



Working Together Towards Flood-Free Communities

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Direct Beneficiary

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I am serving my second term as a councillor in Barangay New Zaniga in Mandaluyong. With more than 5,500 residents, our community is one of the most flood-prone areas in the city. After five minutes of continuous rains—even at standard rainfall volume—PAGASA's Code

Yellow alert would already be raised and the floodwater would already be ankle-high. Code Orange or knee-level flooding is also commonplace here. During Typhoon Ondoy, the waters reached the top of our fence; during Glenda, the flood was chest-high.

Most of the areas here get flooded, especially those near the creek connecting the San Juan and Pasig Rivers. That creek on Lerma Street often becomes stagnant because of accumulated garbage, so we monitor the water level in the waterways. Here in New Zaniga, the water should not reach half of the creek. We are now doing dredging operations on that creek because it is still the dry season and yet, the water level has already reached more than half of the critical level.

Although I am already heading the barangay's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Committee, I am also the Chairman of the Flood Control Barangay Zone Alliance (FCBZA) for Zone 4, which is made up of six Mandaluyong City barangays: Hulo, Plainview, San Jose, MJR (Mabini-J. Rizal), Poblacion, Old Zaniga and New Zaniga. The FCBZA, which works towards flood-free and disaster-free communities, was organised by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA). It is composed of representatives from the nine most flood-prone zones in Metro Manila.

In 2011, I started getting involved in this organisation. We are currently in the consolidation phase: identifying the most flood-prone areas, checking and monitoring the causes of flooding, disseminating information about floods and even solid waste management. We will be putting up tarpaulin banners about early warning signals for gales and earthquakes, as every member of the family should be trained about disaster preparedness and more.

We used to think that garbage had little to do with the flooding problem in our zone, but we have come to realise that it is actually the biggest contributor. As such, we started this recycling project which involves converting used cooking oil to biodiesel. We also try to propagate helpful ideas about solid waste management in all the households and in schools.

We conduct and participate in disaster-preparedness trainings where information on leptospirosis is discussed, such as the Flood Incident Response Safety Training and the training on Health Emergency Management. We also recently organised a Basic High Angle Rescue

Training (BHART) for 150 participants from all over the city and taught them about rappelling, first aid, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), among others. Always on alert, the FCBZA likewise provides backup to local government units and national agencies during disasters.

The MMDA has been of great assistance to us and, hopefully, this would continue. We coordinate closely with them while they, in turn, facilitate our requests for trainings, equipment, and manpower. During Typhoon Maring in August 2013, for example, FCBZA's manpower support came from a group of military reservists the size of a battalion. These men from the 501st Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army helped our community to reach and rescue flood survivors using their 6 x 6 truck.

During typhoons, Mandaluyong City's 27 barangays communicate closely through radio every five minutes, coordinating with our city's Communication Command Center (C3). We get early warning and updates on floods from C3 or direct from the MMDA, which provides us with radios. We also use mobile and landline phones to relay and share information on the suspension of classes, flooding level, passable roads, and requests for support.

There is now a remarkable difference with PAGASA, particularly in its much-improved services. You could say that their forecasts are now 99% accurate. In the past, the common, understandable reaction to PAGASA's reports was disbelief. "That weather forecast does not mean a thing. That typhoon will not hit the Philippines...again." But now, especially with the colour-coded Rainfall Warning System, they can predict not just incoming storms and wind speed but also the volume of rainfall—and issue warning signals early enough. That kind of information is of better use for us because we are now more flood-prone. Indeed, according to a seminar I attended, "Iba na ang panahon ngayon (The times have changed)." I believe that government agencies should be forward-looking as it looks for long-term solutions.

I am more informed now and want to help more effectively, which is why I am involved in DRR—including flood control, waste management, tree planting, and recycling. All these activities and solutions are connected. I have always been active when it comes to dealing with environmental concerns, even back when I was serving as a barangay tanod (village security officer). For our Metropolitan Manila Christian Church, I was part of a group which did a presentation about disasters and organised some members to form a Disaster Awareness Response Team.

Sometimes, I have to tread carefully and slowly, especially since I am in politics and some people may impute my DRR advocacy to partisan political motives. That is where the FCBZA comes in. Even MMDA General Manager Corazon Jimenez was impressed with how our group can function to the point that we have successfully held the recent BHART without asking for funding. I say it is because we have passion for what we do—our heart in the right place as we do public service. When it comes to disaster, one must do everything he can. Why should one even discriminate about whom to help or whether it will bring personal gain? The lives of people are on the line.