HELPING THE MANGYAN PEOPLE PREPARE
FAMILY DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLANS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Inclusive Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (ICDRM) Project has been implemented by Plan International Philippines in 20 communities in Occidental Mindoro. Supported by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, the project has targeted thousands of indigenous families of Mindoro Island, also referred to as the Mangyans.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Occidental Mindoro might cause a more prolonged impact among the indigenous people than other communities in the Philippines. Indigenous people of Mindoro have suffered from discrimination, displacement and cultural degradation, as do many indigenous groups globally. The seclusion of indigenous people means they lack access to health care from outside the community, which has made them one of the country’s most vulnerable communities to health threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

They are also at risk of losing their jobs, especially those who work in the neighboring municipality. Mangyan families often share one house with five to 12 families, which has made it challenging to practice social distancing. This creates the potential for the virus to spread faster among the community and calls for urgent action in raising awareness of COVID-19 and other potential hazards.

The ICDRM project conducted COVID-19 awareness-raising and family disaster preparedness training in response to this issue. Participants were oriented on the basic concepts of inclusive community disaster risk reduction and management and climate change adaptation and mitigation, including information about COVID-19. As a result, they were able to prepare family disaster preparedness plans, which will guide them during emergencies, including pandemics.
These activities were conducted in partnership with the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee (BDRRMC), Barangay Health Emergency Response Team (BHERT), and Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) following health and safety protocols from the Department of Health and Plan’s Local People and Safety Guidelines for COVID-19.

Joined by close to 1,500 family representatives, the event only allowed 25 participants per session, and observed physical distancing, regular handwashing with soap and clean water, and use of face masks. Part of the training was the simulation exercise for distributing E-Salakayte/E-Anlangfe kits (modified hygiene kits) facilitated by the BHERT, the best team to conduct this activity during a pandemic.

Over 900 indigenous families received the kits. Each kit included five hand soaps, four bars of laundry soap, five washable face masks, a clean cloth (for menstruation), and one water container. The distribution of the kits was coupled with information, education and communication materials.

The project responded to COVID-19 in the community by promoting a family-level disaster preparedness plan because the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as economic losses, mental distress, death and separation from family members, are felt most acutely at the household and family level. Those affected are forced to seek tangible and intangible support from their family members during and after the pandemic. There is a high need to protect indigenous people at the family level. As an outcome of this project, Mangyan families are now aware of the need for family disaster preparedness plans in the face of pandemics and climate-related threats.