



Participatory Capacities and Vulnerabilities Assessment:

*Finding the
Link Between
Disasters and
Development*

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Key results of the PCVA review conducted in 2002 entitled "Integrating Disaster Management and Development: what can we learn from the PCVA experiences in the Philippines?" by Marisol Estrella was revised for this handbook.

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Contents

Foreword	iv
I. The PCVA Framework: CVA and Participatory Rural Appraisal	p. 5
II. Organising a PCVA Research	p. 29
III. Conducting PCVA: A process of learning and action	p. 35
IV. Lessons from the review: Improving the PCVA	p. 49
Annex. Voices from the Rubble: Summary of Key Research Findings	p. 61
References	p. 77

Foreword

The Philippines is a disaster-prone country and for poor people who are already living on the edge, each disaster most often means loss of lives and of precious and very limited assets. However, poor people are not completely without abilities and means. Development and humanitarian practitioner needs to take into account people's capacities and vulnerabilities if interventions are to be relevant, sustainable and empowering.

Apart from life-saving measures, Oxfam holds that even the most urgent of interventions amidst a rapidly unfolding disaster situation must create safe spaces that would ensure transparent, accountable and participatory processes through which even the most vulnerable men and women members of the community could analyse their conditions and identify their own needs.

It is towards this end that this handbook on participatory capacities and vulnerabilities assessment or PCVA was developed, and is now being offered as a tool in creating that space. It recognizes the importance of local knowledge built on people's experience of disasters and of poor people taking the lead in addressing their vulnerabilities. This helps in ensuring that people's rights are upheld despite the circumstances brought on by disasters.

As a tool, the PCVA is by no means complete, and should not be seen as standing alone. It should

be used with other tools, most notably gender mainstreaming tools, for it to work most effectively at surfacing key and nuanced information necessary for designing appropriate and relevant pre and post disaster programme interventions. We are grateful to the individuals and families who have not only accommodated the PCVA teams into their homes and communities but also openly shared their experiences and thoughts during the conduct of the researches. We are grateful too to the non-government organisations, people's organisations and local government units whose participation and assistance made the researches a fruitful undertaking. We dedicate this handbook to them.

We hope that the handbook would be relevant to both disaster management and development practitioners. Through this, Oxfam Great Britain's Philippines programme shares its experiences and the lessons it has learned on understanding community perspectives on disasters. It is also our hope that readers will find in it some measure of contribution to the theory and praxis of disaster management.

Lilian S. Mercado Carreon
Philippines Programme Representative
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*I*ntroduction and Background

Background of the PCVA Handbook



"Hindi naman disaster ang baha noong bago pumutok ang Pinatubo. Kasi pagkatapos ng baha, mas mataba na ang lupa sa bukid at napalitan na ang tubig sa mga fishpond at ilog. At saka tatlong piye lang ang taas ng tubig-baha noon, at pagkaraan ng isang buwan, hupa na. Ngayon, may halo ng lahar ang tubig-baha. Mas mataas din ang baha ngayon, mga pitong piye at minsan, anim na buwan na ay may tubig-baha pa rin. Kaya disaster na ang turing sa baha ngayon sa Sta. Catalina."



(The villagers did not consider flooding a disaster before the 1991 Pinatubo eruption. Floods would replenish rice fields, fishponds and river systems. Before, floodwaters would rise up to three feet and last for only a month. But now, floodwater comes mixed with lahar. It is also much higher, around seven feet, and would sometimes last up to six months. That's why people now consider floods as disasters.)

This was how Aling Magda and the other participants in the Participatory Capacities and Vulnerabilities Assessment (PCVA) in Sta. Catalina, Minalin, Pampanga described the change in their experience of disasters before and after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. This was what Oxfam wanted to know when it conceptualized the first PCVA research in 1998.

Oxfam helped local partners respond to the needs of Mt. Pinatubo affected communities for seven years since 1991. In 1998, Oxfam realised it was time to update its assessment of the disaster situation and responses in Central Luzon. Oxfam wanted to determine if people still considered lahar a threat and if there were emerging issues or new threats to the lives and livelihood of the survivors.

But aside from assessing the living conditions of the Pinatubo survivors, Oxfam also wanted the research to be a learning process by encouraging more input and participation from local communities and key stakeholders. This way, the research would reflect the perspectives and experiences of the survivors themselves, as well as that of the various stakeholders' in managing and responding to disasters in the region.

Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis (CVA) was not new to Oxfam. In fact, long before the PCVA was conceptualised in 1998 to inform programme development processes, the CVA analytical framework already played an important role in Oxfam's country programme's efforts to integrate DM into its poverty reduction programmes.

Oxfam and its DM partners applied the CVA framework in assessing disaster situations and identifying development-oriented interventions. Also part of the DM-development integration effort was the launching of cross-programme DM trainings to promote vulnerability analysis among partners and build their capacities in applying the CVA framework in DM and other programme initiatives.ⁱ

However, it was observed that despite efforts to involve local people in the gathering and interpretation of CVA data, the CVA was still perceived mainly as a checklist of categories and factors to be analysed by external organisations with limited input from local communities.ⁱⁱ Hence, it was suggested the CVA framework be combined with participatory approaches, specifically with participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools. The objective was to provide more opportunity for local communities and other stakeholders to participate in assessing the post-Pinatubo eruption situation in Central Luzon.ⁱⁱⁱ

After the PCVA in Central Luzon, four more researches were conducted in communities which

are prone to natural and human-made hazards. One was in Catanduanes, an island province highly prone to typhoons, floods and landslides. This was followed by another in two provinces vulnerable to several natural hazards and armed conflict in Central Mindanao. The last two were conducted with two Oxfam partners conducting natural resource management programmes and were specifically intended to facilitate the integration of DM into the partners' programme designs.

The scope of these PCVAs may be limited to the experiences of specific communities and partners in their specific disaster contexts. Nevertheless, they offer invaluable insights on how people and agencies behave, respond and cope with disasters affecting their communities. Hopefully, these insights could help enrich the current DM thinking and practice in the Philippines.

The PCVA handbook is an attempt to explain what the PCVA is all about, describe how to effectively conduct a

Oxfam also wanted the research to be a learning process by encouraging more input and participation from local communities and key stakeholders

PCVA, and present experiences and lessons regarding people and disasters which were obtained through the use of PCVA.

Part I discusses the two main frameworks used in the PCVA: the CVA tool of analysis and Participatory Rural/Urban Appraisal framework and principles. It presents the theoretical basis of the PCVA and how the two frameworks were applied to PCVA researches.

Part II gives an overview of how a PCVA research is organised. Although presented in a step-by-step manner, it is not the intention to prescribe a single format in organising a PCVA but to share with the reader a list of activities which could make PCVAs more fruitful, relaxed and fun. Part III contains insights and lessons obtained from organising and conducting PCVAs, which hopefully would help others in their use of the PCVA.

Part IV presents the results of the PCVA review conducted by Oxfam in 2001. In that review, Oxfam looked into how the potentials of the CVA and PRA were maximized in the PCVA and presented ways to improve the conduct of PCVAs in the future.

We also decided to include in the annex of the handbook a summing-up of the results of PCVAs. Titled *Voices from the Rubble*, this section presents the key findings and insights on people's perceptions and experiences of disasters and disaster responses gleaned from the PCVAs.

Endnotes

ⁱ In Oxfam's one-programme approach during the period 1996-2000, disaster management was considered a key component of the country programme, linking DM with the other programme initiatives. One of the programme's features was having a process that was developmental, informed by structural analysis including gender analysis and committed to principles of participation and empowerment (Abesamis et al. 1996).

ⁱⁱ Anderson and Woodrow, authors of the CVA specifically recommended that data gathering and analysis of data for the CVA should involve the local people themselves, to facilitate their understanding of their own local conditions and increase their capacity to effect desired changes (Anderson and Woodrow 1989, 21).

ⁱⁱⁱ Roger Ricafort, Manager for Overseas Programmes in Oxfam Hong Kong, helped develop the idea of the PCVA. He also acted as the consultant of the first PCVA research conducted in 1998 in Central Luzon Region.



Disasters create new vulnerabilities. Post-Pinatubo eruption flooding in Minalin, Pampanga.

I

*The PCVA Framework:
CVA and Participatory Rural Appraisal*

I. The PCVA framework: CVA and Participatory Rural Appraisal

A. Analysing Capacities and Vulnerabilities-Developing the Tool

If you have attended a Disaster Management seminar or training, you probably have heard of the CVA. Nevertheless, here is a brief background:

During the 1970s and the 1980s, disaster researchers and DM practitioners started to look at people's experiences of disasters worldwide in a new way. Veering away from the traditional notion which regards disasters as caused solely by external events (also referred to as trigger events such as typhoons, earthquakes, floods, etc.), this new perspective emphasizes the understanding of underlying factors which make disasters happen. It helps us focus more on the development context within which disasters occur. In doing so, it also helps us figure out why some groups of people or communities are more vulnerable to disasters than others.

Mary Anderson and Peter Woodrow and their team of researchers provided us with a framework for understanding people's vulnerability to disasters. They called it *Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis* (1989).

The CVA framework was based on the observation that disasters happen in a development context, and that relief interventions aimed at alleviating the conditions of disaster survivors can have positive or negative effects on this context. In some of the cases documented by Anderson and Woodrow, the lack of understanding and appreciation of local capacities and vulnerabilities resulted in more disastrous situations.¹

In the Philippine context, we've heard of people becoming relief dependent or agency dependent. We've also heard of relief assistance actually causing conflict or divisions among members of a community. There is, in fact, a long list of problems resulting from mismanaged relief interventions that aggravated vulnerabilities rather than help people recover from a disaster.

The CVA framework is designed to help relief agencies understand pre-existing vulnerabilities and capacities of a community prior to the formulation of relief intervention.

People's capacities and vulnerabilities are analysed and incorporated into the project design to make it more responsive to the development context of the disaster-stricken community. By carefully examining the survivors' capacities and

When asked for an example of a *kahinaan*, the most common answer would be *pamumulitika* or too much politicking.

vulnerabilities, the relief agency learns how to make its decisions and actions more sensitive to the survivors' short and long-term needs, as well as their local culture and practices. This can also help find means to maximize local capacities and resources to support the local development process.

In the CVA framework, we define capacities as the characteristics of people and communities which can be used to respond to and cope with disasters, and on which future development efforts can be built. During PCVA workshops, Filipinos would refer to it as *kalakasan* (strengths) or *kakayahan* (capability). Some also associate capacities with natural resources found in the community and people's means of livelihood.

When asked for examples of *kalakasan*, the most common answer would be *bayanihan* (community self-help or cooperation). This is quite interesting since many relief agencies in the Philippines have been utilising the bayanihan tradition of the Filipinos in distributing relief or implementing rehabilitation projects. Many local agencies believe that by encouraging the survivors to organise

themselves and work together in times of crisis (instead of just giving away relief packs), the project becomes instrumental in building a strong sense of self-reliance among the survivors and provides a sense of normalcy during a crisis situation.

On the other hand, vulnerabilities are the long-term factors which affect the ability of a community to respond to events or which make it susceptible to calamities. Blaikie et al. broadened the definition of vulnerability to include the combination of factors determining the degree to which someone's life and livelihood is put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature or society (1994).

The Filipino term *kahinaan* is used during PCVA workshops to refer to vulnerabilities. When asked for an example of a *kahinaan*, the most common answer would be *pamumulitika* or too much politicking. This is because many perceive politicking as the cause of division in a community, and that most of the time, political connection influences the delivery of government services.

In the barangays where PCVA researches were conducted, villagers often mentioned politics as a hindrance to the timely delivery of disaster services. People claim that some public officials would prioritise villages of political allies over those which truly deserve post-disaster support.

But what kind of information do we actually look

CVA Matrix

Categories	<u>Vulnerabilities</u>	<u>Capacities</u>
Physical/Material Productive Resources Skills Existing Hazards		
Social/Organisational Relations Organisations		
Motivational/Attitudinal Views toward change Beliefs		

for in CVA? For those involved in community organising and are familiar with the social investigation (SI) tool, CVA would sound very familiar. Doing CVA is like doing an SI profile. Except that you always ask the question: Is it a capacity or vulnerability?

Major Categories in Analysing Capacities and Vulnerabilities

The CVA framework uses three major categories in analysing a community’s capacities and vulnerabilities: the physical or material, social or organisational, and the attitudinal or motivational aspects (Box 1).

