



Levelling Up: Because the Volcano Never Sleeps

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I was told by a Barangay (village) Calauit officer, who is also part of our community network providing us with ground-level information on incidents on the Volcano Island, that an intensity 1 volcanic earthquake occurred last night. In fact, in the past 24 hours, Taal's seismic

network recorded 35 volcanic earthquakes. Before 8:00 A.M., we issued the Taal Volcano Bulletin that we were on Alert Level 1. This meant that there was no imminent hazardous eruption—the latest of which occurred way back in 1977.

From the Central Receiving and Processing Station at the Taal Volcano Observatory (TVO), we receive and analyse the same data also received by the PHIVOLCS Quezon City office via satellite and in near-real time. This information is then disseminated to the Office of Civil Defence, the media, and others in the PHIVOLCS' network. We are providing frontline service concerning Taal Volcano, generating and giving timely, accurate, and consistent information for the safety of the people.

This job is no joke. The TVO in Barangay Buco in Talisay operates 24/7 with just five personnel. We maintain remote monitoring equipment installed in nine seismic stations—which should be operational at least 85 percent of the time—inside the Main Crater and around the Island. We do multi-parameter monitoring on ground deformation and on the Main Crater Lake's chemistry, temperature, and level using different seismic, geodetic, and geochemistry techniques. As Officer-in-Charge (OIC) and Resident Volcanologist, I supervise TVO's operations, conduct lectures, and perform community relations and liaison work with local government units and other groups such as the Protected Areas Management Board, Taal Volcano Protective Landscape, and Talisay's Peace and Order Council and Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office.

Sometimes, even when we get home, we still have to think of work. There never seems to be enough time to do everything because there is always so much to do. We cannot afford to be lax. If Taal erupts, sacrifices will have to be made. The level of our work will have to be pushed to beyond 100 percent.

But PHIVOLCS' way of doing things has now improved. Office procedures have been systematised. PAHRODF helped PHIVOLCS ensure that the changes will reach and benefit everyone within the organisation. As a result, we levelled up in many ways. This levelling up is not just because of the intervention. The present PHIVOLCS leaders set a good example with their professional knowledge, work ethic, dedication, and motivation. When you see people like that, you cannot afford to just coast along in your work. They encourage the staff to

undergo training and to study, making such opportunities available for us. Already results-oriented, they have become more so, especially with the Results-Based Performance Management System (RBPMS). We have good leadership in PHIVOLCS—and that is why the level of employee morale now is high.

Therefore, OICs like me also need to set a good example. My responsibilities have increased. I have to ensure that everything we do at the TVO is in line with the PHIVOLCS Strategic Plan and the specific objectives set by the Volcano Monitoring And Eruption Prediction Division (VMEPD), to which our office belongs. To meet our targets, we need to cooperate with each other. There is now more teamwork, and everyone is willing to help a colleague or pitch in beyond what is officially required in terms of actual work hours rendered or specific functions. There has really been a big improvement, and with improved systems in place, the TVO is now being transformed—its full potential awakened and developed.

There have been big changes for me, for us. Nowadays, there is more openness, sharing, cooperation, and initiative to do what needs to be done. Before, I did not do diagnostics or processing work, but during my two years at the TVO, I learned a lot about instrumentation. Now, I do not just give support, but I also perform actual seismic monitoring. This holds true for the others, too. Everyone is now being maximized and is working more efficiently.

Before, in terms of outputs, we focused more on quantity, listing our work targets and submitting them to the Chief. Now, with the RBPMS, quality, effectiveness, and time are given more consideration. We also have more interventions such as coaching, incident reports, and other helpful innovations. In doing our Individual Performance Plan (IPP), we get to define our priorities ourselves, giving corresponding weight to our specific tasks—all of which fit into the Division's Plan. When Individual Performance Reports are submitted in June, I rate the TVO staff. If targets have not been met, we discuss the situation and the staff will get support so that they can meet the work commitments they themselves have set.

While the Strategic Plan and the RBPMS brought bigger work objectives and higher standards, PHIVOLCS has provided what we need to get the job done. We undergo essential staff development training. Our projects get funding and we now have the necessary equipment—expensive equipment. Now that we have the capability to set up monitoring even outside the caldera, only a few volcanoes need to have accessible seismic instruments within the crater. We really cannot ask for anything more. If you still cannot measure up, the problem would have to be with you already—on how you manage your time and targets.

In terms of job fulfilment, I am happier now at TVO not only because my family lives nearby and because I have learned to love Taal, where I have been learning a lot ever since I started doing fieldwork. It is also due to the welcome organisational changes that are happening at PHIVOLCS.

I believe that because the volcano never sleeps, we may need to perform at 150 percent to reach our target. There is simply no room to take things easy.