

PROGRAM ON ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Articulating Risk and Resilience

DRR Policy Implications at the Barangay Scale

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Executive Summary

The enactment of the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (Republic Act No. 10121) marked a paradigm shift in national disaster governance from reactive emergency response toward proactive disaster risk reduction. Anchored in international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action and later the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the law institutionalized the decentralization of disaster governance by mandating the creation of disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) councils and committees from the national down to the barangay level. This multi-scalar system sought to integrate risk reduction into development planning while fostering community participation and locally led resilience initiatives.¹

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan for 2020–2030 specifies the “resilience lens” to be the approach taken by the Philippine DRRMC to integrate Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), human security, and DRRM into a common approach for operationalizing the disaster risk management planning. Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic that hazards come in a broad range of properties, “current, emerging, cascading, and complex” (NDRRMC 2020, 18), the updated plan emphasizes the critical assessment of socio-economic factors that intensify the overall risk of communities as one of the core lessons from examining the progress of disaster management in the country. Despite this shift in the framework, persistent gaps remain in how risk and resilience are conceptualized and operationalized at the local level. Philippine disaster risk reduction

policies tend to facilitate hazard-specific preparedness, technical compliance to the guidelines and requirements of national agencies, and infrastructure-oriented solutions that understate the cumulative and socially produced nature of disaster risk. Resilience is frequently framed as a technical outcome measured in terms of the operationalization of disaster response and mitigation systems, DRR fund utilization, or physical mitigation infrastructures rather than conceptualized as a negotiated social capacity shaped by inequalities, governance structures, and everyday coping strategies.

This policy-oriented analysis draws on disaster literature and Philippine case studies to argue for reframing community resilience at the local level. It advances three interrelated propositions. First, disaster risk in Philippine contexts is historically and institutionally produced through land utilization patterns and factors such as informality and socioeconomic marginalization. Second, resilience is not merely a function of community preparedness but is mediated by structural inequalities, multilevel governance mechanisms, and structural social dynamics that often redistribute risk toward the disadvantaged members of the community. Third, everyday community practices already function as resilience strategies deserving institutional recognition by their more explicit integration in local DRRM planning.

A Brief Disaster Situationer

Disaster statistics can only capture in numbers the enormity of impacts experienced by various communities in the Philippines whenever hazards

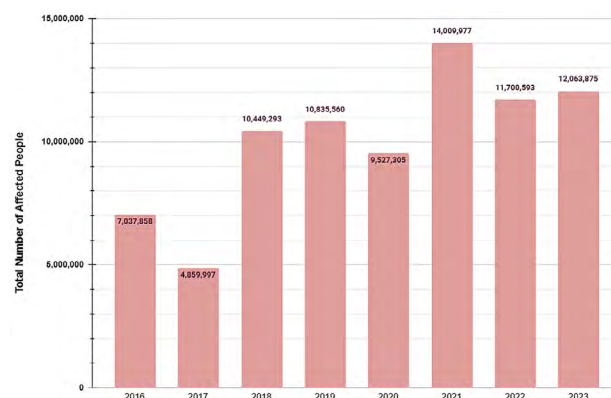
¹ Republic Act 10121. Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010. Congress of the Philippines Fourteenth Congress, Third Regular Session, 2009

become imminent and devastating. In 2025, the World Risk Report's key findings aimed the spotlight at the Philippines as the top-notch of the WorldRiskIndex with its score of 46.56². The country never left the top 10 list in the World Risk Reports since the global disaster assessment commenced in 2011, consistently ranking first in the last four years. The 2025 report further described the Philippines as a country "characterized by high geographic fragmentation and high exposure to weather-related extremes" (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr University Bochum 2025, 6). Coastal and riverine flooding are the major component of the country's risk profile, with exposure influenced by the low-lying topography of flood-prone areas, presence of dense settlements, intense monsoon patterns, and in some areas the inefficient drainage infrastructure (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr University Bochum 2025). On the other hand, the Philippines placed third among Asian nations for the highest number of disasters, with 21 events recorded in 2024 (behind India with 27, and China with 23) (Asian Disaster Reduction Center 2024). The following year, The Emergency Events Database or EM-DAT recorded 16 disasters primarily driven by typhoons and tropical storms including Wipha (Crising), Francisco (Dante), Co-May (Emong), altogether impacting about 11 million people; Bualoi (Opong, 4.6 million), Kalmaegi (Tino, 5.5 million) and Fung-wong (Uwan, 7.7 million). According to UCLouvain and CRED (2025), these events affected an estimated 30 million people or more, including the destructive earthquakes in Central Visayas and eastern Mindanao (IFRC 2025).

