Governance Communication for DRRM and Preparedness Level of the Disaster-Prone Communities in Iloilo, Philippines

Ricky P. Becodo
West Visayas State University
La Paz, Iloilo City, Philippines

Abstract

Conducting communication initiatives in response to the challenges brought by threatening hazards are expected from every local government unit of disaster-prone communities. This study sought to analyze governance communication for disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) in the disaster-prone communities in the Province of Iloilo, Philippines. Data were gathered from two selected flood-prone municipalities in Iloilo, Philippines. Municipality A depended on the Mayor’s Office for DRRM information. Municipality B, on the other hand, aside from the Mayor’s Office had other government institutions provided communication services for DRRM. Both municipalities used various communication infrastructures or media for the information needs of their constituents. Communications, though mediated and personal were observed to be top-down. Municipality A’s communication personnel were co-terminus employees and elected municipal officials. Municipality B, on the other hand, had tenured staff designated as communicators. Communication staff of both municipalities held other positions in the government. Coordination mechanisms of both municipalities were weak and were observed only right before, during and after the disaster. Public spheres on DRRM were commonly found in the coffee shops, transportation terminals, public markets, street corners, sari-sari stores and in the municipal building corners. Governance communication and DRRM activities did not contribute to the level of disaster preparedness of the communities. Community stakeholders are not disaster-prepared.

Keywords: governance communication, disaster preparedness, disaster-prone communities

Introduction

The daang matuwid or ‘straight path’ slogan of the Philippines President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III’s administration inspired the researcher in conceptualizing this study. In implementing the daang matuwid policy, communication is seen as one of the fundamental and crucial factors in the process of governing and in achieving the government’s development-oriented objectives.

Governing is comparable to a situation where a family head talks and regularly listens to each of his/her family members’ concerns and interests. As with the head of the family, the government’s focus on its people’s welfare encompasses a multitude of concerns – health, food security, education, employment, peace and order, and disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM), to name a few. The last one has been a vital concern in recent years due to worldwide climate change conditions that have been wreaking havoc in the country and unduly affecting all aspects of people’s lives.

This study is essential in understanding, governance communication (govcomm), an emerging concept, and its components – policy, institutions, personnel, media, communication mechanisms, and public sphere – in the context of DRRM. This study is also deemed important in that government officials, and stakeholders will be provided with a guide in studying their govcomm that will lead policy makers, and all the
participants in the process, in formulating policies and ordinances related to governance, communication and DRRM.

About DRRM, according to the Emergency Events Database (Than, 2005), the total natural disasters reported each year has been steadily increasing in recent decades, from 78 in 1970 to 348 in 2004. This information gives a hint that in the coming years, disasters are expected to be more frequent, stronger and more threatening. The World Bank’s "Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis" report released in March 2005 emphasizes that more than 160 countries have more than a quarter of their populations living in areas of high mortality risks from one or more natural disasters.

The Philippines is highly vulnerable to natural disasters whose severity and impacts are predicted to intensify with climate change (Australian Embassy, 2010). The United Nations University’s Institute for Environment and Human Security and the German Alliance Development Works report that the top 10 countries facing the highest risk are Vanuatu, Tonga, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Timor-Leste, Costa Rica, Cambodia and El Salvador. Vanuatu, which is experiencing fresh water shortage, has a 32-percent disaster risk; Tonga, 29.08 percent and the Philippines, 24.32 percent (Alave, 2011).

Due to this alarming fact, the Philippine government has to do something for the people for them to be disaster-prepared. Governance communication is important and must be considered in establishing communication mechanisms and in providing relevant knowledge that would educate all stakeholder groups on what to do before the coming of any hazard, during and after the disasters.

This study problematized and wanted to ascertain if how communication is being treated and used by the local governments towards the disaster preparedness of the disaster-prone communities. It examined the cases of the two selected municipalities in Iloilo – one adjudged to be advanced in DRRM and one that was only starting to carry out DRRM activities. It further examined the disaster preparedness level of the community stakeholders in the selected municipalities.

