

# Community-driven Disaster Risk Management and Reduction in the Philippines

Urbanisation in the developing world, mostly driven through the spread of informal settlements, is occurring at a rapid pace, and this growth has direct implications upon strategies that seek to address adaptation to climate change. This brief explores the work of the Homeless People's Federation Philippines, Incorporated (HPFPI) in their campaign to provide post-disaster assistance and reduce disaster risk in relation to their wider goal of improving the living conditions of the urban poor in the Philippines. By helping to initiate community-driven

programmes to improve living conditions, assess disaster risk and secure land tenure, the HPFPI's work aims to address poverty and improve the resilience of poor communities to climate impacts. Their work does not engage with climate change mitigation. This case has been selected because it demonstrates how supporting the organisational capacity of the urban poor can lead to empowerment in the face of adversity and affect positive outcomes in the quest to address vulnerability to poverty and climate impacts.

## Community action for disaster risk reduction needs to...

- invest in long-term development alongside short-term disaster relief. In order to bring about long-term benefits in relation to poverty reduction and adaptation objectives, more significant urban development is required.
- work with local government. Community-driven development and disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts are restricted by the extent of community savings, capabilities and the breadth of support available. They cannot be expected to replace state provision of urban infrastructure that reduces climate risk and saves lives. The HPFPI/PACSII Alliance has created and sustained facilitative partnerships between communities, government, and experts.
- share knowledge and best practice regarding community-led initiatives. In order to help spread community-led DRR and disaster risk management (DRM) practices, the Alliance could share experience and expertise with similar federations through existing international channels and networks (e.g. Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

## Learning lessons from the HPFPI

### 1 The work of HPFPI/PACSII demonstrates co-benefits in relation to poverty reduction and climate change adaptation objectives

This is exhibited by its post-disaster response process and attempts to secure land rights and reduce environmental risk. Efforts to undertake enumeration in poor districts have helped highlight the vulnerability of communities, reducing the invisibility of the marginalised and providing accurate data for relief agencies in post-disaster situations.

### 2 The HPFPI has demonstrated the capacity and competence of settlement federations

Through organisation and mobilisation, the HPFPI has demonstrated the potential that exists within marginalised communities. Slum federations have shown their ability to plan, design and build good quality infrastructure and housing at a lower cost than private firms (Satterthwaite 2011). Coupled with its technical support, the Alliance should push to become more involved in urban planning processes at the city level.

### 3 By working with – rather than against – government, access to policy spaces can be obtained, awarding the poor with a greater voice

Through efforts to develop a comprehensive network, the Alliance has built collaborative relationships which contribute to knowledge sharing, advocacy and fund-raising objectives. These efforts are integral to bringing about more substantial change that can help address the root causes of poverty and vulnerability.

### 4 The Alliance should continue to leverage capital from a variety of sources

In order to scale up operations and increase capacity, the HPFPI/PACSII should maintain its efforts to obtain financial support from communities, through the growth of community associations, and attempt to secure greater contributions from external sources (NGOs, the private sector, donors).

## A closer look at HPFPI

The Philippines is particularly susceptible to natural disasters due to its location within the Circum-Pacific belt, or 'ring of fire', and its position within both the typhoon belt of the North Pacific Basin and the path of the El Niño Southern Oscillation. This means that the country frequently has to deal with the effects of volcanic eruptions, typhoons, earthquakes, landslides, floods and droughts (Rayos Co 2010). Exposure to climate shocks represents a considerable obstacle to development efforts, as the frequency of natural or anthropocentric extreme weather events inhibits efforts made by the government to tackle poverty and reduce the vulnerability of low-income communities (Carcellar *et al.* 2011). Climate change is likely to increase the frequency of extreme weather events; therefore, interventions that seek to reduce poverty should also aim to address the vulnerability of marginalised communities to climate shocks.

The Federation is built around Area Resource Centres (ARCs) which are based within communities and are supported by regional and national offices. Since its creation it has been supported by a variety of donor and funding partners through its supporting NGO: Philippines Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives, Incorporated (PACSII); together these organisations are referred to as the Alliance.

