**04** LESSONS LEARNED AND
EMERGING BEST PRACTICE

# 4.5 The Philippines

Developing Local Codes of Conduct



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# 04 Lessons Learned and Emerging Best Practice

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# The Philippines: Developing the Local Codes of Conduct

In the Philippines, all government officials—including members of local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) committees and councils—are required to behave in line with the *Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees* (Republic Act No. 6713). This is a national law enacted in 1989. The Code of Conduct (CoC) sets out the expected behavior of all government employees. This includes carrying out their duties with responsibility, integrity, competence and loyalty.[1]

## Challenges putting policy into practice

The CoC sets out important expectations of government officials. However, there are gaps in its requirements. Its uptake and enforcement are also uneven across localities. It does not explicitly mention the IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (IASC Six Rules), which applies to all humanitarian actors. While all government officials are required to sign a CoC, there are varying practices for disseminating information about the CoC and ensuring compliance. For example, local government units (LGUs) with human resources departments orient staff on the CoC. However, LGUs without human resources may not have the capacity to do so. These gaps can increase the risk of misconduct—including the abuse and exploitation of communities affected by natural disasters—and vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, children, women and older people.

## Local CoCs to complement national law

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded *Preparing to Enhance Protection in Disasters (PrEPD)* project proposed that targeted barangays (districts) and cities draft local CoCs for members of the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Council and Barangay DRRM Committee. This approach created several opportunities:

1. Include the IASC Six Rules in the local CoC. These rules are critical to safe and dignified disaster preparedness and response activities and disaster risk reduction (DRR) actors, both at the city and barangay levels, must strictly observe them.

2. Make sure DRRM committees and councils sign a CoC reinforces the importance of staff conduct and principles—such as accountability and integrity. It was also a way to document the commitment of members to respect ethical standards.

3. This approach could be tested with a small group. It may be scalable across other government departments.

To support this effort, the project team developed a CoC training adapted to DRR and local humanitarian actors. They then used the training across project sites and documented participant feedback. This process was accelerated because PrEPD was implemented alongside the USAID-funded Supporting Household and LGU Awareness and Knowledge for Earthquake Preparedness (SHAKE) project. This meant PrEPD staff members were able to use existing relationships with DRRM committees and councils.

## Results to-date and lessons learned

Overall, the CoC training received positive feedback from barangay and city-level participants, who highlighted its value, impact and relevance. They noted that the risk of misconduct in their context is high because vulnerable communities frequently interact with DRRM actors responding to climate-induced disasters.

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[1] RA No. 6713, Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards, https://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/issuances/republic_acts/RA_6713.PDF.

The CoC sessions also raised the following lessons:

- **CoC principles are better accepted and understood when translated into the local language.** The initial CoC package was written and released in English. Based on previous learning, the team chose to facilitate the CoC sessions in the local language. The team then translated the CoC PowerPoint slides into Filipino to explain the concepts more effectively to barangay and city participants.

- **Training can increase buy-in to key concepts of safe and dignified programming.** By training on CoCs, the project team hoped to increase buy-in from participants. They also hoped to encourage DRRM committees to develop their own CoCs for all members. This suggestion was well received. The next step was to designate focal points in the ten targeted barangays and five cities who would later be responsible for drafting the CoCs. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) partners—Caritas Pasig Inc. and CSA Malolos—continue to support focal points in this writing process.

- **Including the CoC in existing guidance—such as government-mandated plans—can help embed safe and dignified programming.** DRRM committees and councils drafting CoCs have agreed to include the final version as an annex in future DRRM and Contingency Plans. By institutionalizing the CoC in this way, the project team hopes it will remain a top priority for DRR actors.

## Looking ahead

PrEPD has been successful in supporting its target barangays and cities to develop CoCs, but the possibility of scaling this approach to barangay or city-wide initiatives requires more time and resources. Government officials will need to review and analyze the merits of this initiative, as well as determine how it impacts their work and procedures. Nevertheless, adoption of local CoCs in the project's targeted areas will help safeguard vulnerable communities during future disaster preparedness and response activities.