**Research Design**

This descriptive research analyzed governance communication in two selected municipalities in Iloilo, Philippines. Data on DRRM initiatives undertaken by the municipalities and observable facts about the different components of governance communication – policy, government institution, communication human resource, communication infrastructure, coordination mechanism and public sphere were described by, explained by and obtained from the respondents. The level of disaster preparedness of the community stakeholders was also identified to determine future communication initiatives to be done by the selected municipalities.

This study also employed case study method as one of the forms of descriptive research. To analyze governance communication in the two selected municipalities, the researcher involved different stakeholder groups – the municipal disaster risk reduction management council, the barangay disaster risk reduction and management committee and the community people – as research participants. It also employed various instruments and methods to understand the governance communication circumstances of the selected communities.

**Research Locale**

The study was conducted in the municipality A and B in the province of Iloilo, Panay Island, Philippines from August 2012 to December 2013. Municipality B, from being a third class municipality, became a first class municipality in 2009. Municipality A, on the other hand, was a fourth class municipality during the time of the study.

These municipalities were selected because they are comparable in terms of topography...
and flood problem, as confirmed by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) Chief Geologist of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Western Visayas. Both are flood-prone coastal municipalities and are only one meter above sea level. In Municipality A, the barangays near the rivers are especially at risk of flood. Municipality B, on the other hand, is another flood-prone municipality. When Typhoon Frank hit in 2008, 32 of 45 barangays of Municipality B were flooded. Moreover, these municipalities are the exit gates of flood waters from some upland portions of Panay Island (Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, 2003). Approvals to conduct the study were sought from their respective chief executives of the municipalities.

Data Gathering and Analysis

To identify DRRM activities and describe the kind of governance communication undertaken by the municipalities, the researcher chose participants from the respective Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (MDRRMC) of the selected municipalities. The following selection criteria were used: a) willingness to participate in the study; b) availability during the schedule of data collection; c) extent of participation in DRRM activities; and d) interest in sharing knowledge and experiences in conducting DRRM communication initiatives.

The researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire for the key informant interviews (KII's). Survey questionnaire was constructed, pretested, validated and was used to gather data from the community stakeholders. Official documents from the municipalities and barangays were collected and reviewed to verify the data obtained from various sources. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted to confirm, clarify and strengthen or correct the earlier gathered data.

Qualitative data were presented using narratives. Quantitative data collected through surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics supported by descriptions and table.

Results and Discussion

DRRM Activities

The DRRM activities in the Municipality A were limited to training on quick response, information dissemination and warning through the town crier (recurida), fire drill and bomb/explosive drill.

However, after Typhoon Frank (International name: Fengshen) in 2008, it was noticed that Municipality A’s DRRM communication activities had improved a bit. They conducted a hazard assessment for one time only. They also held orientations/briefing activities on DRRM, linkaging, and provided or warnings when a typhoon was coming through the town crier. Other DRRM activities of Municipality A were the basic relief, rescue operation and rehabilitation of infrastructures after the disaster.

Municipality A conducted hazard assessments by asking barangay captains about the hazards experienced in their respective barangays. Municipal officials, employees, and barangay officials were oriented and briefed about DRRM. Partnerships with owners of local commercial establishments – gasoline stations, grocery stores, rice mills – were forged. Collaboration with commercial establishment included agreements like opening stores to provide the needs of the local government even during disasters. As a usual practice, the municipality used town crier to warn the community, especially those living beside the creeks, rivers and sea to be ready and evacuate when necessary.

Municipality B, on the other hand, had started earlier in conducting DRRM activities. Unlike Municipality A, Municipality B used a portion of its internal revenue allotment (IRA) fund to finance its DRRM activities. Before Typhoon Frank, Municipality B had already conducted the following communication
initiatives: communication campaigns/social marketing on good health practices; free medical education, check-up, and provision of medicines; training/drills on what to do during floods. Local officials regularly communicate on DRRM through walkie-talkies; regular community meetings; training on how to rescue victims from disasters. Farmers were trained on how to improve farming through climate field school; barangay officials were trained on what to do during disaster situations, barangay police group were empowered to response during disasters; and other DRRM training of the Municipal Social Welfare Development Office, Municipal Health Office, and Municipal Agriculture Office.

