

Security in adversity: coastal women's agency in the aftermath of Haiyan

Presented by

Mary Barby P. Badayos-Jover, PhD

Director, Gender and Development Program

University of the Philippines Visayas

Secretary, Board of Trustees, National Network of Women in Fisheries in the Philippines, Inc.

Presentation Objectives

- Share coastal community women's experiences following a very extreme climatic event
- Highlight how coastal women's agency emerges during difficult circumstances like disasters
- Emphasize crucial institutional support for sustainable grassroots women's empowerment

Contexts

- Coastlines are critical environmental and economic resources for the Philippines

- A growing number of Philippine population live along the country's extensive coastline

Contexts

- Coastal vulnerability to disasters has heightened due to global environmental change
- Coastal disasters are gendered experiences

“ Power relations of age, race or ethnicity, social class, and **gender** shape the societal experience of disasters, just as they frame that “normal life” which is so profoundly disrupted by events like floods, toxic spills, or earthquakes.”

-- Enarson 1999

When Haiyan struck...

- known as Super Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, Haiyan was one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded in human history
- On November 8, 2013, Haiyan devastated a number of coastal communities in the Visayas group of islands in the Philippines.

Salient Points on the study of Gender & Disasters

- Women and men are differentially affected by disasters, with women more likely to bear higher stress levels
- Contemporary disaster response mechanisms remain gender-blind
- Particular women's needs or concerns are usually unmet during disaster response and recovery

Approximately 5 months after Haiyan...

- An estimated 5.6 million people remain in need of food assistance
- Support still needed to prevent food insecurity and restore agricultural & fishing livelihoods

--USAID 2014

The town of Estancia in the wake of Haiyan...





The coastal island village of Bayas in Estancia...







Our initial engagement in Bayas...

- Public service / extension project by a group of Social Science faculty; funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives
- Focused largely on helping the community process their disaster experience & giving initial input on community empowerment, including awareness-raising on gender relations

Focus Group Interviews

Purok (sub-village)	No. of Representatives
Golden Rosary	11
Calachuchi	14
Gumamela	9
Rosas de Baybayon	10
Santan	6
Bougainvillea	12
Cactus	8
TOTAL	70

Sex-disaggregation of FGI pax

Females	Males
47	23



Significant Findings of Rapid Assessments

- Stereotyped gender roles and tasks abound in the affected community after the typhoon

“The women gathered household items dispersed by the storm surge, washed clothes that have gotten muddy, swept and mopped muddied floors...”

“The men cut or cleared debris from uprooted trees on the roads, gathered dispersed corrugated roofing, cut down damaged house posts”

- Women felt discriminated against in terms of information dissemination

“We [women] were often not informed...”

- Institutional responses / disaster mitigation focused on the household as a unit, mostly ignoring gendered dynamics and needs

Women's needs/concerns (e.g. help with household chores and childcare) were subsumed under general community needs by relief workers, planners and community leaders

- Lack of women's consultation at time of disaster response leads to mismatch in relief operations and women's needs/concerns

“It's always boats...every time people come here to give aid, they give boats...what about aid [specifically] for women?”

In spite of women's marginalization
& subordination during disasters...

- Disasters and post disaster contexts provide ample opportunities for women's empowerment
- Women's capacities and resilience are highlighted

- Grassroots women are given impetus to articulate their needs
- Disaster recovery and rehabilitation efforts give leeway to grassroots women's organizing

Active Women Food Processors of Bayas, Estancia



Training on food processing



Feminist theory of women's agency

- an account of women's capacity for individualized choice and action
- Premise—institutions and practices throughout human history have subordinated women (albeit in different ways and to different degrees at different times and in different places)

The question remains...

When women speak, do we listen?

The problem of sustainability ...

The initial organized women's group in Bayas was shortlived

- Lack of start-up capital for their business
- Problems with members' commitment
- No institutional support were made available to them
- No definite market for their products
- Members have conflicting interests
(members coming from Sitio Maliog-liog are into fishing-related activities while members from the barrio are food vendors and store owners)

The Bayas Women's Association (BAWA)

- Founded in September 2014 & registered with DOLE in February 2015 as a way to avail of financial support from a donor NGO
- Initially one group composed of 295 members but was later split into two chapters (*Barrio-170 members; Sitio Maliog-liog-125 members*)
- Was granted a boat that they rent out and a concrete structure was built to house their store



BAYAS COMMUNITY
STORE SERVICE

BAYAS WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

actionaid


Balay Mindanao

- The LGU provided start-up capital for members who qualified, at 3% interest/mo
- Members can use the pump boat for personal emergencies
- Members can avail of small emergency loan from the association's funds

