Urban Disasters and Risk Communication Through Youth Organizations in the Philippines

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13.1 Introduction: Importance of Participatory Risk Communication

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) 2015–2030 was adopted at the end of the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. The Sendai Framework lists the roles and potential contributions of different stakeholder groups in DRR (UNISDR, 2015). One of the 13 guiding principles of the Sendai Framework states that DRR requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership as well as empowerment and inclusive, accessible, and nondiscriminatory participation, especially of people disproportionately affected by disasters.

Like the Sendai Framework, its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (HFA), promoted participatory disaster risk reduction (DRR) and stated that "both communities and local authorities should be empowered to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources, and authority to implement actions for disaster risk reduction" (UNISDR, 2005). The involvement of local governments and communities in the design and implementation of DRR initiatives is a generally recognized good practice (UNISDR, 2012). Unfortunately, although there has been some progress in establishing national DRR policies and legislation, this has not accelerated widespread local DRR practices (GNDR, 2011). For example, the gap between HFA and its implementation at the "front line" or local level had not been bridged (GNDR, 2011). The failure to strengthen local governments and to make progress in community participation means that the HFA rhetoric had not been translated into DRR action (Matsuoka & Shaw, 2012). All members of the community, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic position, should be involved in thinking, planning, and deciding about DRR (GNDR, 2011). By involving people in the decisions that affect their lives through the provision of access to necessary information and resources, participatory DRR has the potential to make initiatives more sustainable, integrative, and empowering (Cadag & Gaillard, 2012).

In the case of the Philippines, the necessity of participatory DRR is made more prominent by the need to develop and strengthen local disaster prevention, mitigation, response, and reconstruction capacities to complement national capacities (Fernandez & Shaw, 2013). The Philippines is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries (IFRC, 2009) and has been consistently among the top five countries with the highest number of reported disaster events in the last eight years (CRED, 2014).

Risk communication is an important component of DRR. It is the provision of risk information to concerned and interested stakeholders to enhance risk awareness and understanding, which hopefully will lead to disaster preparedness action and eventually to protection and safety (Rød et al., 2012). Recently, risk communication is considered more as an open and transparent interactive exchange rather than a uni-directional or one-way transfer of information and knowledge between those responsible for managing risks and those who may be affected by those risks (Höppner et al., 2010). The purposes and functions of risk communication are shown in Box 13.1.

Risk communication has to use various communication channels and tools in order to be effective, taking into consideration the specific needs of the target audience, including language, disabilities, culture, degree of vulnerability, and geographic dispersal (Höppner et al., 2010; Cole & Murphy, 2014). It is no longer advisable to rely entirely on television, radio, and newspapers as the only sources of risk information. Social media has become one of the primary sources of information, particularly during disasters and emergencies. According to Tabell (2015), "With the rising popularity of smart phones, which have also become very inexpensive nowadays, people turn to social media to get or share public safety information, or stay connected with family and friends, or even request assistance from emergency response agencies."

The use of social media, particularly social networking sites, has become so extensive and widespread in the Philippines that the country has been tagged as "The Social Networking Capital of the World" (Vulcan Post, 2014). Social media played an important role in disaster response during the recent calamities in the Philippines, like the Bohol Earthquake and Typhoon Haiyan, both of which happened in 2013.

Box 13.1 Purposes and Functions of Risk Communication

- Raise awareness
- Encourage protective behavior
- Inform to build up knowledge on hazards and risks
- Inform to promote acceptance of risks and management measures
- Inform on how to behave during events
- Warn of and trigger action to impending and current events
- Reassure the audience (to reduce anxiety or "manage" outrage)
- Improve relationships (build trust, cooperation, networks)
- Enable mutual dialogue and understanding
- Involve actors in decision making

Source: Höppner et al. (2010)

In the case of Typhoon Haiyan, which was one of the strongest storms ever recorded on Earth, traditional communication channels became nonoperational (Takahashi & Tandoc, 2014). Social media was effectively used in connecting with loved ones; in notifying the authorities of the local situation and bridging the information gap between the government and the affected communities; in organizing relief efforts; in increasing public awareness; and in empowering and stress-debriefing for survivors (Third Team Media, 2014).

Risk communication is essential in pursuing Sendai Framework's Priority 1: understanding disaster risk. To achieve Priority 1, nonsensitive hazard exposure, vulnerability, risk, disaster, and loss disaggregated information must be made freely available and accessible. The Sendai Framework also encourages stakeholders to "strengthen the utilization of media, including social media, traditional media, big data, and mobile phone networks to support national measures for successful disaster risk communication, as appropriate and in accordance with national laws" (UNISDR, 2015). Similar to other DRR activities, risk communication should be participatory as well as interactive and continuous in order to have a positive impact and be effective.

13.2 The Role of Youth in Risk Communication in Urban Areas

Until recently, most DRR research traditionally assumed that youth are passive victims with no or very little role to play in communicating risks, participating in DRR-related decision-making processes, or preparing for, preventing, and responding to disasters (Anderson, 2005; Kirschke & van Vliet, 2005; Chatterjee et al., 2015). For example, Mitchell et al. (2008) observed that none of the more recent theoretical models or guidelines for good communication practice singled out the unique needs and potential role of youth as resources or potential informants within risk communication systems. Two explanations can be offered for young people not appearing in the models. First, risk communication has historically been associated with information flows from the top downwards, with scientific institutions at the top and the public at the bottom. These approaches assume an ignorant public whose knowledge "deficit" (compared to that of the experts) requires that they be provided with simple information. The second reason relates to paternalism and the commonly held belief that parents make decisions about the level of risk their children face. Parents and guardians are assumed to be able to pass risk information on to their children and/or act to protect their safety. This leads to disaster risk management practices that assume that parents make responsible and appropriate decisions and choices about the risks their children face. This paternalistic view of children does not recognize either the rights or the value and utility of young people as agents who are able to assimilate and manage information and to convey rational risk management choices among their families and wider networks.

But youth definitely can make contributions to risk communication. In the Solferino Youth Declaration, released in 2009 during the 150th anniversary of the birth of the

idea that eventually led to the founding of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, youth volunteers issued an appeal to world leaders to recognize youth as agents of change; to encourage the unique abilities and skills that young people alone can bring to the table, such as intercultural communication and innovative use of technology; to include youth in decision-making and planning processes at all levels; to push for youth to have a stronger role in program development and implementation to empower their communities; and to increase focus on formal and nonformal peer education as a primary method of disaster prevention (IFRC, 2009). According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Strategy 2020, focusing on young people is a crucial investment (IFRC, 2010a). Young people can have multiple roles as contributors, including being innovators; early adopters of communication, social media, and other technologies; inter-cultural ambassadors; peer-to-peer facilitators; community mobilizers; agents of behavior change; and advocates for vulnerable people (IFRC, 2010b). Young people bring much-needed skills when working alongside older people, which can lead to an intergenerational transfer of experience that is vital to both progress and stability in society.

In the case of the Philippines, youths (i.e., persons aged 15 to 24) constitute one-fifth of the total population, at 24 million (CIA, 2014). This is an age group that has still been largely untapped to contribute in DRR. But with the increasing pressure to promote inclusive participation in the Sendai Framework, the participation of young people, as well as other previously neglected stakeholders like women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, is hoped to be increased in the coming years. Anecdotal examples have shown that young people indeed have the capacity to take part in DRR undertakings. However, it is acknowledged that access to the necessary information, resources, and authority is needed to empower youth to participate in DRR in their communities. Back et al. (2009) has noted that youth participation in DRR makes economic sense because in the long run, when young people learn and practice DRR "the benefits stream is integrated into the rest of their adult lives, yielding a higher benefit than when adults acquire the same skills, and embedding the changed behavior early enough for it to be passed on to subsequent generations."

Excluding youth from DRR processes threatens their safety from disasters and neglects a valuable resource for risk communication, education, advocacy, and action-oriented risk reduction activities (Anderson, 2005). The evidence confirming the value of young people's participation in DRR is getting stronger (Walden et al., 2009). For example, the experiences of an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) working with youth in the Philippines on community risk mapping and mitigation activities have shown that youth have a much greater capacity to participate in DRR than many people assume. Through community mapping, young people are able to assist in identifying hazardous areas, safe areas, and evacuation routes in their locality (Fernandez, 2012; Fernandez & Shaw, 2015a). Young people used their DRR knowledge to successfully persuade school officials and community planners to relocate their school, previously situated in a high-risk landslide zone, to a safer area (Mitchell et al., 2009). The growing popularity of volunteer geospatial initiatives (Ushahidi, Open Street Map, Wikimapia, etc.) is now considered as a way to engage communities, especially young people, in collecting data that will help in planning and managing disaster risk at the local level (GFDRR, 2014).

