

Whispers of Nature: Narratives of Women in a Local Disaster Risk Communication Plan

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Abstract

Unearthing the narratives of women in Barangay San Jose, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines foregrounds the crafting of a locally adaptive disaster risk communication plan. Despite the dismay, sadness, and horrifying stories of women participants, the community-crafted communication plan is an authentic expression of gender representation highlighting women's voice towards the development of a pro-active risk disaster communication plan that is focused on perceptions, experiences, and lessons learned under the three different phases of risk response: pre-disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster response.

The narrative-based communication plan will be utilizing descriptive phenomenology highlighting the lived experiences through recollection of struggles and coping mechanisms of the women of Barangay San Jose centered around Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) which ravaged lives and property Region 8 (Eastern Visayas) where Barangay San Jose is situated.

This paper reveals that: 1) Advocacy on women engagement in information campaign manifests behavioural impact. 2) Increased knowledge and skills through crafting a locally adaptive risk communication plan are relevant to changing patterns of natural calamities brought about by climate change. 3) Women expression and representation save humanity and minimize environmental damage in crisis situations.

Keywords: Barangay San Jose, Tacloban City; local risk communication plan; narratives of risk disaster; typhoon Haiyan.

Introduction

Barangay San Jose in Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines, is a coastal area prone to environmental destructions brought about by typhoons that visit the city year-round. The place was recorded as one of the heavily destroyed communities in Tacloban City when Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) wrecked a tremendous havoc in Region 8 in November 8, 2013. Barangay San Jose, Tacloban City in the region was ravaged leaving thousands, dead and homeless (Gettyimages, 2021). With strong winds causing tsunami-size waves rushing through the shores of this coastal place, it took only few hours to wipe out houses, buildings, and several belongings prompting individuals to run to evacuation places but many were unable to reach their destination as the harrowing winds and rain battered enormously.

In the aftermath of the storm, local and national governments were left with a logistical nightmare: roads and airports to disaster zones where blocked by debris, thousands were dead, thousands were missing, millions had been displaced (Hodal, 2014). To this date, typhoons causing heavy rains continue to create flooding in several areas destroying lives and property. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop a robust local risk disaster communication plan which is adaptive to changing conditions in order to prepare the barangay constituents in dealing with various crisis situations. This proposed

project highlights women participation and engagement in crafting a locally adaptive risk communication plan based on the narratives of the women population of San Jose.

Since time immemorial, women in San Jose have been objectified as mere household entities whose capacities were centered mostly on rearing children or doing household chores. In crisis situations, their non-participation in communicating risk and disaster plans that would benefit the community has been one of the contributing factors to poor disaster response of the community.

The proposed project: “Whispers of Nature: Empowering women in developing a local Risk Disaster Communication Plan in Barangay San Jose,” focuses on women representation in crafting a locally adaptive risk disaster communication plan based on local narratives. Specifically, the local communication plan will be written in the vernacular tongue, the Waray-Waray dialect. The purpose is to prepare residents in general and women in particular through communicating risk disaster situations grounded on perceptions, experiences, and lessons comprising the narratives.

According to previous studies, disaster communication must be creative, sensitive to culture and context, and also gender-targeted, based on knowledge of how particular groups of women and men create, receive, interpret, and exchange knowledge about hazards and disasters (Gender & Development, 2009). During disasters, women play key roles in the emergency management sector and in families, businesses, and communities (Mehta, Bradley & Miller, 2018). For instance, in flooding situation, there is a growing recognition in the literature of the role of women in decisions about protecting against flood risk (Bradshaw et al, 2002 as cited by Binh & Lerland, 2020). Women empowerment through involvement with community-based organizations (CBGs) and non-government organizations (NGOs), and their adoption with livelihoods significantly contribute to developing resilient communities (Alam & Rahman, 2018).