The Physical/Material Aspect

The physical or material C & V refers to the physical characteristics of a community which make it vulnerable to disasters, and those physical characteristics which can be utilised to recover from disaster impacts.

For example, we assess land, climate, environment, infrastructure, food, housing, capital, physical technologies, people’s health, skills, livelihood strategies, etc. and ask the following questions: Do they make people susceptible to disaster impacts, or can they be used for effective disaster mitigation, preparedness and recovery?

The physical/material aspect also refers to the location and types of structures in the community.

It refers to answers to the following questions: Where do people live? What type of materials are their houses made of? Where do they work or derive their income? And of course, it is in this aspect where we categorize the different types of hazards which affect the community.

The Social / Organisational Aspect

This aspect pertains to the socio-political processes and structures in a community which can either make people and communities vulnerable to disasters, or contribute toward effective disaster management. In the social/organisational category, we look at how people organise various social, political and economic activities, negotiations, and decisions in the community.

In the CVA, we try to find out whether these structures and processes create divisions in the community or make some groups more powerful or influential than others in making decisions which affect the whole community.

On the other hand, by assessing the social/organisational C & V of the community, we also try to determine what existing social and political processes can unite people in managing disasters. We identify which structures can be enhanced or established to promote the active participation of marginalised groups in various decision-making processes.

What structures and processes are we looking

for? We refer to formal (e.g., barangay councils, NGOs, people's organisations) and informal (e.g., council of elders) political structures, community leaders, family structures, relations between and among neighbors, and relations between and among organisations. We try to answer the following questions: What roles and functions do they play in the community? How influential are they? How do they relate to each other? How do people relate or engage with the government and non-government organisations? What capacities and vulnerabilities do they create?

The Motivational / Attitudinal Aspect

The attitudinal/motivational aspect pertains to how people perceive, understand, and interpret events happening in their community. This is based on their belief systems and their attitudes towards themselves. People can adopt a fatalistic outlook, an attitude of dependency (i.e. a "dole-out" mentality), an individualistic attitude, or feel victimised, or have a sense of empowerment or

Through the CVA matrix, we can easily determine the factors which may be critical to the development of a community.

"fighting spirit", or a spirit of collectivism.

This category helps us understand why people think and behave the way they do. Do they have the motivation to change their situation for the better? Do they still practice or believe in the Filipino *bayanihan* spirit? Do people believe that there is a need to do something about too much politicking in their community? Are they willing to participate in instituting changes in the community?

CVA is a practical and simple (but not simplistic) way to analyse the situation in a community. Through the CVA matrix, we can easily determine the factors which may be critical to the development of a community. It can also help establish the relationships among the different factors and between the capacities and vulnerabilities of a community.

Although the CVA framework was primarily designed for relief projects, many agencies use

it to formulate disaster preparedness and mitigation programmes. This is because of the richness of the information obtained from the use of the tool. To further enhance this capability of the CVA, five more criteria were added to the CVA framework, making the CVA more sensitive to the complexity of a given situation.

Five Additional Criteria: Sharpening the CVA

1) DISAGGREGATION BY GENDER.

The CVA recognizes that men and women play different social and economic roles in a community. They have different levels of access to the community's physical and social resources and are affected by disasters differently. In the same manner, by disaggregating capacities and vulnerabilities by gender, we learn that men and women possess different capacities in responding to and coping with disasters. (Please refer to Box 2)

Box 2

Gender Disaggregation Matrix

Categories	Capacities		Vulnerabilities	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Physical/Material				
Social/Organisational				
Attitudinal/Motivational				

CVA Disaggregation by economic class

Categories	Capacities			Vulnerabilities		
	Rich	Middle	Poor	Rich	Middle	Poor
Physical/Material						
Social/Organisational						
Attitudinal/Motivational						

In applying the CVA framework, it is important to ask the question: WHO? Who has the skills, who decides, who has access to resources, who participates, who is more vulnerable - Men or Women?

2) DISSAGREGATION ACCORDING TO OTHER DIFFERENCES.