An accounting of natural disasters in the last decade (see Figure 1) compiled by the Philippine Statistics Authority further illustrates the consistently high numbers of individuals affected by extreme events such as drought, volcanic activities, earthquakes, extreme precipitation and monsoon rains, typhoons and other phenomena. Using the projected population for 2023 at 112.89 million (based on PopCen 2020–2025 Mid-Year projections by PSA), it can be deduced that nearly 11% of the population in 2023 were affected by major disaster incidents, excluding human-induced hazards (e.g., civil disturbance, environmental hazards such as oil spills, vehicular accidents, etc.). As climate change intensifies these disasters and puts the country's most vulnerable people at greater risk, it becomes even more critical that disaster risk reduction is well-coordinated

across borders and adaptive to local social and environmental realities.

Figure 1. Number of Affected People Due to Natural Extreme Events and Hazards for Major Incidents



Source: The Compendium of Philippine Environment Statistics, Philippine Statistics Authority, 2025

Policy Context: Decentralized Disaster Governance under RA No. 10121

Republic Act No. 10121 institutionalizes a comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management system by creating multi-sectoral councils and committees at national, regional, provincial, municipal, and barangay levels. Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committees (BDRRMCs) are mandated to conduct risk assessments, formulate Barangay DRRM Plans, implement preparedness and response activities, and coordinate recovery efforts within their jurisdictions.³ Frontline duties, such as executing preemptive evacuation when necessary, also fall within the mandate of the local DRRM councils (Domingo and Manejar 2018).

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRMP) 2020–2030 further reinforced this decentralized approach by emphasizing inclusive DRRM that integrates local knowledge, prioritizes vulnerable sectors, and integrates DRRM across development processes and across institutional functions of state agencies (NDRRMC 2020). The plan recognizes that resilience-building must extend beyond emergency response toward addressing systemic vulnerabilities and promoting participatory governance. In theory, Philippine DRRM policy

2 This is nearly 6 points higher than India, and 3.6 times of the minimum score of 12.88 to be classified under the category of Very High Risk.

3 From Republic Act 10121

thus aligns with the global resilience agenda, such as that of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, that underscore multilevel governance, community empowerment, “building back better”, and the social dimensions of risk. However, translating these principles into local practice has been challenged by institutional limitations in DRR plan design and implementation, a narrow problematization of risk, and the failure to synergize DRR with community-based development approaches.

Reframing Risk: From Episodic Hazards to Cumulative Process

Imperiale and Vanclay (2021, 893) posit that the root causes of disasters are “the local history of past development and associated processes and impacts” and their interactions with local vulnerabilities and social risk processes (e.g., corruption, rent-seeking, disaster capitalism, etc.) and the outcomes they create over time. While disaster studies emphasize that disasters are not isolated events but the materialization of risk influenced by exposure, vulnerability, and capacity (Cadag 2020), local DRRM planning remains heavily organized around discrete hazard types. Contingency plans are commonly prepared for floods, fires, earthquakes, and typhoons as separate risk categories, each accompanied by preparedness protocols and emergency response procedures. While such measures are essential components of disaster management, contingency planning and scenario-building for specific risks without connecting disaster risk to historical processes of development disparities reinforce an episodic depiction of risk in which disasters are treated as extreme, discrete events rather than as manifestations of vulnerabilities and uneven development. This framing obscures how disaster risk accumulates through socio-spatial conditions experienced by the community. Insecure housing on marginal lands, precarious livelihoods, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation exacerbate exposure and sensitivity to hazards. As disaster scholarship emphasizes, disasters emerge from the intersection of hazards with these structural vulnerabilities and the inadequate capacity to reduce risks rather than from hazard events alone (Imperiale and Vanclay 2021). Hazard and disaster mitigation, without directly addressing the root conditions that reproduce risk, limits the transformative potential of resilience-oriented policies.

