tablon has committed to set aside at least 5% of its revenue to fund the plan’s implementation.

Over the coming months, Esmeralda, team leader Flores and the rest of the volunteers will focus on raising awareness about what to do in the event of an emergency, prioritizing high-risk areas. The team understood that, while hazards like the July flash flood cannot always be avoided, being well prepared and looking out for one another is vital to prevent the loss of lives. Through their sustained and tireless efforts, the volunteers and everyone else involved have laid a solid foundation for a safe, adaptive and disaster-resilient Tablon.

*Text and photography by
Arianne Gijsenbergh*

Ridge to Coast, Rain to Tap (R2CR2T) project

The R2CR2T project aims to improve water supply and reduce flood risks and vulnerability in the Cagayan de Oro River Basin in Mindanao, the Philippines. It is a public-private partnership between VEI, Cagayan de Oro Water District, Philippine Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Unifrutti, Hineleban Foundation, Bukidnon Indigenous Peoples Advisory Council, Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council, Wetlands International and FITC. The project is co-funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administered by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) through the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW).