

The Philippines' Improving Response to Natural Disasters

Dalmacito A. Cordero Jr PhD 

Department of Theology and Religious Education, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Letter to the Editor

Cite this article: Cordero DA Jr. The Philippines' improving response to natural disasters. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep.* 18(e52), 1–2. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2024.58>.

Keywords:

Delivery of Health Care; Disaster Planning; Disasters

Corresponding author: Dalmacito A. Cordero, Email: dalmacito.cordero@dlsu.edu.ph.

To the Editor,

In a recent article, the authors interestingly claimed that India was an emerging global power with respect to providing medical aid during natural disasters. Despite being a developing country and economy, it has emerged as 1 of the key providers of immediate disaster aid to affected countries.¹ This claim is firmly validated since the Philippines is 1 of the recipients of this charitable act. I would therefore like to present the recent developments and improvements in my country that can be imitated by other developing countries.

The Philippines is 1 of the world's most disaster-prone countries. Located along the boundary of major tectonic plates and at the center of a typhoon belt, its islands are regularly impacted by floods, typhoons, and landslides, as well as earthquakes, volcanoes, and droughts. It also ranks among the top 3 countries in the world for population exposure and vulnerability to hazards.² When *Haiyan* (known as super typhoon *Yolanda* in the Philippines) hit the country in 2013, it affected more than 14 million people across 44 provinces, displacing 4.1 million people, and killing more than 6000 people with 1800 missing. It also damaged 1.1 million houses, destroyed 33 million coconut trees, and disrupted the livelihoods of 5.9 million workers. Overall damage was estimated at \$5.8 billion.³ India was 1 of the countries that immediately sent assistance by airlifting relief package comprising of medicines, hygiene chemicals, tents, and blankets, as well as tarpaulins, and ready-to-eat meals.⁴ During this disaster, the clearest explanation for why the country suffered such dire effects, is poverty. Many homes are modestly constructed of light materials like wood and the government has few resources to invest in infrastructure that could resist natural disasters and be used for relief efforts. The devastated city of Tacloban remained almost inaccessible after 3 days; aid workers said it took 6 hours to make the 14-mile round trip ferrying supplies between the airport and the city center.⁵ This implies that the disaster response of the country needs a lot of improvement.

Today (10 years after the earthquake), major improvements can be seen. First, there was the development and launching of "Ready to Rebuild (R2R): Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery Program." The R2R training program provides manuals, guidance, and training sessions to assist the country's Local Government Units (LGUs) in developing Local Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery Plans based on the National Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery Planning Guide, which was developed by the Government of Philippines with technical support from the World Bank. It also covers the use of *GeoRiskPH* integrated multi-hazard database, to improve local climate, disaster, and health-related baseline data sharing for risk-informed planning.⁶ Second, there was the launching and immediate use of PhilAWARE: a system that provides hazard monitoring, early warning, and advanced modeling to provide critical impact and potential needs' information to aid rapid response. It has been proven to be an effective tool for disaster monitoring. Since its deployment, the system helped the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) to monitor and respond to super typhoon *Rai* in December 2021, and was successfully used again for mapping the numerous landslides that occurred during tropical storm *Agaton* in April 2022.⁷ Lastly, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST)-Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) developed the Plan Smart web application which is an automated planning tool that will systematically generate rehabilitation and recovery plans using science-based information from *GeoRiskPH* integrated system and pro-forma templates. This web application is also ready to receive baseline data of local governments that are essential for planning. To equip provinces and cities, a series of trainings on the use of Plan Smart is ongoing. Participants are trained on how to collect, manage, and integrate their baseline data into *GeoRiskPH* platform for a risk-informed Rehabilitation and Recovery Plan.⁸

Much has been done but there is still a lot to do, in order to improve the Philippine's response to natural disasters. However, with continuous effort and collaboration between the government and other private sectors, as well as a strong, continuous show of solidarity by other nations, resilience will never be out of reach.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health, Inc.

References

1. **Mukhida S, Das P, Das NK, et al.** Medical aid in natural disasters: India an emerging global power. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep.* 2023;17:e467. Doi: [10.1017/dmp.2023.127](https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2023.127)

2. **Bollettino V, Alcayna T, Enriquez K, et al.** Perceptions of disaster resilience and preparedness in the Philippines. *Harvard Humanitarian Initiative*. <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/perceptions-disaster-resilience-and-preparedness-philippines>. Published June 2018. Accessed August 31, 2023.
3. **Reid K.** 2013 Typhoon Haiyan: facts, FAQs, and how to help. *World Vision*. <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2013-typhoon-haiyan-facts>. Published November 2018. Accessed August 31, 2023.
4. **Nodiri N.** Indian navy provides relief materials to Philippines. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indian-navy-provides-relief-materials-to-philippines/articleshow/26091599.cms>. Published November 19, 2013. Accessed August 27, 2023.
5. **Fisher M.** Why the Philippines wasn't ready for typhoon Haiyan. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/11/11/why-the-philippines-wasnt-ready-for-typhoon-haiyan/>. Published November 19, 2013. Accessed August 27, 2023.
6. **Chavez D.** Strengthening the Philippines' post-disaster financial resilience through support at the national and local levels. *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/04/05/strengthening-the-philippines-post-disaster-financial-resilience-drmhubtokyo>. Published April 5, 2022. Accessed August 29, 2023.
7. **Goering C.** PhilAWARE hailed as a success, second phase of project in the works. *PDC Global*. <https://www.pdc.org/philaware-hailed-as-success/>. Published November 19, 2013. Accessed August 29, 2023.
8. **Cordero LJ, Tolosa-Martinez M.** Towards a comprehensive disaster risk management system for the Philippines. *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/brief/towards-a-comprehensive-disaster-risk-management-system-for-the-philippines>. Published March 7, 2023. Accessed August 30, 2023.