Everyday risks are also embedded in ordinary urban conditions rather than extraordinary hazard events. For example, flooding in Barangay Tatalon is linked

not only to intense rainfall but to blocked waterways, inadequate waste management, and being a low-lying area adjacent to the San Juan River, one of the catchment areas in Quezon City. Data from local DRRM plans, such as the Quezon City DRRM Plan 2021–2027, further show that high-risk barangays often experience overlapping hazards such as flooding, fire, and health risk that are rooted in urban inequality, or what Imperiale and Vanclay (2021) refer to as negative social changes associated with development interventions, rather than discrete hazard exposure. Treating risk as episodic limits the prospects for local DRR actions to compliance to national agency checklists rather than effectively addressing these long-term, compounding threats.

Structural Capacity Constraints at the Barangay Level

The capacity of barangays to fulfill their DRRM mandates remains significantly constrained by limited resources, technical expertise, and institutional support. Empirical assessments of local DRRM councils in several Philippine municipalities and barangays indicate that BDRRMCs frequently lack basic emergency equipment, early warning systems, and reliable access to disaster-related data. Budgetary allocations for barangay DRRM activities are often insufficient and subject to bureaucratic delays which undermine timely preparedness and response initiatives (Cuya-Antonio and Antonio, 2017; Pas-iwen 2022; Toledo-Bruno, Mendoza, and Tandog 2017).

Moreover, DRRM council members typically hold multiple administrative roles across local government offices, which has implications on the time and focus they can dedicate to DRRM efforts (Pas-iwen 2022; Toledo-Bruno, Mendoza, and Tandog 2017). These overlapping responsibilities impact the capacities for regular planning, monitoring, and other DRRM activities, and may also hamper innovation in solutions and strategies. This also puts added strain and pressure on the very frontliners of crises and emergency management in the community.

Power and the Translocation of Risk

Critical analyses of urban resilience in Metro Manila reveal that resilience interventions frequently privilege infrastructure protection and spatial redevelopment in economically strategic areas while displacing or marginalizing informal communities. Large-scale flood control projects and post-disaster projects often result

in the eviction of urban poor residents under the guise of risk reduction, effectively transferring vulnerability rather than eliminating it (Clark 2020). Resilience discourse, in this context, functions to legitimize the restructuring of urban space in favor of profitable investments while concealing the socio-economic roots of disaster risk. Wealthier districts, which are more economically viable for development, benefit from infrastructural protection while populations in marginal areas continue to deal with hazard risks. Ajibade (2022, 2230-2231) similarly interrogates sociotechnical resilience solutions thriving on capitalist circulations that “further reproduce spaces of accumulation, devaluation, and dispossession”. This condition underscores the necessity of barangay-level governance that prioritizes equity, inclusivity, and local knowledge in fostering resilience-oriented DRRM.

Beyond Technical Accomplishments: Everyday Resilience Despite Compounded Risk

Recent analyses of Metro Manila DRRM plans reveal a tendency for LGUs of the National Capital Region to operationalize resilience through technical indicators of preparedness, of governance gauged by multi-stakeholder engagement and adherence to international and national DRR frameworks, technical risk assessments, and integration of infrastructure protection in DRRM plans. Early warning systems, emergency response protocols, and institutional coordination mechanisms are frequently well articulated in local plans. However, significant gaps persist in areas related to recovery mechanisms, community participation in post-disaster planning ecosystem protection, and the genuine integration of vulnerable populations into DRRM planning (Ner et al. 2022). Notably, disaster survivors are rarely engaged in recovery decision-making processes. Similarly, despite extensive evidence of its role in mitigating flood and climate risks, ecosystem protection receives minimal attention in most local DRRM plans in the region (Ner et al. 2022). The gap between institutional goals and the realities of DRRM implementation may well be a driver of community resilience at the grassroots level, as observed in highly exposed urban neighborhoods such as Barangay Tatalon.

One of Quezon City’s most densely populated barangays, Tatalon illustrates how residents have developed informal, yet adaptive resilience practices rooted in lived experience. Facing recurrent flooding

and frequent fire incidents, community members have organized rooftop evacuations, improvised flood navigation systems using ropes, utilized informal communication networks, and engaged in collective emergency response. Households routinely prepare emergency supplies, secure important documents, and monitor hazard conditions based on local knowledge (Martinez, Santiago, and Delfinado 2025). These practices function as organic resilience mechanisms that operate beyond formal DRRM planning structures.

