

## Disaster Risk Reduction

When the place you call home is prone to disaster, you are compelled to undertake precautions so that you are better prepared when the next disaster strikes. Such is the situation of Albay.

Located on Luzon's eastern seaboard, Albay is among the provinces which are often battered by typhoons. Each year, roughly 198,000 houses are threatened with destruction from storm surges and at least 350,000 people need to be evacuated. Another 300,000 of the population are threatened by tsunami. And with an active volcano in its midst, three cities and five municipalities are under threat from volcanic eruptions that occur from time to time. An estimated 127 villages or 11,000 to 12,000 families are also threatened by mudslides and eight municipalities and two cities are threatened by floods.

Thus, in 1995, Albay's provincial government institutionalized the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (APSEMO) which was tasked to design and implement a disaster risk management and reduction program. Its main objective was to develop more pro-active and disaster resilient communities.

APSEMO managed to attain its objective by pursuing a community-based, disaster risk management approach. The communities are involved in formulating early warning markers and disseminating alarm information and advisories



for disaster avoidance. The communities are also involved in planning activities essential in disaster management before, during and after an emergency. Family disaster preparedness activities are also undertaken so that people become more aware of what to do before, during and after a disaster. There are assigned roles for everyone and designated pick up points have been identified to make evacuation more organized.

The communities are also empowered to decide when to undertake pre-emptive evacuation because they are properly equipped with early warning devices and tools. The management of evacuation centers during the initial onset of a disaster are also undertaken by the Barangay Disaster Coordinating

Councils with the help of the evacuees. The communities also conduct quarterly drills and exercises. This approach enabled Albay to chalk-up zero casualties from typhoons and volcanic eruptions for the first five years.

However, evacuating and rebuilding affected communities is costly and the communities remain at risk. APSEMO found a better solution which it refers to as geostrategic intervention (GUICADALE). It identified communities and areas that are prone to disasters through risk mapping. Then it also identified safe areas and drew up comprehensive land use plans. The program entails the relocation of 10,076 households in eight resettlement sites. It also involves the construction of a new airport and road network. By relocating

the disaster prone communities and commercial centers to safer areas, Albay hopes to reduce the impact of natural disasters on its people. And since the communities are involved in the planning and implementation of the program, the families willingly render labor as their counterpart in the construction of their relocation homes. With the CLUP, Albay managed to integrate disaster preparedness with economic development and has enticed more entrepreneurs to invest in the area.

As a department of the provincial government, APSEMO receives a regular budget. But Albay depends on calamity funds for disaster response and risk reduction initiatives and relies on the national government and international aid for extreme calamities. To fortify its limited public resources, Albay vigorously nurtures partnerships with international aid agencies such as the UNDP, USAID, JICA, WFP, FAO, EC-Dipecho, Italian Cooperation, ADPC, Christian Aid,


Oxfam, Manila Observatory, Habitat for Humanity and numerous NGOs and civic organizations.

The success of the Provincial Government of Albay in institutionalizing APSEMO was given recognition by the Department of the Interior and Local Government. The program is now included in the DILG's Good Practices in Local Governance: Facility for Adaptation and Replication Project (GO FAR). This is a process designed to build the capacities of LGUs by providing opportunity to improve local governance performance through sharing and replication of good practices that are participatory, innovative and sustainable.

Several "peer to peer" replication and inception workshops have also been conducted in the Provinces of Sorsogon, Sarangani and Pampanga. These provinces are also disaster prone and are keen on creating a similar office in their respective provinces. Through

these inception workshops, the participating LGUs learn about the actual operation and implementation of the programs and gain a better understanding of the importance of strengthening collaborations between disaster coordinating councils, support institutions, NGOs and the communities.

APSEMO has also been working with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center and the European Commission in the creation of disaster management offices at the municipal level in Albay. The municipalities of Camalig, Daraga and Oas were selected as pilot areas and are now in the process of creating their respective disaster management office.

Today, the people of Albay are well ahead in guaranteeing climate-proofed and disaster prepared communities. 



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