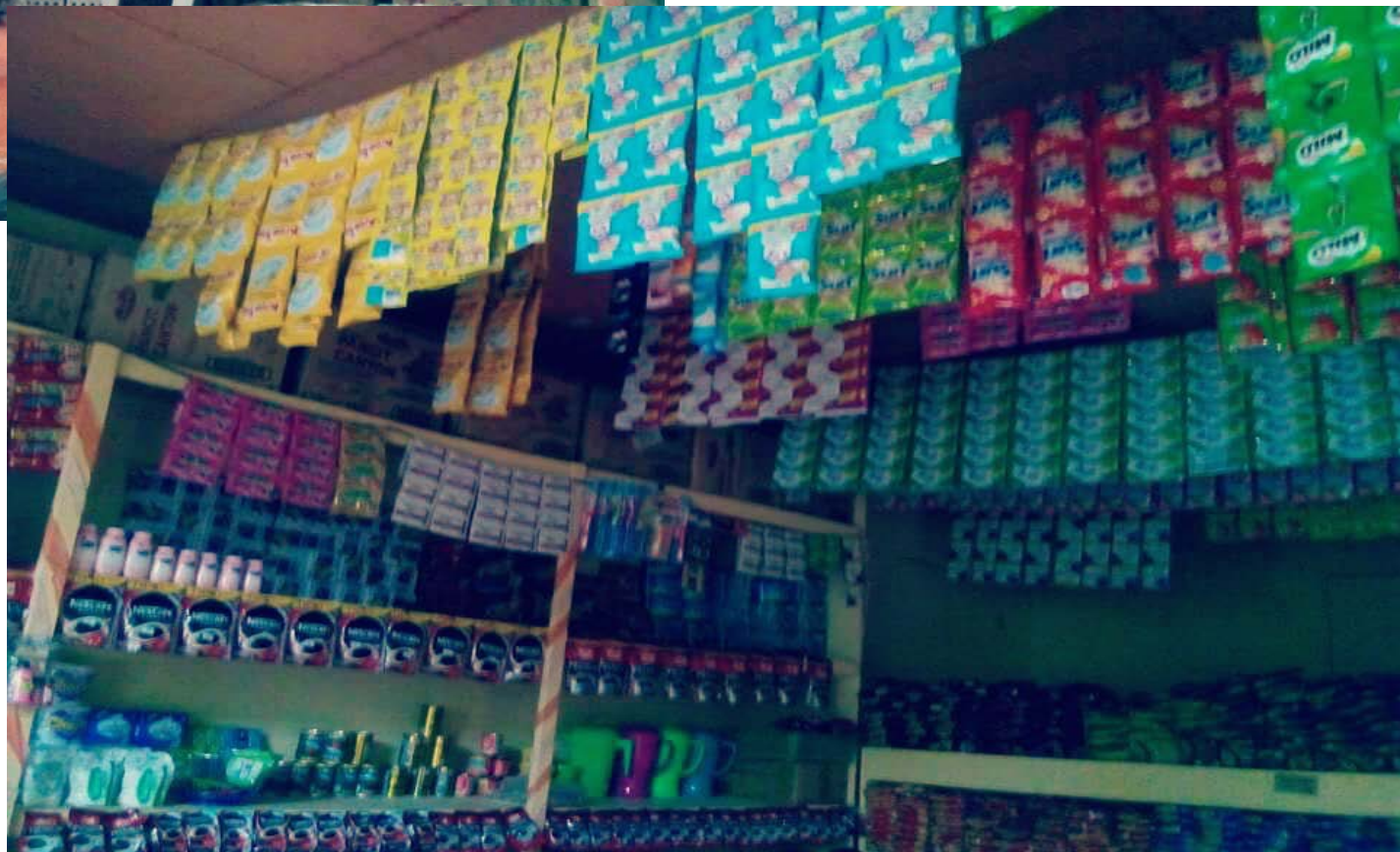
**BAYAS WOMEN'S COMMUNITY
STORE**

DAGEL BRUGS ESTHANCIR, ILOILO

actionaid

Action Aid





REMINDER: Coastal women's agency during disasters—

- Necessary for relief, recovery, resilience
- Enhanced by pre-existing social capital, networks, leadership, and public participation
- Undermined by issues of exclusion & seclusion

Recommendations for Gender-sensitive coastal disaster work

- Disaster response and recovery efforts have to consider the intersections of vulnerabilities, including those pertaining to gender biases
- Women need to be made part of decision-making
 - *Women need to be organized to minimize their experience of political subordination*

- Disaster contexts highlight women's resilience and can provide opportunities for women's empowerment if harnessed by institutional responses
- There is still a need to mainstream gender sensitivity in coastal disaster response and mitigation in the Philippines
 - *Should take into consideration masculinist institutional policy structures*

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Thank you for your attention.