However, vulnerability within the barangay remains unevenly distributed. Informal settlers residing near waterways experience significantly higher exposure to flooding and structural damage compared to residents with more secure land tenure and durable housing (Calvario et al. 2024). Limited evacuation spaces further aggravate risk for marginalized groups. The Barangay Tatalon case thus demonstrates that while community resilience is evident, it is shaped by structural inequalities that formal DRRM planning guidelines have yet to adequately address. They reflect what resilience scholars describe as everyday resilience, or the incremental coping strategies embedded in daily life that enable communities to deal with recurring risks and systemic neglect (Clark 2020).

Toward a Community-Centered Resilience Framework

To strengthen community participation and realize RA No. 10121’s intent to empower local communities in addressing disaster risks, this policy brief recommends:

1. Reframing community resilience to be attentive to systemic inequalities and historic processes that perpetuate vulnerabilities. This necessitates a fundamental shift from episodic hazard management toward cumulative risk governance. Barangay DRRM planning must explicitly address informality, housing insecurity, livelihood vulnerability, environmental degradation, and infrastructure mismanagement as integral components of disaster risk reduction rather than as peripheral development issues.

It should be emphasized that focusing on community resilience should not deflect attention from the social vulnerabilities disproportionately experienced due to systemic lack of security and protection. Risk inequalities emerging from material inequalities – the poor population being overwhelmingly burdened by risks as they occupy

marginal spaces with substandard infrastructure – are perpetuated by entrenched elite and state narrative that slum dwellings have compromised infrastructural interventions meant to minimize disaster risks, and for which eviction has become the resolution (Alvarez and Cardenas 2019). The territorial stigmatization of informal settlements has proven to be consequential in the context of DRRM, as extensively articulated by Alvarez and Cardenas (2019). Policy-making should be critical of the variegated mechanisms by which resilience-building interacts with power and class, and the possible outcomes of undiscerning, business-as-usual decision-making.

2. Institutionalizing community knowledge and participatory risk assessments that document everyday risk conditions and resilience strategies alongside technical hazard data. People from affected communities use coping and survival strategies to deal with disaster situations before outside help is able to reach them. Leveraging the resources and capacities of the local community is at the heart of community-based disaster risk management. The most vulnerable members of the community at risk, who are the first to be impacted by hazards and disasters, are the major stakeholders in reducing the adverse impacts of these events. The goal of community-based DRRM is to actively engage community members in all phases of planning and decision-making, in ways that are attentive to local knowledge, cultural practices, and cultural and social diversity (OCD, n.d.)

Related initiatives include the Kahandaan, Katagan at Kaunlaran ng Komunidad: Gabay sa Pagsasanay sa Disaster Risk Management modules designed by the Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP) and the Pagsasanay sa Disaster Preparedness at Contingency Planning manuals of the Corporate Network for Disaster Response (CNDP) and CARE.

3. Expanding BDRRM indicators to include informal and community-led practices as measures of resilience. The integration of local perceptions of place, community knowledge, and local values, facilitated by strong community engagement, generates stronger local support and sense of ownership, paving the way to more favorable policy outcomes (Baybay and Hindmarsh 2019). In a study conducted by the said authors, values and characteristics that Filipinos identify with, such as solidarity, helpfulness, industriousness,

and “resilience practices,” can be infused into community engagement activities to encourage stronger cooperation. Bayanihan is also considered to positively influence unity, solidarity, cooperation, and generosity (Baybay and Hindmarsh 2019, 68).

A key element of Community-based Disaster Risk Management or CBDRM is the utilization of local knowledge and existing mechanisms and resources community members deploy in order to cope with hazards and disasters. As emphasized in the multi-stakeholder project “Learning from Good Practices: Case Studies on Community-based Disaster Risk Management in the Philippines”, “self-help actions in prevention, mitigation measures, emergency response and recovery” are important to disseminate.

4. Allocating funds within the Local DRRM Fund to support grassroots initiatives such as clean-up drives, community training, and local hazard and disaster monitoring mechanisms. Closing the capacity gap at the barangay level also demands sustained investment in capacity enhancement activities, provision of essential equipment, and community organizing for continued information dissemination and action planning.

Recognizing everyday community practices, addressing structural inequalities, and strengthening institutional support at the barangay scale can move Philippine DRRM closer to its people-centered vision.

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