After Typhoon Frank, Municipality B continued to practice most of its DRRM activities and added some activities: monthly meetings (the office of the mayor conducts regular meetings in one of the barangays each month) to consult and find solutions to the community problems. DRRM IEC materials were distributed; livelihood activities like swine production, broiler chicken raising, livelihood projects for persons with disability, vegetable gardening and distribution of rice seedlings were conducted. Fingerlings were dispersed in the municipality bodies of water, and canal cleanup or linis canal project was also implemented. Municipality B also assisted neighboring municipalities DRRM Councils during the conduct of their evacuation and rescue drills.

**Governance Communication for DRRM**

**Government policy supporting DRRM communication services**

Based on the document review, before typhoon Frank Municipality A had Executive Order (EO) no. 12-1995, which later revised to EO no. 4-2010, mandating the creation of Municipal Disaster Coordinating Council (MDCC) with two communication units: Public Information Unit (PIU) and Communication and Warning Unit (CWU).

After Typhoon Frank, Municipality A enacted EO no. 15-2011 (and later EO no.3-2012) which reorganized their MDCC into Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (MDRRMC). In the older versions EOs (before Typhoon Frank), MDCC PIU function was defined as "to provide accurate information and instructions to the civilian population on disaster arising from natural and man-made causes. However, EOs No. 15-2011 and 3-2012 (which came later) failed to define the functions of PIU of their MDRRMC, which was considered a clerical error. On the other hand, the role of MDCC Communication and Warning Unit was carried even after the organization was renamed to MDRRMC. CWU was expected "to provide, operate and maintain continuous and reliable communications and adequate warning system throughout the period of impending and or existing disaster and calamities."

Key informants from Municipality A did not know and did not recognize the difference between the functions of MDRRMC’s units: PIU and CWU. They said that their municipality had no policies to communicate DRRM to the public.

When FGD was conducted with the MDRRMC officials of Municipality A, they said their municipality do not have an ordinance that mandates to communicate DRRM. Their statement, however, does not coincide with the documents found in their Municipality, specifically in their Executive Order that cited the creation of Public Information Unit and Communication and Warning Unit. Municipality B, the same as the Municipality A, had DRRM policies that supported the provision of communication services for DRRM as found in their EO no 36-2010 crafted based on the national laws. Review of their previous policies revealed that Municipality B had EO no. 2-2002, which established a Public Information, Communication, and Warning Unit (PICWU).
With the change of administration (when the new mayor was elected) in 2007, the unit was divided into two units: Public Information Unit (PIU) and Communication and Warning Unit (CWU). Despite the division of the unit, no clear distinction (no document showed that functions of the two units were clarified to the MDRRMC members) or no difference was made between the functions of two units. Incredibly, based from the EO of Municipality B, both PIU and CWU, though separate units, were expected coordinate, direct, and control communication and warning operations; provide, operate, and maintain a continuous and reliable communications and provide adequate warning system throughout the period of impending and existing disaster or calamities. Both units were also expected to provide accurate and timely information and instruction to the civilian population in the state of disaster; provide a plan for the proper dissemination of information to prevent public panic in the disaster affected area. They were expected to coordinate with government and private media in advocating the public on disaster preparedness operation; and provide effective communication linkages/facilities among the various agencies involve. This observation seemed disturbing, but when the key informant was reached, he said the municipality adopted RA 101-21, which is already detailed in terms of functions and responsibilities of the various offices. He did not know that the two communication units, PIU, and CWU, have perfectly the same functions.

**Government institution(s) providing DRRM communication services**

Besides the fact that both municipalities have Public Information Units and Communication and Warning Units under their MDRRMC, in practice and the belief of the participants, it is only the Office of their Mayor (in Municipality A) that provided communication services for DRRM in the municipality. Whereas in Municipality B, aside from the Office of the Mayor, some other government units in the municipality were recognized to be providing the DRRM communication needs of the stakeholders. These government units are the Municipal Planning and Development Office, Office of the Municipal Agriculturist, Municipal Health Office, Municipal Social Welfare, and Development Office, Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippine National Police and other government offices in the municipality.

FGD participants from Municipality A and B said that government institutions in their municipalities providing communication services for DRRM lacked communication facilities, preparation, and trained communication personnel to address the stakeholders’ DRRM communication and information needs. FGD participants from both municipalities considered their DRRM involvement as additional responsibilities only.

**Communication human resources dedicated to DRRM**

In Municipality A, Communicator 1 (a co-terminus employee) continued to serve as chair of the MDCC Public Information Unit (PIU) until after the local election in 2010 when the term of the former mayor ended. Her position was given to Communicator 2 (another co-terminus employee) who served as private secretary to the new mayor. In 2011, Communicator 2 resigned from her position and Communicator 3, the Tourism Officer of Municipality A, was designated to chair the now MDRRMC PIU.

In 2012, when the MDRRMC was again reorganized, Communicator 3, the chair of the MDRRMC PIU, was also appointed as Municipal DRRM Officer. Communicators 2, 3 and 4 had no formal training to do communication work. According to Communicator 4, she was designated to the positions because the local executive could not identify for a more capable person to handle the responsibilities.

In Municipality A’s MDCC, when the term
of the chair (communicator 5) of the Communication and Warning Unit (CWU) ended in 2010, Communicator 6 took over but after a year, the President of the League of Barangay Captains (Communicator 7) was designated to chair the MDRRMC CWU. Communicators 6 and 7 also had no experience or training in communication work. There had been several changes in the chairmanship of Municipality A’s MDCC and MDRRMC communication units. In Municipality B, on the other hand, from MDCC time to MDRRMC, Communicator A, throughout the years, continuously served as chair of the MDRRMC PIU, as Municipal Information Officer and at the same time Municipal Human Resource and Management Officer. Communicator B also continued to be the chair of the MDRRMC CWU up to the conduct of this study.

Communication infrastructure and media to support communication services for DRRM

Municipality A sometimes held community meetings or ‘pulong-pulong’, house to house and face to face communication to inform the public about dengue and other diseases. They also used town crier and flyers.

Informants said that Municipality A started only to conduct orientations on DRRM to their municipal officials, employees and barangay council members after Typhoon Frank in 2008. The enactment of RA 101-21 enabled the municipal and barangay officials to purchase equipment and materials in preparation for disasters, including walkie-talkie units.

Municipality B, on the other hand, even before Typhoon Frank, had already conducted DRRM training activities such as flood drills and simulations to strengthen the capabilities of the barangay officials and their rescue teams to respond whenever there is a disaster. Community meetings were also regularly conducted in the barangays every last Friday of the month. The farmers’ field school, campaigns, flyers and agri-hearing (meeting with farmers) were continuously used to inform and capacitate community stakeholders in facing disasters. Town crier and face to face communication were also used in Municipality B to announce warnings about approaching typhoons.

Moreover, cellular phones became a popular medium for people in Municipality A and B to communicate their concerns with the government. They did not directly contact the mayor or the other higher officials, however. The informants had observed that in the barangays, the constituents called or texted their barangay captains or zone leaders about DRRM concerns, only during emergencies and after disasters. Usually, texts were about reports of their and their properties situations during and after a disaster and were about complaints on the distribution of relief goods.

Face to face communication was the preferred mode of communication at the barangay level especially in informing the community about impending disasters and common health concerns.

Coordination mechanism for DRRM communication

Coordination among the MDRRMC members, especially among community people and the council in Municipality A during good weather days and when there were disasters was so weak. The local government and the MDRRMC had no shared vision for the organization. Members of the council were said to be oriented, yet this study revealed that they were not familiar with their particular roles and didn’t possess knowledge and skills to do their functions. During disasters, coordination was observed to be lacking among the rescue groups. The same problem was found in the distribution of relief goods.

In the Municipality A, one of the factors considered hindering the growth of the MDRRMC as an organization and the
coordination among its members was the conflict between the executive and legislative bodies. Similarly, the local government and MDRRMC of Municipality B missed crafting their DRRM vision statement. Members were said to be also oriented about their roles and functions however their performance revealed that they lack knowledge and skills to perform their particular functions. With the administration of the former mayor of Municipality B, a communication protocol was crafted. It was made to be observed during disasters so that reports on the status in the community, the number of casualties and damage to properties can be easily recorded. The sad thing was established protocol was only bypassed mainly by some barangay officials who sought direct and special favor from the office of the mayor. This coordination problem brought misunderstanding among and between MDRRM Council members. Coordination problem resulted from discrepancies between the records of the MDRRMO and the Office of the Mayor on the number of victims and damages that also made the distribution of relief goods and other social-related services during and after the disasters problematic and more stressful.

Coordination for DRRM among MDRRMC members and coordination in the municipal and even in the barangays were not established and practiced in both municipalities during good weather days. DRRM activities and coordination, whenever there is, was only observed right before the coming of a hazard (in the case of the typhoon), during and right after a disaster.

Public sphere for public dialogue on DRRM issues

In Municipality A, a coffee shop of former Municipal Official was used as a hub for informal discussions about any news, stories, and issues in the municipality. However, unless those stories and discussions were formally channeled to the government, the local government officials did not bother themselves with them, treating them as mere rumors and gossip. A mechanism that will facilitate directing the complaints and valid issues and concerns of the ordinary people in the community was not present.

A similar thing had been happening in the coffee shops near the municipal hall of Municipality B. With the shops attracting more customers from various sectors; the public sphere continued to be productive. Stories in favor of and against the government were freely and continuously constructed in the public sphere. However, unlike in Municipality A, these stories and discussions fueled the quiet but growing conflict between the government and the public sphere in Municipality B. People in the government were onion skinned about the issues discussed among the public in the coffee shops, terminals, public markets, sari-sari stores, streets corners or tambayans and even corners of the municipal buildings. Stories or complaints from the public sphere were considered personal attacks and intended to destroy the image of one in the position. People in the public sphere are considered detractors rather that partners in governance.

Informants and FGD participants from both municipalities acknowledged the vital role of public spheres in constructing information for the people’s consumption. If properly facilitated and channeled to the concerned, information from the public sphere has a potential capacity of helping government improve its performance.

Stakeholders’ Level of Disaster-Preparedness

This study assumed that governance communication influences level of disaster preparedness of the community stakeholders. When asked about their level of preparedness, respondents viewed themselves as disaster prepared \(M=2.09\). The same result was obtained when the data were classified according to municipalities: Municipality A,
\(M=2.12\) and Municipality B, \(M=2.03\). At the barangay level, however, only two considered themselves as prepared, Brgy. 2 of Municipality B \((M=2.55)\) and Brgy. 2 of Municipality A \((M=2.46)\). Brgy. 1 of Municipality A \((M=1.96)\) and Brgy. 1 of Municipality B \((M=1.81)\) perceived themselves as not prepared for disasters.

### Table 1: Respondents’ perception of the stakeholders’ level of disaster-preparedness \((n=309)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipality A</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brgy. 1</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brgy. 2</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality B</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brgy. 1</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brgy. 2</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Mean</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key informants from the selected barangays in Municipality A and B did not fully agree with the results on the level of preparedness of the respondents. For them, people in their communities were not prepared for disaster. They noted that when disasters like flood strikes, people immediately needed help from the government for their basic needs: food, shelter, and even clothing. The informant from Barangay 1 of Municipality B said that respondents from their barangay may have thought they were disaster-prepared because they were used to floods and had survived them. Though they had survived floods, they never learned to ready their basic needs (or they have nothing to prepare) and just waited relief goods from the local government — thing that will not work anymore when the whole municipality is in an extreme disaster situation.

