



04 LESSONS LEARNED AND
EMERGING BEST PRACTICE

4.4 The Philippines

Embedding Safe and Dignified Programming in the CLDRM+ Protection



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 00 INTRODUCTION	 01 TARGET AUDIENCE	 02 SHOCK RESPONSE	 03 AWARENESS	 04 BEST PRACTICE	 05 GLOSSARY
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04 Lessons Learned and Emerging Best Practice

4.1 Global: Common Gaps in Safe and Dignified Programming in Contexts Vulnerable to Natural Disasters

4.2 Sierra Leone: Embedding Safe and Dignified Programming

4.3 Sierra Leone: Mapping Services and Developing Referral Pathways

4.4 Philippines: How to Embed Safe and Dignified Programming in the CLDRM+ Protection

4.5 Philippines: Developing Local Codes of Conduct

4.6 Uganda: Setting Up and Improving Feedback Mechanisms

The Philippines: Embedding Safe and Dignified Programming in the CLDRM+ Process

Experience from crises around the world shows that vulnerable groups—such as older people, people with disabilities, women and children—are disproportionately affected by natural disasters. The Philippines faces frequent, rapid onset natural disasters—such as typhoons and earthquakes. Those living in densely populated informal urban settlements are particularly vulnerable. Women and girls are especially at risk during evacuations; living in open areas, makeshift shelters, or crowded evacuation centers increases their vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Older people and people with disabilities experiencing mobility challenges are also particularly at risk. Communication challenges linked to language, literacy or specific impairments can leave some individuals and groups without critical information or less able to access support. This is why a safe and dignified programming approach to disaster preparedness and response is so critical.

Inclusive and accountable disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM)

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded *Preparing to Enhance Protection in Disasters (PrEPD)* project was launched in 2021 to explore ways of embedding safe and dignified programming in disaster risk reduction and management. This included adapting and testing existing tools.

One of the tools was a guide that had been developed to support community-led disaster risk management processes. As part of the project, this tool was adapted to bring a great focus on protection and is now known as the **1.3 Community-Led Disaster Risk Management + Protection (CLDRM+) Facilitation Guide**. This tool provided an important framework for conversations on safe and dignified programming in the Philippines.

Safe and dignified programming in the Philippines

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has worked in the Philippines since 1945. In recent years it has implemented disaster risk reduction and emergency response programs in partnership with national and local government units (LGUs), local partners and communities. Since 2019, CRS has implemented the USAID/BHA-funded Supporting Household and LGU Awareness and Knowledge for Earthquake Preparedness (SHAKE) projects. These projects have focused on enhancing resilience to earthquakes in communities of Metro Manila. The SHAKE project provided an ideal opportunity to embed safe and dignified programming.

A needs assessment was conducted in April 2022 to understand the protection and accountability issues during disasters, gaps in institutional stakeholder approaches on safe and dignified programming in disaster risk reduction (DRR), community knowledge about rights/entitlements and coordination gaps between protection and DRR actors.

This assessment picked up on the following gaps and barriers:

- **National law does not adequately incorporate protection-responsive guidelines.** Legislation in the Philippines focuses on structures, rather than rights and standards, and concentrates on the actions of response actors rather than the concerns of crisis-affected people.

- **Protection was not consistently mainstreamed ahead of and during disasters.** Local DRR and management committee members in barangays (districts) of Metro Manila are experienced in developing disaster plans. However, protection risks—such as sexual exploitation and abuse—are not explicitly or routinely addressed in these plans. LGUs described challenges in mapping protection issues and referral pathways options. The need to improve risk assessment tools—including protection risks as well as a facilitation guide to encourage discussion around protection risks in disasters—also came up.
- **Disaster risk reduction planning did not sufficiently include people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.** In communities where CRS had implemented community-led disaster risk management programming, people with disabilities were engaged in planning activities. However, there was a clear need to increase and strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in all activities.

Using this analysis, CRS developed a plan, taking advantage of SHAKE activities in ten targeted barangays. Staff members from partners—including Caritas Pasig Inc. (CPI) and the Diocese of Malolos Commission on Social Action (MDSAC)—attended a weeklong face-to-face workshop. These sessions aimed to develop the skills of participants to run the same sessions in local communities. They covered the concepts underpinning safe and dignified programming and simulation exercises.

“The disaggregated approach helped draw out community needs before, during and after disaster events. It’s also a way to detail specific protection issues and gaps that warrant the attention of local and barangay officials, who were also present during the training of trainers sessions.”

—CARITAS PASIG, INC. STAFF

The project team then tested the CLDRM+ tool with participants—including Barangay and City disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) committee/council members, community Safeguarding Agents and DRRM ambassadors. These sessions also brought in representatives of diverse groups—such as older people, youth, people with disabilities and single heads of household. Project staff documented learning from the workshops in the ten barangays, including direct feedback from participants. Further changes were made to the tools, particularly the CLDRM+, based on the observations and feedback of local partner organizations and LGUs.

Lessons learned for enhancing safe and dignified programming approaches in DRRM

- **Safe and dignified programming is better understood when the concepts are presented in plain language.** The team observed that many DRR and local humanitarian actors had limited technical knowledge and skills in safe and dignified programming. This highlighted the need to simplify the concepts, translate them into local languages and contextualize them. By applying plain language principles, it was possible to explain and discuss complex concepts in ways that were accessible for community members and leaders.
- **Community-level training is more accessible for community participants.** The team observed that it was more effective to run a week-long training per barangay so that participants could return home each day. This contrasts with the initial plan to conduct a single week-long training at a central location, bringing participants from multiple barangays together and requiring them to stay overnight in hotels. Many participants declined to attend the overnight training due to their family commitments.
- **With enough time, CLDRM+ prompts in-depth discussion of protection risks in DRR.** The project team observed that the CLDRM+ process encouraged barangay participants to think beyond traditional natural and manmade hazards and consider protection risks as well. Participants analyzed the protection risks present in their areas before, during and after disaster shocks. However, participants tired quickly because of the short but intense brainstorming sessions. Dedicating extra time for discussion could encourage even more in-depth discussion and analysis of protection risks.
- **The Safety-Access-Dignity (SAD) approach works well when there are disaggregated groups.** Partner staff observed that grouping participants helped unpack protection risks. For example, people with disabilities were grouped together, as were older people, single heads of household, etc. This helped participants to identify common needs and risks specific to different groups.

- **Implementing the CLDRM+ alongside ongoing disaster preparedness projects improved targeting and increased impact.** Tools, lessons learned and recommendations from these activities have already been used in the creation of DRRM plans in the ten target barangays. This is important because it implies that protection risks will be considered when designing response plans at the barangay level.
- **Involving local partners contributes to greater sustainability.** CRS actively involved its two diocesan partners in facilitating the CLDRM+ process. Partners led the risk assessment processes with the ten target barangays. By advancing local leadership in this way, partner staff may become champions of the CLDRM+ and safe and dignified programming now and in the future.
- **Local coordination structures can bring greater focus to safe and dignified programming.** Learning from the workshops influenced Barangay DRRM committees in all the target sites to review and modify their existing coordination structures. The committees decided to set up their own “protection teams,” creating a mechanism to further draw out protection risk discussions and identify risk mitigation measures. These protection teams also serve as a promising entry point for meaningful inclusion of members of vulnerable groups.