Hence, women’s participation in risk communication is an absolute requirement (Takeuchi & Shaw, 2008 as cited by Binh & Lerland, 2020), because the higher level of access to risk information that women have, the better the preparedness of their families (Alam & Rahman, 2014 as cited by Binh & Lerland, 2020). Also, women through their social networks can become active agents of change and thus act beyond their usual domestic roles and responsibilities in order to contribute to the overall enhancement of community resilience (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013). In effect, risk communication can probably be more effective when narratives are aligned with scientific information (Shanahan et al, 2019). Also, characters matter in audience experience of narrative transportation measured by effective responses (Shanahan et al, 2019). Hence, narrative-based risk communication is a *lingua franca* to translate scientific information (Shanahan et al, 2020).

On the other hand, in the Philippines, a feminist-photo-based approach (*PhotoKwento*) examine women’s experiences of disaster recovery of Tacloban City through demonstrating how technique fosters engage research relationships and participatory knowledge construction practices pertaining to disaster experiences (Zoe & Canete, 2020). This illustrates an artistic perspective of disaster practices through photo narratives forming engaging knowledge experience in disaster interventions.

Based on the surveyed literature, two points were highlighted as knowledge gaps: (1) the need for women participation in crafting a local risk disaster communication plan specifying their role as active agents in the actual writing process (2) the need to develop a local communication plan using the native dialect.

Finally, the role of women in capacity building such as in the formation of a locally adaptive risk disaster communication resonates women’s voice and their representation promotes gender and human equality in addressing climate change.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

- Foster women empowerment and participation in adapting a local communication plan as a response to risk and disaster situations in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals of gender equality (SDG # 5), climate action (SDG # 13), and partnership for the goals (SDG # 17).

Objective

1. To create a narrative based locally adaptive risk disaster communication plan written in the vernacular tongue, Waray-Waray.

Research Questions

1. What are the narratives of women of Barangay San Jose, Tacloban during Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda)?
2. How will the narratives form the locally adaptive risk disaster communication plan?

Needs Assessment Framework

This section highlights Needs Assessment with possible issues that will surface in the narrative report.

1. Gathering of evidence

- Women's role confined to mothering duties or doing household chores.
- Not present in consultative meetings and assemblies on risk disaster communication and management.
- Lack of representation in overall community-based activities.

2. Analysis of evidence

- Non-participation discriminates women in critical response to risk and disaster situations, denying them the opportunity to be actively engaged in mitigating climate change.

3. Brainstorming of contributing factors

- Lack of educated women in the barangay contribute to non-participation; excessive parental duties; general apathy in community activities.

4. Getting to a root cause

- Non-participation discriminates and disempowers women to be involved in communication and management of risk disaster situations.

5. Determining next steps for improvement

- Initiate dialogue with community leaders and members
- Engage in seminars and trainings on women's rights and roles in risk disaster interventions.

B. Capability-building

- Collaborative planning - multi-directional planning where stakeholders and community people especially women are engaged in coming up with locally adaptive communication plan.
- Leadership development - barangay leaders, risk disaster teams, and communication practitioners continually update their knowledge and skills in disaster communication.
- Peer learning through workshops and seminars - community women engage in collaborative learning in devising adaptive communication strategies with the use of available technology (ICT, social and traditional media, etc.) and through face-to-face interactions.

