



## Disaster Risk Reduction is the “New Normal”

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### Indirect Beneficiary

### NAMRIA – Strategic Planning

I have been working in the Office of Civil Defence (OCD) for 16 years. Aside from being the designated Chief of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (NDRRMS), I handle the Operations Center of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council

(NDRRMC), and the Project Management Office of the OCD. I am also the head secretariat of the NDRRMC OCD. I am the first designated chief to handle three divisions.

This particular work is very challenging. We know for a fact that the Philippines is always hit by disasters. So for about half of the year, we focus on policy formulation, the provision of technical assistance to local government units (LGUs), and project implementation. May is the start of the rainy season, and then we have the *habagat* (monsoon season). So from May to December—and sometimes it spills over to January—we are in what we call 'operations period'. We always have a blue or red alert status in the Operations Center. And the guiding mantra is that we drop everything and prioritise operations—coordination, response, and catering to the needs of the NDRRMC.

Together with NAMRIA, we work with technical agencies like the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS), the Philippines Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration (PAGASA), and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau. We work very closely with NAMRIA, simply because they have the mandate of providing baseline and topographic information. Because of the nature of our work, hazards mapping is crucial to us. They provide baseline information and help us out in the production of multi-hazard maps.

We started working with NAMRIA in 2005 and are happy to have worked with them for quite some time now. People from NAMRIA have always been very professional and organised. We really had a good start with NAMRIA, and up to now, they are closely supporting us and performing tasks as required of them. Maybe we are fortunate that we work with the right people in NAMRIA—because when we work on projects with them, we demand that they commit people. For each project, we have specific targets and deadlines, so we ask them to provide counterpart personnel who have the capability to really deliver. That's our condition whenever we engage NAMRIA.

They generally have good working ethics and immediately act on requests, and that is very important. When we are in operations period, we need maps as one of our tools for decision making. For example, when Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) hit the country, I requested that NAMRIA come up with a map of areas within the 50-, 100-, 150-, and 200-kilometre radius of the typhoon. They said, "Give us 12 to 24 hours." And they delivered.

It is not easy because we have a very high standard, especially in projects, for the production of the maps—and a very tight schedule. But they have always delivered. I cannot recall an instance when NAMRIA frustrated us.

NAMRIA also helps us out in our information and education campaign. If we have maps of an area, we need to tell people in the community or officials at the barangay and municipal level what is on the map. So it is actually NAMRIA that designs a module to help ordinary people understand the map.

NAMRIA provides training to government agencies and private firms through short courses. Some of our people have availed of this training. The knowledge and skills that they have acquired help us in our day-to-day work. Our organisation has benefited through the application and use of that knowledge. We can now understand hazard maps and interpret the data better. This will lead us to make recommendations to our bosses on decisions to be made.

I see our work at the OCD, particularly at the NDRRMS, intensifying in the years to come. There has always been this challenge. We really have to be proactive in the way we think of programs on disaster risk reduction and management, especially with climate change looming. Normal is not normal anymore. Some call it 'the new normal'.

But whatever it is called, the challenge to deliver more remains. That is why we in the OCD anticipate that there will be greater demands on us as an organisation. In fact, we are increasing our manpower from 301 plantilla personnel to 1,500 in five years. Our proposed new organisational structure and staffing pattern are undergoing review at the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The NDRRMC has 44 member agencies. NAMRIA serves not just all of us, but also, through its work with us and with other organisations, the whole of the Philippines. The PAHRODF intervention has resulted in the improved delivery of services for NAMRIA—and because their work impacts on our work, it translates to improved delivery of services for us as well.