

Older people and effective disaster risk reduction

Invaluable contributions to community safety through disaster preparedness in the Philippines



Robano Roberta Cruz (left) from the Philippines listens for disaster warnings on her radio. She shares the news with neighbours, including Belen Honra (right).

Older people's associations and effective disaster relief

Older people's associations' local knowledge and community organising skills proved invaluable in disaster relief efforts after Typhoon Ketsana hit the Philippines in 2009

Typhoon Ketsana was the most destructive typhoon to hit Manila since records began. More than 450 people died when the storm struck the Philippines in September 2009. In the midst of the destruction, older people played a valuable role in relief and recovery efforts.

The contribution of older people was coordinated by the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE) and the Confederation of Older Persons' Associations of the Philippines (COPAP).

Rapid response

COPAP, which is made up of representatives of older people's associations (OPAs) from across the country, was due to hold its major annual event, the Walk for Life, on 1 October 2009. But after hearing about Ketsana, the event was cancelled and COPAP poured its efforts into relief operations. OPAs visited the affected areas to assess older people's needs. With their report,

"The organisation was able to pinpoint the people who really needed relief goods. They knew who was in need because they are also from this area."

Bonifacia Basconcello,
COPAP

COSE developed a proposal to submit to HelpAge International for funding.

Together, COSE and COPAP organised and distributed relief goods. The initial relief consisted of food and cooking utensils. This was later followed by assistance in rebuilding homes and livelihoods. Some of the affected areas did not have electricity so HelpAge also allocated grants for solar panels.

COPAP past president Bonifacia

Basconcillo said OPAs made relief operations easier.

“Everyone cooperated and helped, not only in the distribution, but also in gathering facts and data to submit to funding agencies. It was easier because everyone helped one another,” she explained.

“The organisation was able to pinpoint the people who really

needed relief goods. They knew who was in need because they are also from this area. The OPA leaders are really knowledgeable about the people in the area.”

Another COPAP past president, Salvacion Basiano, said older people’s life experience means they can help minimise disturbances when relief goods are distributed.

Robano Roberta Cruz, 68, uses her radio to listen for disaster warnings. She also has a bag full of essential items packed in case she has to evacuate quickly





Gloria Bacani says receiving shelter and livelihood assistance helped her regain her integrity

“We decided on measures to take so that people who were not beneficiaries would not come around and crowd,” she explained.

Many older people who benefited from COSE and COPAP’s relief efforts were inspired to form their own OPAs, which will help in local disaster preparedness and recovery from future disasters.

Improved spirits

Gloria Bacani, 71, of Clemencia Village, received relief assistance from another community’s OPA immediately after Typhoon Ketsana.

The OPA’s positive contribution was inspiring and after a month of meetings and consultations,

Gloria’s community formed its own OPA.

Feeling fortunate

“I feel lucky and happy that I am a member of the association, Gloria said.

“I actively participate in all activities and programmes such as the burial fund benefits and medical mission.

“I go to monthly meetings and enjoy talking with other older people who are in a similar situation to me.

“I also received shelter assistance and livelihood assistance from my association through the help of COSE, which has helped me regain my integrity as a person.”

Older people's associations and effective disaster risk reduction

The cooperation and organisation ingrained within older people's associations makes them a valuable resource to implement community disaster risk reduction programmes

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, with particular risk from typhoons, floods and earthquakes. It is impossible to tell when the next calamity will strike, but it is possible to be prepared.

Older people's associations (OPAs) in the Philippines have been working to make their communities disaster-prepared. As cohesive community organisations with extensive local knowledge, they can ensure the whole community is involved.

Valuable lessons

In the months following Typhoon Ketsana, all the OPAs in disaster-prone areas in greater-Manila underwent training and began disaster risk reduction (DRR) work. COPAP past president Salvacion Basiano said one of the most important lessons was to be aware of the situation of the community as a whole, not just individuals.



In the community of Banaba, older people work with children to implement DRR activities such as community mapping

“It is possible that some individuals are not severely affected, but others in the community might be severely affected, so they need to know what to do,” Salvacion explained.

Another COPAP past president, Bonifacia Basconcillo, said that



OPA members in Bagong Silangan cart supplies to a medical mission. The same organisation is coordinating village DRR activities

sponsored by COSE, COPAP has held training sessions on disaster management and formed disaster committees in each area.

“We were [also] able to prepare hazard maps for the area, so that by the time a disaster comes, it is easier to identify who are most vulnerable,” she explained.

COPAP has also learned the value of working closely with other agencies.

“It is important that we have to work together,” Bonifacia said.

One of the areas that was hardest hit during Ketsana was Bagong Silangan. Many people lost their homes and belongings in the floods.

Setting an example

COPAP visited Bagong Silangan to assess the damage and offer assistance. Inspired by COPAP’s actions, the community formed its own OPA, which is now coordinating DRR activities to prepare the community for future disasters.

Being prepared

Rosemarie Diaz, 56, (right) has felt better prepared for the future since her village formed an OPA. The OPA's disaster committee organises activities such as training, hazard mapping, sand bagging and drainage cleaning.



Merlita Puhit, 68, (left) lives in a village with no electricity. Through a HelpAge project, she acquired a solar panel and an electric radio. Merlita can now listen for disaster warnings. This means she can actively prepare for emergencies and share information with neighbours.

Nanay (Mother) Nenita, 66, (right) has been more aware and vigilant when it rains since her OPA held DRR training. She now knows what to do in emergencies to save herself and her grandchildren.



Wisdom and leadership



Older people must be included in DRR efforts.

Health and mobility problems mean it is particularly important that older people are prepared for disasters. They must be able to act quickly and know what to do, where to go and what to take.

Older people's role in the community also means they are perfectly placed to be leaders in times of emergency. Age means greater community knowledge, which is invaluable in disaster planning and responses.

It is also more likely older people have experienced previous disasters, meaning they are able to share important information about which areas are most at risk, which areas are safest and how quickly disasters strike.

"While I do not believe we own all the wisdom, given the time that we have been living, we have comparatively greater experience that we can draw on [in disasters]. So I think it is imperative that older people are involved, not just as recipients, but in planning. The experiences we have had can help to make things easier."

**Salvacion Basiano,
COPAP past president**

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