The HPFPI works to support its members through initiatives which aim to:

- secure land tenure;
- improve living conditions;
- reduce poverty and;
- assist citizens in fulfilling their right to a dignified life.

The cheapest housing available in the Philippines is almost two times the average annual income of a Filipino worker; this means that the majority of households cannot afford the cost of housing and land (HPFPI/PACSII 2011). The HPFPI supports the urban poor through the promotion of community savings to improve financial capabilities in order to catalyse community development and social cohesion. Members pay into a savings scheme, called the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF), which can then be utilised by communities when purchasing and developing land. The Federation also supports communities in learning to

### The HPFPI national network



200 urban poor community associations and savings groups



More than 85,000 members



Inhabitants from 16 municipalities and 14 cities

Source: HPFPI/PACSII (2011).

comply with legal and bureaucratic requirements, and builds relationships between community associations and local government.

The frequency of extreme weather events in the Philippines within the last ten years has demonstrated how brutally exposed many of those in informal settlements are. Given the susceptibility of the Philippines to climate shocks, HPFPI efforts to improve the living conditions of the urban poor have grown to encompass DRR and DRM strategies. In the wake of a disaster, the HPFPI implements a post-disaster response process, which entails:

- 1 **Initial data gathering** – which allows for the immediate needs of victims to be assessed and the disaster area mapped;
- 2 **Trust and contact building** – Federation leaders introduce HPFPI volunteers and establish relationships;
- 3 **Savings programme implementation** – promoting the programme within the affected community;
- 4 **Organisational formation and registration** – the formation of the community association entails capacitating local volunteers and potential leaders, whilst increasing the savings fund;
- 5 **Intervention identification** – the community chooses the intervention most appropriate for them. The three choices are: immediate, house materials loan; mid-term, transit housing; long-term, a land acquisition initiative and house construction (Carcellar *et al.* 2011).

Coupled with its post-disaster response process are HPFPI's DRR strategies. A cornerstone of these strategies entails the identification and support of communities at high risk. City-wide enumeration, through community surveys, reduces the invisibility of marginalised groups and ensures that they are not excluded from local government's DRR planning. This process also helps to raise awareness of risk among the vulnerable and assists with the development of community-based information systems (*ibid.*). The Alliance is also partnered with Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), an institution with specialist knowledge regarding risk assessment and mapping. This partnership aims to develop a community-led risk assessment and mitigation (CRAM) process in order to capacitate communities. The combination of these efforts will help to build a profile of environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities across urban poor communities (*ibid.*).



Devastation caused by typhoon Sendong on the island of Mindanao, the Philippines

Furthermore, the Alliance is also in the process of increasing the scope of community-led development and DRR through the development of an alternative finance facility and a technical support institution in an attempt to scale up its work. The technical support institution aims to enhance efforts to mitigate risk with the help of technical professionals who will support community action. Professionals will instruct members on climate/disaster resilient and affordable housing design, assist with advocacy of building standard policy reform (in order to simplify the process), promote the use of green architecture, and assist with housing site selection and planning using environmental risk assessments. The alternative finance facility aims to improve resilience through the provision of disaster insurance for low-income groups and reconstruction loans (*ibid.*).

Although community-driven development and disaster risk management/reduction has made a discernible impact upon the lives of many of the urban poor in the Philippines, the scope of the Alliance's work is limited to an extent. Community group resources for development are limited to savings, HPFPI/PACSII support, and the capabilities acquired by members (*ibid.*). These efforts need to be supported by local and regional government through the institutionalisation of the community-led model and a greater emphasis upon policies which enable land provision for low-income groups (*ibid.*). Furthermore, larger-scale efforts to build resilience, such as sufficient drainage systems, require investments that are beyond the scope of community savings schemes.

There is potential for increasing community-driven action to reduce the vulnerability of low-income communities to poverty and climate-related shocks, but there is a need for greater external support to address limitations regarding resources.

## The potential for low carbon, climate resilient development (LCCRD)

It can be argued that the work of the HPFPI/PACSII Alliance constitutes an example of climate resilient development due to its focus upon reducing poverty and climate change adaptation.

