PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

Vulnerability, capacities and resilience in Philippine context

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CENTER FOR KAPAMPANGAN STUDIES
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Kumusta na, ayos pa ba
Ang buhay natin, kaya pa ba
Eh kung hinde, paano na
Ewan mo ba, bahala na?

Dong Abay, Yano, Kumusta na, 1994

About the cover: “Turbulent Sea” by Cyrene B. Gaillard
Oil on paper, 48 cm x 58.5 cm, France, 2010
Although seemingly vulnerable the small outrigger boat actually proves able to face huge waves as Filipino people show capacities and resilience in facing natural and other hazards.

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Mainstreaming marginalized groups and their capacities

As discussed in introduction, some people among marginalized groups within society may be more vulnerable than others because they are deprived access to resources which are available to others with more power. The needs of those marginalized people are less considered in actions to reduce the risk of disaster. Such an argument is not new as it dates back to pioneer works by Wisner (1978) and Blaikie and Brookfield (1987). However, it is somehow overlooked by contemporary researchers, policy makers and practitioners when it comes to DRR. This, despite the growing gap observed worldwide between the poorest and the richest, between people regularly affected by natural hazards and those who have never been concerned, between people and governments able to deploy an increasingly large arsenal of measures and those unable to resort to even the most basic strategies.

Marginalization is a matter of poverty, but not only that. Obviously, limited financial resources prevent people from choosing where to settle, which includes choosing safer areas which can be expensive. Poor people are also unable to afford DRR measures although these are often available locally. Vulnerable people and communities in the face of natural hazards also include those who are socially and culturally excluded from dominant policies and DRR activities. These encompass all neglected segments of societies, often including children, elderly, women, gender minorities, people with disabilities, refugees, prisoners, homeless people and ethnic minorities. Many are physically fragile, unable to move easily and dependent on the decisions of others in the face of natural hazards – frequently because all aspects of society do not factor in their special needs.

Still, marginalized groups display their own resources and capacities in facing natural hazards, which should be harnessed for strengthening DRR. This chapter
provides two critical examples in the Philippine context. First, it draws upon the case of a marginalized social group hitherto totally overlooked in the Philippines when it comes to disasters and DRR: the baklas. In a second instance, this chapter investigates the case of the youth in DRR and suggests that when carefully considered through the use of adapted tools, children and teenagers may display significant capacities in facing disasters.

Integrating baklas and their capacities in DRR: a case study from Irosin, Sorsogon

Although nowadays often considered as gays, or sometimes transsexuals, the identity of the baklas is much more ambiguous as it does not refer only to a particular sexual behavior. It rather expresses specific roles within the household and society or an ability to swing from male to female tasks and responsibilities (Garcia, 2008). It is, therefore, more a question of gender than a simple differentiation upon a divergent sexual orientation. This is evident in the term bakla (noun) which is actually the contraction of babae (woman) and lalaki (man). When used as an adjective, bakla further means uncertainty or indecisiveness (Tan, 1995).

Baklas openly claim their identity and are recognized for their leadership and initiative when it comes to community activities. Yet, they often suffer from mockery and discrimination when in the presence of men and women, especially in rural areas. On the larger political scene, and despite several legal requests, marriage between baklas has not yet been recognized. However, progress towards the recognition of baklas’ rights has recently been made as their congressional party list named Ladlad was authorized by the Supreme Court to file candidacy during the 2010 elections. Within the family, young baklas are frequently marginalized and tasked with demanding house chores which span across the usual responsibilities of both boys (e.g. fishing, fetching fire wood and water) and girls (e.g. cleaning the house, doing the laundry, caring for babies).

The baklas’ ability to swing from male to female tasks and responsibilities as well as their sense of initiative and leadership prove particularly useful in time of disaster, thus making baklas crucial resource persons within their communities when confronted with natural hazards. Unfortunately, such capacities are often, at best, overlooked or at worst, denigrated.

A similar P3DM for DRR project as the one described in the previous chapter was conducted in Irosin. This project enabled to consider baklas’ particular vulnerability but also their capacities to face natural hazards. Irosin has a very irregular terrain characterized by the plain on the valley floor, secluded plains and valleys on the mountaintops, undulating hills and mountain peaks, including Mt Bulusan which is one of the most active volcanoes in the Philippines (Delfin et al., 1993). The municipality also experiences several cyclones per year, which trigger flooding, flash floods and landslides. Although primarily relying on agricultural resources, Irosin is also a catchment area catering public and private services to at least five adjoining towns.