Young people can offer innovative ideas about managing risks, provided they are encouraged to learn about disasters, hazards, vulnerability, and coping capacities (Walden et al., 2009). They also have the ability to share and apply what they learned within their households, families, and the wider community (Shaw et al., 2009). Young people should be regarded as potential partners in conducting DRR activities, such as risk communication. Youth organizations can be one of the main actors in communicating disaster risks to communities (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013). Before a disaster, youths can assist in disseminating disaster awareness information and in conducting preparedness drills. After a disaster, they can be mobilized to help in gathering information about the impact of the disaster and to report this to the community.

The Sendai Framework urges that youth "should be given the space and modalities to contribute to disaster risk reduction" (UNISDR, 2015). It is very important to increase our knowledge of young people's capacities in order to better understand the roles that they can play in reducing personal and community vulnerability and to effectively design and implement programs that encourage their active involvement. Although young people are vulnerable to disasters and need to rely on adults for various forms of protection and support, they nevertheless possess significant qualities that could serve as a significant resource for households and communities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Their knowledge, creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and social networks could be used during all phases of the disaster risk management cycle to help themselves and others (see Table 13.1).

Table 13.1 Young People's Contributions Throughout the Disaster Risk Management Cycle

Preparedness	Response	Recovery
Canal declogging and dredging projects to avert the perilous effects of flash floods Fund-raising for acquiring necessary life-saving gear and vehicles Conducting first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and water safety training, as well as fire and earthquake drills Supporting the campaign for voluntary blood donation Risk communication through community mapping (identifying hazardous areas, safe areas, and evacuation routes)	Providing emergency medical services to disaster victims Helping in relief operations (distributing food, clothes, and medicines to families in evacuation centers) Joining search, rescue, and retrieval operations Operating a 24-h disaster and emergency response organization	Planting various high-yielding fruit trees on a denuded mountain after a devastating flash flood Acknowledging the contribution of those who helped in emergency response and recovery efforts Reviewing and modifying preparedness plans Volunteering to build houses for poor disaster victims

Source: Fernandez and Shaw (2013)

In addition, young people can also serve as a bridge between their parents and digital DRR information because of their knowledge of technology (computers, mobile phones, and the Internet), which may be considerably more sophisticated than that of older generations (Mitchell et al., 2009; Riddell et al., 2011). Youth can also employ social media and mobile devices to mobilize their peers and volunteers, disseminate important information, and assist in tracing missing community members when a disaster occurs (INEE, 2013). In communities with a high incidence of poverty (i.e., where parents are illiterate, do not have the time to attend trainings and meetings, or do not have access to information), youth already play a major role as interpreters and conveyors of messages to their households and communities (UNISDR, 2007). Young people play a significant role as articulate informants in DRR communication, from disaster mitigation and preparedness information dissemination to the use of early warning systems (Walden et al., 2009).

According to UN-Habitat (2013), by 2030 about 60 percent of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18. A huge proportion of young people now live in urban areas and there is even a phenomenon referred to as the "urban youth bulge." Young people living in cities can capitalize on the "urban advantage" of having more access to the abundant goods, services, and amenities such as access to ICT infrastructure not found in rural areas (UN-HABITAT, 2013). For example, Mearns et al. (2014) mentions that majority of Twitter users are young and urban dwellers. Also, according to Mulyasari and Shaw (2013), one of the strengths of youth organizations in urban areas is the ability to raise funds from the government, NGOs, the private sector, and the community. Given this situation, youth living in cities will have more and better opportunities to participate in DRR activities like risk communication compared to their rural counterparts. However, the involvement of youth in urban areas in DRR will benefit not just their city but also peri-urban and rural areas that rely on urban areas as their market for goods and services.

The impact of urban disasters will go beyond city limits (Sanderson et al., 2012). The potential number of people and assets that will be affected by urban disasters will be huge and will require a large number of organizations, including youth organizations, putting efforts into disaster prevention, mitigation, and preparedness. According to Cumiskey et al. (2015), "Creating awareness of DRR and increasing communication related to DRR among young people is vital as it helps young people understand their capacity for contributing to DRR." When applied in the urban context, creating opportunities for youth engagement will not only directly benefit youth, but will also have positive impact on cities and surrounding areas (Arrighi et al., 2015).

13.3   Examples of Risk Communication by Youth Organizations in Urban Areas in the Philippines

There are many youth organizations in the Philippines. Presented in the next sections are six examples of youth organizations operating in urban areas and how they conduct risk communication. The Internet has been instrumental in the increased youth

participation in risk communication and other DRR tasks. The Internet and the virtual networks it supports have reduced the costs of participation (time, effort, money) by increasing the availability of information (Boulianne, 2009). The Internet and social media can reach large numbers of young people fast and at a relatively low cost, enhancing the voice of young people significantly (Back et al., 2009). One advantage of activities involving social media is that they do not require physical presence. Young people can be engaged in DRR remotely and over a wide geographical area with an Internet connection, which usually are urban areas.

13.3.1   Youth Councils

Filipino youth have been highly encouraged to participate in the affairs of their community, and the Philippines is the only nation in the world that has a mechanism of involving the youth sector in local governance, through the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK, Youth Council) (Fernandez & Shaw, 2015b). In urban youth councils, possible risk communication roles for the youth include putting up warning signs; organizing emergency drills; and assisting in information dissemination through the use of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As an example, most of the youth councils in Makati City have their own Facebook account where they post announcements about their upcoming activities, including those related to DRR, as well as share pictures of implemented projects. When Typhoon Haiyan hit the central Philippines in November 2013, *Barangay* Olympia (Olympia Village) Youth Council called for volunteers to help prepare relief goods for the typhoon victims. The youth council was able to find volunteers quickly by using Facebook and Short Message Service (SMS) or text messaging.

13.3.2   Red Cross Youth

The Philippine Red Cross is the premier humanitarian organization in the Philippines. The Red Cross Youth (RCY) is its youth volunteering program (PRC, n.d.). Several RCY chapters in urban areas use social networking sites to promote their various activities. For example, the University of the Philippine Red Cross Youth in Quezon City posts announcements on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/UPRCY) about its slippers donation campaign, disaster preparedness seminar, blood donation drive, donation drive for the 2015 Nepal Earthquake victims, fundraising campaign (by selling t-shirts), etc. Another chapter, the Centro Escolar University Red Cross Youth in Manila City, utilizes Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/CEURedCrossYouth) to call for volunteers and for first-aid training participants. Their posts usually contain pictures or posters, contact mobile phone numbers, and hashtags, which are "a type of label or metadata tag used in social network and microblogging services which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content" (Wikipedia, n.d.).

13.3.3   Boy Scouts of the Philippines

The Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) is one of the largest youth organizations in the Philippines and has around two million members (Santos, 2015). Its online

presence includes having its own official website (http://www.scouts.org.ph/), its own hashtag (#ScoutsPH), its own Facebook account (https://www.facebook.com/scoutsphilippines), and a Facebook community page (https://www.facebook.com/laginghanda). Posts on Facebook show announcements of suspension of classes due to typhoons, survival tips, reports on fire prevention seminar and disaster preparedness trainings, etc.

13.3.4   Girl Scouts of the Philippines

The Girl Scouts of the Philippines (GSP) has a special service program called SAVER, which stands for Service Auxiliary Volunteers for Emergency and Relief (GSP, n.d.). SAVER is undertaken by a team composed of 12 to 45 Girl Scouts and non–Girl Scout volunteers organized to assist in fact finding, communication, referrals, and relief operations. Their pre-emergency, emergency, and post-emergency activities include providing a communication service (transmission and reception of messages/information).

13.3.5   Youth Bonded Together

Buklod ng Kabataan (Youth Bonded Together) is a group of children and youth in *Barangay* Banaba of San Mateo Municipality. It advocates DRR and climate change adaptation through theater performances (Tanner et al., 2009). This group communicates their perceptions of local hazards, such as flooding and river bank erosion, and the impacts of these hazards on lives, livelihoods, and properties through singing, dancing, and acting. Through their performances, different stakeholders are encouraged to take action.

13.3.6   Youth Peer Education Network

The Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER) is a youth-to-youth initiative pioneered by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Although the primary advocacy of Y-PEER is adolescent sexual and reproductive health, when Tropical Storm Washi (locally known as Tropical Storm Sendong) hit southern Philippines in December 2011, UNFPA quickly mobilized youth volunteers through Facebook and SMS to various evacuation centers to help identify pregnant women in need of assistance and to organize information sessions with young people (UNFPA, 2012a; UNFPA, 2012b). Volunteers engaged other young people in the evacuation centers through focus group discussions to talk about their experiences in these temporary shelters.