Based on Jaeckel LLC (2007) article on "Four Levels of Emergency Preparedness," the study respondents, in general, were just at level 1, meaning they were not disaster-prepared. Results revealed that all (100%) respondents did not have written emergency or contingency plans for their families during disasters. Family members did not also have a clear understanding of their respective roles and were not oriented on where to go, what to do and bring when required to evacuate immediately from their homes during the disaster. Moreover, all (100%) respondents had no extra supply of food and other necessary materials. They have nothing prepared to sustain themselves even during the first three days of the disaster.

Key informants from Brgy 2 of Municipality A and Brgy. 2 of Municipality B, where survey respondents perceived themselves as disaster ready, said that the discrepancy between the respondents’ perception and their actual disaster-preparedness level revealed the lack of understanding of the respondents of their real disaster-preparedness situation.

To clarify the disaster-preparedness level of the community stakeholders obtained through a survey, FGD participants were asked to write all that they thought they needed during a disaster. Moreover, if they had those items at home, they were to indicate their respective quantities. The researcher then described to the FGD participants the different levels of disaster-preparedness according to Jaeckel LLC (2007).

During the discussion, all FGD participants admitted and agreed that they did not know about an emergency bag or its contents. Hypothetically, whenever a disaster come during the conduct of FGD and if local government or any private entity could not come for immediate relief services, they had only very few of the items they had identified important for them to survive during the first few days of the disaster. It showed that FGD participants did not have their basic needs – extra supplies of foods and other necessary materials to sustain themselves. Moreover, only one out of the 40 FGD participants from the four barangays had savings in the bank which may not be accessible for immediate use during the disaster. All FGD participants
concluded that they all belonged to the level one classification of Jaeckel LLC. They were not disaster-prepared.

Mostly, community stakeholders' level of disaster preparedness resulted from the kind of governance communication observed in the municipalities (Figure 1).

Conclusion

DRRM activities conducted in the two selected municipalities did not contribute to the disaster-preparedness of the community stakeholders. Even the adjudged as an advance municipality regarding implementing DRRM, Municipality B, failed to raise the level of disaster-preparedness of its community stakeholders. The evaluators may have used different measures in assessing the municipality as advance in DRRM practices. A level of disaster-preparedness of the community people may be not included in the criteria in evaluating the extent of municipalities’ DRRM implementation. Municipalities did not consider communication as a factor that may contribute to the improvement of people knowledge and involvement in DRRM which may eventually increase their disaster-preparedness level.

Recommendation

Results of the study may be significant to the local government units especially to the members of the local DRRM Council, private institutions in the municipality, the rest of the linkages and community stakeholders. LGU and MDRRMC members of the two selected municipalities may be informed about the existing govcomm for DRRM and their
community stakeholders’ disaster-preparedness level which may encourage them to craft govcomm for DRRM model for their respective municipalities. They may consider reorganizing their LGU and MDRRMC structure to achieve the DRRM goal, disaster-prepared communities. Municipalities may revisit their existing communication policies for DRRM. They may establish an institution in the LGU that would take the lead role in communicating DRRM and explore other communication infrastructures or media that may facilitate faster horizontal and top-to-bottom bottom-up communication. They may hire or train communicators for DRRM. They may also reorganize and train members of municipal DRRM councils, including BDRRMC, to improve coordination for DRRM, and explore on how the public sphere may be used in policy making and in addressing DRRM needs of the community stakeholders, especially the marginalized groups in the municipality.

Partnership with private institutions like NGOs, schools, churches, business organizations and companies in the municipality may also be strengthened to address communication and DRRM needs of the communities.

Barangay councils may also be encouraged to study their barangay governance communication for DRRM so that strong partnership with MDRRMC may be fostered and issues on disaster preparedness among their barangay constituents may also be addressed.

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