The P3DM for DRR project was conducted in the village of Macawayan located at the midst of the plain of Irosin (Figure 6 and 29). The Cadac-an River traverses the village and sustains the irrigation of agricultural activities mainly rice production. Local people are often forced to evacuate their home along the river during cyclone events and heavy rains. Livelihoods of the people are greatly affected since majority of the people relies on rice production that is usually the most affected during flooding.

In Irosin, young baklas are asked by the parents to do the dirty chores and clean their house in the aftermath of flash floods. Simultaneously, they, too, are those who spontaneously walk around the town to collect relief goods among their neighbors. When evacuated in crowded churches or public buildings, baklas suffer from the lack of privacy, being uncomfortable with either women or men. Their
personal grooming needs are also objects of jokes from men in male comfort rooms where they are assigned. Nonetheless, they spontaneously care for babies and young children. Some do the cooking. For most of the young baklas of Irosin, disasters, therefore, turn out to be even more stressful and demanding situations than for men or women.

P3DM for DRR was conducted in January 2010 under the leadership of the Integrated Rural Development Foundation (IRDF), an NGO involved in rural development. The primary objective of the project was to introduce DRR into local development planning (Figure 1). A number of stakeholders participated in the project including the local community, the BDCC, the Municipal Government of Irosin, the provincial government of Sorsogon, the local elementary school community, PHIVOLCS, IRDF, the Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP), and UP Diliman.

The initial activity consisted of building a 2.74 m X 2.74 m 3D map covering the whole village of Macawayan with a land area of 333.33 ha. The map enabled participants to plot natural hazards, vulnerable assets and people’s capacities (Figure 2). Overlapping hazard-prone areas, vulnerable assets and local capacities in one map allows people to concretely appraise disaster risk in their immediate environment. P3DM eventually facilitated the planning of actions to reduce the risk of disaster, including measures to reduce people’s vulnerability and to enhance capacities to face natural hazards. This P3DM project also featured an innovative indigenous version of GIS tools connecting the 3D map with columnar tables from the village officials containing data at the household level. This output proved to be very valuable in facilitating health surveys and feeding programs.

Young baklas were involved as a singular group and as members of the larger community (Figure 30). A special FGD has enabled the assessment of their particular roles and needs in the face of natural hazards. They then participated in participatory mapping activities with the larger community. Baklas identified their houses on the map in order to delineate specific areas where each of them shall collect relief goods in time of emergency. Their potential contribution to the life of the community while evacuated in public buildings was also discussed. These activities conducted in the presence of men and women contributed to the recognition by the larger community of the contribution of baklas to DRR. This helps in reducing discrimination and mockery during disasters.

The successful dialogue between baklas and the larger community, and then between the entire community and government officials, school representatives and scientists using P3DM as the solid basis for discussions is perhaps the most important and unique contribution of this project. P3DM provided a tangible tool where baklas, the larger community of Macawayan and outside stakeholders were able to discuss DRR face-to-face, at the same time, and around the same table. This proved particularly useful not only for assessing the baklas’ particular needs in facing natural hazards but also for recognizing their unique contribution in times of disaster. When a consultation was conducted in early 2011 with all the barangay authorities of Irosin regarding the possibility of extending P3DM for DRR to all villages in the municipality, the head of Macawayan instantly and spontaneously mentioned the case of the baklas who were able to contribute to their local activities the previous year.

At the national level, there are also increasing, although still limited, initiatives which militate for the recognition of the baklas’ contribution to DRR. In the aftermath of cyclones Ondoy and Pepeng in late September – early October 2009, Manila-based organizations militating for the rights of LGBTs raised support for the survivors without discrimination on the basis of their gender or sexual orientation (http://diversityandequality.ph/) and then persisted as an advocacy group for the consideration of baklas and their genetically female counterpart, the tomboys, in DRR. This group is named LGTBI (Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals, Bisexuals, Intersex) Pinoy’s for Calamity and Disaster Victims (http://groups.to/lgbtipinoysforcalamityvictims).
However, integrating marginalized groups in DRR sometimes requires specific tools to fully appraise their vulnerability and capacities in facing natural hazards. This is the case for the youth.

**DRR and the youth**

Disasters often leave heavy toll among the youth. Children prove to be particularly vulnerable because they are physically fragile, sometimes malnourished, often dependent on decisions and actions by others, regularly gathered in unsafe school buildings, and frequently unaware of the preparedness measures (e.g. Delica, 1998; Anderson, 2005). Yet kids and teenagers are usually very knowledgeable about their environment and often very dedicated to community activities (Wisner, 2006b).

There is growing literature stressing the impact of natural hazards on the youth and the importance of giving them a role in DRR (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Wisner, 2006b; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2007; Luna et al., 2008). Recent emphasis has been given to the role of youth and education in implementing DRR policy especially at the community level (Wisner, 2006b; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2009; World Vision and Plan, 2009). It is assumed that schools and colleges of all levels can be powerful venues to convey effective and far-reaching risk-reduction activities (Anderson, 2005). Pupils and students are often avid to learn about natural hazards and their neighboring physical and social environment. They are also very effective in relaying disaster preparedness measures. In front of them, teachers are the best credible facilitators to discuss how to cope with natural hazards. Furthermore, school and college officials often have a broad view of the local communities through direct contact with the parents. A number of NGOs such as Plan, Save the Children and World Vision have thus drawn specific programs to help youth prepare for and cope with disasters. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is also presently conducting a campaign entitled “Reduce risks, protect children! Reduce risks! Involve children!” In the Philippines, such programs are progressively spreading to national and local governments which are henceforth considering specific policies for the youth (National Disaster Coordinating Council, 2002; Luna et al., 2008).

Along these objectives, tools have been developed specifically for involving the youth in DRR (Petal, 2007). These include comics and cartoons in local languages to raise hazard and disaster awareness among children (e.g. Mercy Malaysia et al., 2005; No Strings et al., 2007). Games are also widespread and include board games such as that of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) named “Risk Land” (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and United Nations Children’s Fund, nd), card games (Ministère de l’Ecologie, du Développement et de l’Aménagement Durables, 2007) and interactive computer-based games (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2009). Drama and role-playing games also enable students to rehearse DRR activities.

The following paragraphs further suggest the use of participatory mapping as a tool to enhance disaster risk awareness and facilitate discussion around disaster-related concepts among the youth. The present case study documents an experience conducted at the City College of San Fernando in the province of Pampanga (Figure 6) in August 2009. It largely draws on the experience accumulated during P3DM (chapter 5) and constitutes a shorter and lighter version of this form of participatory mapping.

The City College of San Fernando was established in 2009 on the initiative of the city government which covers all expenses for the operation of the school. The college gathers for the needs of 600 poor youth of the city who do not have to pay any tuition fee for attending their classes as long as they maintain good grades. So far, the college offers courses in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Information Technology, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Technical Education and Skills at the undergraduate level.

DRR was discussed as part of the regular curriculum for first-year students, i.e. 16-year-old youth. It involved two batches of 35 students each, girls and boys, in an hour-and-a-half class per batch. Most of these students have limited access to formal educational media such as books and the Internet. Participatory mapping was thus used as a medium for making disaster-related concepts and disaster risk tangible to the students. The objectives were to familiarize the students with the concepts of hazard, vulnerability, capacities, risk and disaster and to discuss the origin of catastrophic events in their familiar surroundings.

As a preliminary pre-class activity, a scaled base map including the borders of the city was drawn manually on two pieces of recycled paper joined together and glued over a large refrigerator carton. The scale of the map was approximately 1:7,500. Other materials required for the activity included an assortment of push pins of different shapes and colors, tailor pins, colored yarns, scissors and marker pens.

Each class started with a short introduction on the objectives and methodological steps for the activity. Students were eventually asked to plot the different villages
After this general information, the students plotted disaster-related data on the same map (Figure 31). It first included their house and the kind of housing materials it is made of. They used different colors of cylindrical push pins to distinguish 2-storey houses, 1-storey cemented houses, 1-storey houses made of mixed materials and 1-storey houses built of light materials such as wood and palm leaves. Only the students’ houses were plotted because of time and scale constraints and because the objective of the activity was to discuss disaster-related concepts based on the participants’ personal experiences. The participants eventually added onto the map the most vulnerable people living in their house, i.e. the children who are less than five years old, the pregnant women, the elderly above 60 years old, people with disabilities, and those with long-term illness such as diabetes or cancer. They used small ball-like push pins of different colors. In a final step, the students resorted to yarns to plot the rivers which flow throughout San Fernando and the areas which they consider as flood-prone. They actually distinguished the places where flooding is considered as severe from areas where it is moderate using, respectively, brown and yellow yarns (Figure 32).

The final section of the activity consisted of discussing disaster-related concepts and the origins of disastrous events based on their own experience in San Fernando which they featured in the map. It started with a debate on the role of natural hazards in triggering disasters. The map was of great help to show that many of the most affluent students and families were living in hazard-safe areas while many poor households were residing in flood-prone villages. Within the flooded places, the map also rendered easy the discussion regarding who is the most affected and who is suffering the most in the event of an evacuation. The map facilitated the discussion on people’s vulnerability and capacities in the face of natural hazards based on the students’ experiences in dealing with people with disabilities and elderly relatives. The activity closed with a short discussion on what would be the remedial measures for flood disaster risk in San Fernando based on the previous discussions on hazards, vulnerability and capacities.
Such an activity proved very useful in raising awareness about DRR among the youth. Indeed, the usual media of education such as lectures, readings, and film showing rely on a one-way communication strategy where the youth learn from someone else. This strategy hardly works with disaster risk because hazard, vulnerability, and risk are abstract concepts which materialize only when phenomena strike and wreak damage. Indeed, one of the major issues and difficulties when trying to discuss disaster-related concepts and disaster risks with school pupils and students is to make these concepts tangible or concrete. In that perspective, participatory mapping both renders these concepts tangible and directly involves the youth in the learning process. As the ancient Chinese proverb states, "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand." This adage is particularly true in disaster education.

Participatory maps, thus, are concrete tools which help in materializing hazard, vulnerability, and risk. Overlapping hazard-prone areas, vulnerable resources and assets, and people's capacities on a map allows students to concretely appraise disaster risk in their immediate environment. This is particularly important among marginalized communities which are both the most vulnerable to natural hazards and those where access to outsiders' knowledge is often most difficult. Rambaldi and Callosa-Tarr (2002: 3) note that in such marginalized areas "the tendency for most people (...) is to learn via concrete sensorial experiences, rather than abstract concepts". Participatory mapping, therefore, contributes to empowering the most marginalized pupils and students such as those attending classes in public schools and colleges by granting them access to knowledge and by valuing their own knowledge of the place where they live.

Participatory mapping is cheap and easy to reproduce in classrooms. It demands little logistics. Moreover, the materials needed for the activity (carton, recycled paper, push and tailor pins, scissors, maker pens, and yarns) do not cost more than 1.5 US$ and are available everywhere in the Philippines. Building a participatory map and discussing DRR fits within an hour-and-a-half class but may be extended, if required. The use of push pins and yarns which are removable facilitates debates among pupils and students and makes the activity fun and joyful for the participants. The experience conducted at the City College of San Fernando actually showed that participatory mapping is often considered as a game by the students who competed in a friendly and collaborative atmosphere.

As a precaution, it is however advisable to conduct participatory mapping on the floor of the class room as it limits eye contact among the participants and thus balances power relationships between students with a strong personality and those who are shyer. For example, in San Fernando, a student leader who actually also served as a local official in his village strongly dominated his batch and rigorously organized the activity like a factory line where all his classmates queued to get a pin before plotting their house on the map. Some students were clearly put off by this student's strategy. To avoid such problems, it is also advisable to limit the number of participants to 15–20 so that all students can simultaneously work on the map.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that both the vulnerability and capacities of marginalized groups have to be considered into DRR. The foregoing case studies emphasize that although marginalized groups such as the baklas and the youth prove particularly vulnerable in facing natural hazards, they also display significant capacities to cope with disasters. These capacities are rooted in the particular experiences of such groups in everyday life. Integrating capacities, as well as recognizing the particular vulnerability of the baklas and the youth, among other marginalized groups within Philippine society, requires that a dialogue be established between them and the larger community and society. Indeed, members of marginalized groups usually know what their weaknesses, resources and strengths are. The issue is most often to have these capacities recognized by outsiders so that they can be tapped for DRR. It is therefore crucial to establish a dialogue between marginalized groups and other stakeholders of DRR. This is sometimes difficult as it requires tools which make vulnerability and capacities tangible to outsiders. The activities conducted in Irosin with young baklas and at the City College of San Fernando with young students show that participatory mapping may be one of these tools which integrate local and scientific knowledge into DRR. More tools are, however, still required to fully appraise the entire spectrum of capacities of marginalized groups in the context of the larger community, as emphasized in chapter 5.