Table 13.2 summarizes the risk communication activities of the six youth organizations presented above. With their extensive contacts and networks, and up-to-date knowledge of social media and mobile devices, young people can be a critical asset in risk communication and follow-through actions like sharing information about people who need help, making it easier for authorities to respond, assisting in relief operations and managing evacuation centers, raising awareness about the disaster, and fundraising.

Table 13.2 Youth Risk Communication Activities in Urban Areas in the Philippines

Youth-led and Youth-serving Organizations	Risk Communication Activities
Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Councils)	Putting up warning signs; organizing emergency drills; assisting in information dissemination through the use of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; calling for volunteers for relief goods repacking via Facebook and text messaging.
Red Cross Youth	Using social networking sites to announce donation collection drives, disaster preparedness seminars, blood donation drives, fundraising campaigns, calls for volunteers and for first-aid training participants, etc.
BSP	Posting announcements on social media of suspension of classes due to typhoons, survival tips, reports on fire prevention seminar and disaster preparedness trainings, etc.
GSP	Has a special service program called Service Auxiliary Volunteers for Emergency and Relief (SAVER) to assist in fact finding, communication, referrals, and relief operations.
Buklod ng Kabataan (Youth Bonded Together)	Communicating risks and responses through youth-led theater in the Barangay Banaba, San Mateo, Rizal.
Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER)	When Tropical Storm Washi hit southern Philippines, Y-PEER mobilized youth volunteers through Facebook and SMS to various evacuation centers to help identify pregnant women in need of assistance and to organize information sessions with young people.

Aside from the long-standing formal youth organizations, there are also spontaneous youth groups that form when the need arises and disband after emergency situations have passed (INEE, 2013). There are also risk communication contributions made by individuals. Citizen reporters can provide timely and detailed information on the local situation (Mulyasari, 2014). Plan International supported young people from Typhoon Haiyan-hit provinces to share their views and be actively involved in disaster recovery through its Youth Reporter Project, which trained 280 youth in media skills (Plan International, 2014). Utilizing handy video cameras, young people working in small groups with their friends shared their thoughts and experiences about the typhoon that changed their lives and their plans for the future.

These group and individual contributions show that youth can be tapped to play an important role in DRR (Oposa, 2013). Even through simple tasks like reposting information about a disaster on their Facebook or Twitter accounts, young people already contribute significantly to increasing awareness about disasters and the plight of affected communities (De la Cruz, 2014).

13.4 Future Directions: Helping Youth Contribute Further to Risk Communication

Discussions leading to the Sendai Framework for DRR, as well as the strategies of international civil society organizations (CSOs) like the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, have highlighted the potential significant contributions of the youth. But it should be noted that what is important for local actors like young people is how they will transform international priorities, goals, and strategies into local actions and results. At the operational level at the "front lines," the mechanisms for youth participation in information-sharing, consultation, decision-making, initiating action, evaluating results, and providing feedback should be clear if we are to expect better results in terms of the quantity and quality of youth involvement in DRR in general and in risk communication in particular.

There are several concrete steps that can be taken to help young people get more involved in risk communication. One is to provide media skills training, like what Plan International did in their Youth Reporter Project. Another is to provide youth with improved access to risk information before and after an emergency so that they are aware of what different stakeholders are doing and what resources are available so that they can plan ahead and be empowered to plan their own activities. Youth can also be provided organizational and institutional support, as proposed by the Bangkok Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2014 (AMCDRR, 2014a; AMCDRR, 2014b). For example, the youth councils in the Philippines are not yet fully integrated into the DRR committees in their village. Changes in government policies can mandate the more active engagement of youth with DRR committees, which can provide opportunities for intergenerational interaction and learning, and can cultivate productive adult-youth partnerships. Mentorship and adult supervision can provide youth with positive role models and a safe environment to explore their roles in the community. But it is also important to provide enough space for them to maintain their independence in pursuing their own initiatives.

DRR activities like risk communication need to be inclusive and participatory to be efficient and effective. It is necessary to ensure the engagement of stakeholders, like young people, who possess significant qualities that can serve as a significant resource for households and communities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Their knowledge, creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and social networks make youth a valuable resource for risk communication, as shown by the examples presented earlier in this chapter.

Acknowledgments

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