Communication Plan Framework

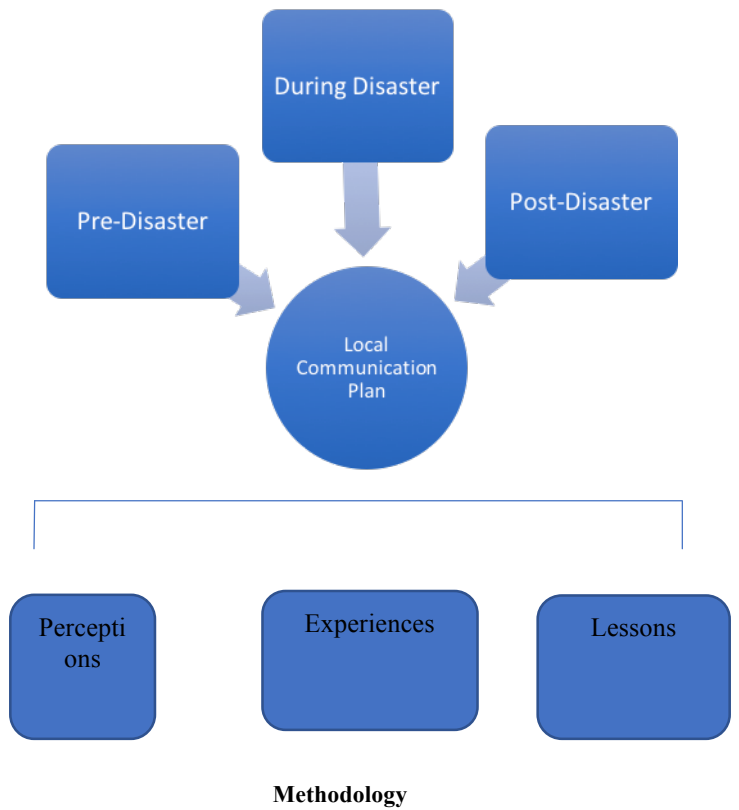
This local risk disaster communication plan is grounded on the narratives of the women population in Barangay San Jose, Tacloban City consisting women's perceptions, experiences, and lessons they have encountered in previous disaster situations in general and with Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in particular. Due to the heavy impact of Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, stories on preparation, response, and post-disaster survival mechanisms are recorded in order to create a comprehensive storytelling so that that the same mistakes will not happen again in the future.

Figure 1 shows a Narrative Based Local Communication Plan Framework highlighting two segments (pre-disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster) communication initiatives and (perceptions, experiences, and lessons) forming part of the narratives.

Pre-disaster preparations include activities from government evacuation plans to individual and family preparations such as checking on the stability of the house, saving water, food, medicines, checking on the status of impending weather or other disturbance, among others. Disaster response highlights real-time actions of citizens, local leaders, and stakeholders generally focused on survival strategies and mechanisms as the disaster batters the community. During this time, communication systems maybe down due to electricity failure from strong winds, cable and satellite disruptions to loom making it more difficult to communicate with family and community members. Lastly, post-disaster actions include activities in the aftermath of a disaster such as community rehabilitation, delivery of food and water, shelter and medicines as immediate responses, psycho-social healing, community rehabilitation as long-term plans, among others.

In the lower section of the framework highlights the different phases of risk disaster preparations through narrative telling of personal struggles classified as perceptions, experiences, and lessons. Perceptions form part of an individual's pre-conceived notions of disaster largely based on previous experiences of disaster. Perception in communication is the act of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information which influences human's ability to communicate since responses to different stimuli, whether they are items or people, are contingent on how we interpret those stimuli (Watts & Lombardo, 2022). Next in the narrative structure accounts for people's experiences. In here, personal accounts of the many aspects of risk and disaster situations form largely on individual struggles for survival with detailed description of different coping mechanisms usually with emotional impact. In the third section, lessons of the disaster highlight corrective measures learned from the disaster serving as a guide to lessen the impact of a disruption.

Figure 1. Narrative Based Local Communication Plan Framework



Design

This project proposal will utilize descriptive phenomenology in describing the lived experiences of women participants in Barangay San Jose, Tacloban City. Specifically, it will adopt the Collaizzi’s method of data analysis in order to explore the experiences: 1) read the transcript to be familiar with the data; 2) identify and extract significant statements and phrases; 3) formulate meanings; 4) group all formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes and themes; 5) define all emergent themen into exhaustive description; 6) describe the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; 7) discuss with experts and reviewers (Wirihana et al, 2018).

Activities to Achieve the Project Objectives

- House-to-house visit to recruit women
- Development of a locally adaptive risk disaster communication plan in partnership with LNU, barangay leaders of San Jose, Tacloban City, and members of National Risk Reduction and Management Council through seminar-workshops with women participants (advocacy campaign, message, communication strategies, target audiences, stakeholders, and community beneficiaries as content focus). Communication plan is to be translated to local dialect for distribution to the different households.
- Lectures and trainings on Risk Disaster Management (pre-disaster, during and response phases of risk and disaster emphasizing on women’s critical involvement in the different phases of disaster situations)
- Dissemination of locally developed risk communication plan (leaflets, tarpaulins, social media, and verbal communication)

- Cultural Performances (film showing, community theater)

Table 1. Breakdown of Activities

Activity	Participants/clients	Resources/site
House visitation	Household women	Video/audio recorders, paper & pen, brochures/leaflets distributed to all households
Training and Seminar	Women, community leaders, disaster team, experts, relevant stakeholders	Microphones/speakers, recorders, tables and chairs, in the barangay hall
Information campaign	Team leaders, barangay volunteers, community people	Leaflets, brochures, tarpaulins, social media posts

Table 2. Monitoring and Evaluation

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Women participants	Household visitations	enrolment and participation in risk disaster communication and planning.	Increased knowledge and skills of women in risk disaster communication	Disaster preparedness
Project funds	Consultative stakeholder meetings	interested donor institutions & individuals	Increased awareness and involvement of stakeholders	Successful project implementation & sustainability
Capital resources (ICT)	Dialogues, trainings & seminars, writing communication content	Faster delivery of outputs (messages)	Technological learning	literacy
Human resources (project teams)	Development of local risk disaster communication plan	engagement	Collaborative learning	Sustainable education

Sustainability Plan

The risk communication plan will have the following agenda on sustainability:

A. Economic sustainability – to ensure economic survival of the project, funding must be allocated wisely so as not incur wasteful spending; proper liquidation of expenses should be done.

Interventions:

- Keep all receipts of expenses
- Honorarium of technical experts to be reasonably provided.
- Factor negative externalities (cost to environmental damage, social cost, etc.)

B. Environmental sustainability – this should be factored in all aspects of project implementation. Communication plan must be effectively pursued under the principle of environmental preservation which can be done by ensuring that damage through risk and disaster reduction is minimized.

Interventions:

- Initiate action plans on any environmental issue
- Manifest advocacy through social mobilization

C. Human sustainability – project sustainability is largely dependent on commitment of human resources especially on women participants.

Interventions:

- Monitor well-being of women participants in risk related activities
- Foster lifelong learning skills relevant to any changes in disaster response
- Continually upgrade knowledge and competences in local risk communication and management

Lastly, alignment of the project to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as stated in the project goal remains a priority.

Table 3. Project Gantt Chart

	Project Summary	Indicators	Means of Verification	Risks/Assumptions
Goal	20% increase in women participation on risk disaster communication planning and management	Percentage of women participation	Comparison of percentage of women enrolment	Women empowerment and representation
Outcomes	Increase knowledge & skills in risk disaster communication & management	Proficiency and literacy among women participants in crafting communication plan	Six-month evaluation	Disaster preparedness
Outputs	Implement local Risk Disaster Communication Plan	Number of women actively involved in Risk Communication plan	Training/seminar attendance	Effective risk communication plan saves lives & minimizes damage
Activities	Trainings, seminars, dialogues, consultations	Number of trainings, seminars, and consultations conducted	Record of trainings, seminars, dialogues, and consultations	Knowledge transfer to the household and community

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussions, the following statements are worth pondering: 1) Advocacy on women engagement in information campaign manifests behavioral impact. 2) Increased knowledge and skills through crafting a locally adaptive risk communication plan are relevant to changing patterns of natural calamities brought about by climate change. 3) Women expression and representation save humanity and minimize environmental damage in crisis situations.

Finally, locally translated communication plan engenders positive behavioural response with easily understood interventions and strategies forming long-term solutions. As such, developing a locally adaptive risk and disaster communication plan drawn from the narratives of women in Barangay 88, San Jose, Tacloban City in the Philippines is a tedious process of unearthing struggles of survival amidst the horrors brought about by Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) on November 8, 2013. Despite the projected dismay, sadness, and objectionable accounts that can surface from the storytelling process, the community crafted plan in various phases is an authentic expression of gender representation where women’s voice highlights direct participation in pro-active designing of environmental disturbances that will happen in the future. Finally, following the crafting of the plan, its implementation accounts for the concerted efforts between the government, civic groups, stakeholders, and the community people to realize the “Whispers of Nature” a truly

authentic mirroring of women participation in disaster risk interventions.

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