If a multi-dimensional view of poverty is taken, the Alliance's efforts can be seen to impact upon poverty in the following ways:

- **By securing land tenure, members of the urban poor are awarded access to a legal plot of land upon which to build a permanent home.** This removes the threat of eviction, which improves wellbeing, and boosts the assets of those involved. Technical support, which includes soil assessment and a risk evaluation of the land, is provided before purchase in order to ensure the plot is in a safe location. The human right to a dignified life is the driving ethos behind the Alliance's work, and land acquisition helps realise this goal.
- **Developing slums and acquiring land can enhance human assets.** Upgrading living conditions can improve the health of community members.
- **Through the development of community associations, access to social networks are enhanced.** The Alliance has forged productive partnerships with local, regional and national government which has provided a platform for the urban poor to engage with policy formation, relocation policies, city-wide planning and slum upgrading (Rayos Co 2010). Community associations also contribute to social cohesion through the organisation and mobilisation of communities. The Alliance's technical support institution will also improve links to technical experts, who can advise best-practice for climate resilient housing construction, helping to improve the

capabilities of the poor whilst reducing vulnerability to climate shocks.

- **The financial capabilities of beneficiaries are improved through the provision of UPDF loans.** These loans can be utilised for reconstruction, land acquisition, community upgrading, and livelihood enterprises.

The work of the Alliance can also be understood to contribute to climate change adaptation in the following ways. Firstly, DRM represents a cornerstone of adaptation policy. Climate change is likely to increase the frequency of extreme weather events; therefore, an efficient disaster response process is a central component of the adaptive measures needed to be undertaken by societies susceptible to climate risk. HPFPI/PACSII's post-disaster response process demonstrates the potential of collective action in response to the limited capacity of government.

Secondly, climate change adaptation entails building resilience to anticipated climate impacts at all levels of society. Informal settlements, which often lack basic protective infrastructure and are comprised of poor quality housing, are at great risk from extreme weather events. The Alliance's work in assisting slum dwellers' efforts to upgrade their properties can be seen to increase the resilience of such communities. Likewise, sharing technical knowledge on affordable climate resilient building design helps the spread of adaptive practices. However, it should also be stated that these measures are inherently limited if the poor still remain in hazard-prone areas. The Alliance's relocation efforts, which assist the poor in securing land tenure in environmentally low-risk areas, represent a more effective and transformative approach; in these instances the cycle of risk regarding climatic shocks is broken. It should also be acknowledged that relocation is not always possible, or desired. In urban areas, where land is limited, relocation may entail moving far from current employment and so families often choose to remain in the area they currently occupy (Carcellar *et al.* 2011). Effective and long-term climate change adaptation entails a focus upon tackling the root causes of poverty. Although the work of the Alliance does contribute to improving the living conditions of the Filipino poor, its ability to bring about wholesale change is limited by its resource base. Fundamental infrastructural change that would improve poor people's access to basic services and provide more substantial protection from climate impacts is currently beyond the scope of the organisation. Although the Alliance strives for these measures, limited funds lead to a greater focus upon post-disaster relief efforts.

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## Further reading

Carcellar, N.; Rayos Co, J.C. and Hipolito, Z.O. (2011) 'Addressing Disaster Risk Reduction through Community-Rooted Interventions in the Philippines: Experience of the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines', *Environment and Urbanization* 23.2: 365–81

HPFPI/PACSII (2011) Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, Incorporated (HPFPI)/Philippine Action for Community-led Shelter Initiatives, Incorporated (PACSII), <http://hpfpi-pacsii.org/> (accessed 18 December 2011)

Rayos Co, J.C. (2010) *Community-Driven Disaster Intervention: Experiences of the Homeless People's Federation Philippines, Incorporated (HPFPI)*, IIED Human Settlements Working Paper 25, London: IIED

Satterthwaite, D. (2011) 'How Urban Societies Can Adapt to Resource Shortage and Climate Change', *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society* 369: 1762–83

## Authorship

This *Case Study* was written by Guy Crawford, a Research Assistant at IDS. It complements the Tackling Poverty in a Changing Climate Learning Cycle of the Learning Hub. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS.