INCLUDING YOUTH AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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Staff from the office of the municipal disaster risk reduction and management facilitating an orientation with Mangyan communities about emergency preparedness.

Barangay San Agustin is one of the 22 barangays in the Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro Province of the Philippines. It is located in the northern municipality and has seven indigenous sub-villages. The landscape of the barangay is rough and mountainous. With 80% of its area highly steep and sloping, the barangay is vulnerable to typhoons, floods, and landslides, which have brought tremendous threats to life, property, agricultural production, livelihood projects and infrastructure. San Agustin registered a total population of 2,246 as of 2018; most are indigenous people.

In the past, indigenous people were not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making and were not even invited to consultative meetings. This limitation decreases participation in public life and the ability to articulate their interests in local decision-making. Consequently, local governance processes, including disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) planning and policies, often do not reflect the interests of vulnerable groups. This exclusion makes these vulnerable groups much more vulnerable during times of emergency.

The Inclusive Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (ICDRM) project, funded by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies through Plan International, partnered with the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee (BDRRMC) and Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRMO) of Sablayan, was implemented in this barangay for four years.

The project assisted the community in preparedness programs, such as family disaster preparedness planning, contingency planning, and evacuation drills. It involved all the key leaders and representatives from vulnerable groups, including the indigenous people. Youth participation has been encouraged from the beginning of the project, and their contribution has been well-recognized. Involvement of indigenous people was encouraged in all project activities and has helped BDRRMC realize the importance of understanding the concerns of indigenous youth on issues that affect them during emergencies or disasters.
In the ICDRM project, indigenous youth champions were responsible for helping their elders to disseminate information about the preparedness program, the potential hazards, and what to do before, during and after a disaster. They also encouraged fellow youth to attend community meetings and listen to the elders and the barangay council.

As agents of change, indigenous youth have made significant progress in creating more inclusive disaster preparedness in the barangay. During a feedback session, Batery, an indigenous leader, said,

“NAGPAPASALAMAT KAMI DAHIL SA KAUNA-UNAHANG PAGKAKATAON NGAYON LANG KAMI NAKASAMA SA GAWAIN NA TULAD NITO. NATUTUNAN NAMIN KUNG PAANO KAMI MAGING HANDA KAPAG MAY BAGYO.”

(WE ARE THANKFUL BECAUSE WE WERE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS KIND OF ACTIVITY FOR THE FIRST TIME. WE LEARNED HOW TO BE PREPARED WHEN THERE IS A TYPHOON.)

To sustain the participation of the youth in the barangay disaster risk reduction (DRR) program, representatives of indigenous youth groups were included as official members of BDRRMC. They also established several programs such as community evacuation simulations.

The youth group was tapped to disseminate messages on DRR, climate change adaptation (CCA), and COVID-19 to the indigenous community through public service announcements using solar-powered speakers and round horns (trumpa).

The ICDRM project has allowed indigenous people’s voices to be heard. It has expanded the enabling environment to include vulnerable populations in public planning processes, specifically around DRRM. Their contributions to DRRM planning will, in turn, make these plans more representative of their whole communities, making them more legitimate, better understood and better utilized.