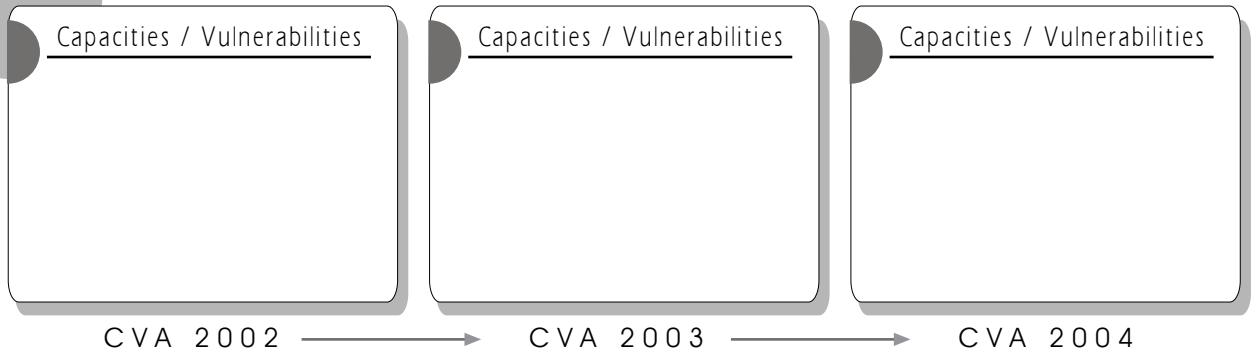
The CVA recognizes that disasters have different impacts on people because they have varying degrees of vulnerability to disasters. Some households have more resources than the others. They have better houses, savings, insurance, or, in many cases, more access to outside resources, whether they be physical, social or political. These factors can increase or decrease their capacity to respond to and recover from disasters.

By using the CVA framework, we try to determine how the community is organised or divided. Are

there divisions by socio-economic ranking, ethnic, political or language groups? Who controls the socio-economic and political structures in the community? Who has more influence over decisions that affect the life of the whole community? Who is more vulnerable and how differently are they affected by a disaster ? (Please refer to Box 3)

3) CHANGE OVER TIME.

We can also use the CVA framework to assess changes in a community over a certain period of time. We can assess the situation before and after a disaster event and see how capacities and vulnerabilities of the affected population have changed. We can also use CVA information in planning an intervention, and apply the framework in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the project on the people's C & V later on. (Please refer to Box 4)

Box. 4**Changes over time****4) INTERACTIONS AMONG THE ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES.**

When using the CVA framework, it is important to note that all six categories overlap and interact with one another. For example, interventions which address physical vulnerabilities will have an effect on other vulnerabilities and capacities of the community. This interaction among the categories should be considered in formulating the objectives of any proposed intervention and should guide implementing activities. (Please see box 5 for an example of an interaction between two analytical categories.)



Men and women residents discuss the factors that make them vulnerable to crisis. PCVA in Pikit, North Cotabato 2000.

The PCVA conducted in Catanduanes revealed that floods and landslides devastated majority of the barangays when a super typhoon hit the province in 1998. Many barangays did not have community preparedness plans, or any simple evacuation plan, despite the fact that they live in extremely hazardous conditions - near riverbanks, or at the foot of steep mountain slopes. Their farms were also located along mountain slopes, making their products highly vulnerable to strong winds, landslides and pests. During typhoons and flooding, individual families decided by themselves when to evacuate. Evacuation usually took place only when danger was imminent.

People were fatalistic about disasters. Many of them believe that nothing can be done about disasters.

But the PCVA also found that the people's lack of capacity in preparing for and responding to disasters was also due to the fact that the local government largely ignored them in most stages of disaster management planning. People were not informed about the hazards and vulnerabilities in the province and were not aware of their role in disaster management planning. They were left on their own, which further contributed to their fatalistic attitude.

A community-based disaster management project was implemented as a result of the PCVA. The project facilitated the formation of village-based disaster preparedness

organisations through training interventions. It provided support to high-risk communities in setting-up preparedness plans which included a community evacuation plan. The planning and training sessions, where they had frequent discussions about disasters and disaster management, made them realise that disasters can be managed and that they can actually be proactive in addressing their vulnerability to disasters.

On the other hand, the project also provided support in developing and strengthening community leaders and organisations. The objective was to help them engage with local government agencies in advocating for a more proactive disaster management programme in the province. This time, the organising programme made them realize the importance of the role they play in disaster management and development planning, and that they have the right to be heard in deciding matters which affect their life and livelihood.

People in the villages saw for themselves that if they worked together they could do something about disasters and make government work. At present, most of the village organisations represent their barangays in the local development councils¹ where they participate in local governance processes. The project resulted in higher confidence among members of the community, not only with regard to participating in DM but in addressing other development issues confronting their community as well.

5) SCALE OR LEVELS.

Though applied in barangays, villages and municipalities, the CVA framework is also useful in assessing capacities and vulnerabilities of larger districts (e.g., barangay to municipal, provincial to regional, and up to the national level). The first PCVA in 1998 assessed the DM policies and practices in Mt. Pinatubo-affected communities at the barangay, municipal, and provincial levels. We should take note, however, that as the scale of the area increases, the results of the analysis will be less precise.

Furthermore, we should be aware of the way macro-level policies or activities affect the capacities and vulnerabilities of smaller entities such as municipalities and barangays. The macro-micro link should be clear in applying the CVA. For example: Do national policies like the Local Government Codeⁱⁱⁱ and Presidential Decree 1566^{iv} increase or decrease local capacities in responding to disasters? How do national economic policies like trade liberalization affect local trading at the provincial and municipal levels, and how do they impact on local farmers and other small-scale producers?

PCVA: Improving the CVA

So, how did the PCVA improve on the CVA? The PCVA research team came-up with its own categories of factors to be assessed, which were based on the objectives of the research. Instead

of using the Physical/Material, Social/Organisational, and Motivational/Attitudinal categories, the members of the first PCVA team explored how these categories can be improved to make the inquiry focus more on local needs, experiences, and perceptions of people and key actors in the communities. Information needs as required by the research objectives were prioritised and grouped into key areas of inquiry (KAIs), further systematizing the PCVA's own set of categories of factors.

The following presents the most common categorisation of KAIs used in the PCVAs. We should take note, however, that the KAIs are determined by the objectives of the research, and therefore must be reviewed, refined, or even changed if necessary when designing a PCVA.

People's experience and perceptions of disasters

By exploring people's experience and perceptions of disasters, we are able to draw a clear picture of local vulnerabilities and understand them from the point of view of the people who live under vulnerable conditions. From people's experiences of various disasters, we learn about how local conditions of vulnerabilities are created by various human actions, local processes and policies, as well as how disaster events can create new vulnerabilities

in a community.

People's experiences of disasters also allow us to learn about how they assess disaster impacts. People have their own criteria in assessing disaster impacts. Through years of exposure to various disasters, they have also developed their own indicators to assess whether a disaster is severe or not.

These local indicators are important in determining how and when local communities consider an event a disaster. What factors do they consider in defining an event a disaster? These local

indicators should then inform the decisions and actions of external actors (e.g., relief agencies, development NGOs, government) regarding the appropriate type of intervention and the right time to intervene.

Furthermore, local perception of disasters is also important in understanding the way poor people behave and react during disaster situations.

It is only through their experiences and local belief systems that we can understand how and why

people develop certain attitudes towards disasters (e.g., passive, complacent, or fatalistic attitudes), or whether poor people really feel helpless in the face of disasters.

This KAI explores how people in communities experience disasters, how hazards affect vulnerable communities and what aspects of community life are severely affected by disasters. This includes discussions about the community's disaster history, the different types of hazards that they experience, the different ways people are affected by these hazards, and the way people behave or react during and after disasters.

People's coping strategies

From this KAI, we learn how people use and search for existing local resources and capacities to prepare for, respond to and recover from the impacts of a disaster event. People hit by disaster have different levels of coping. At the individual household and community levels, poor people have different indigenous coping strategies. Knowing these local coping strategies also helps external actors in determining more appropriate types of interventions and avoid undermining people's capacities.

People's coping strategies are assessed in two ways: those that rely on internal resources (household and community resources) and those that depend on external assistance (coming from

The PCVA was conceptualised as an enabling process where poor people can analyse their disaster experiences and take action to address their vulnerabilities.

outside the community, including the government). In this KAI, people discuss how they prepare for and respond to disaster events (at the household and community levels), and what strategies they utilise to recover from disaster impacts.

Internal and external response mechanisms

Who are the key actors who provide disaster assistance to disaster survivors? How do the survivors assess disaster assistance received from various groups? What are people's criteria for considering disaster assistance as effective or ineffective?

This KAI highlights the various ways disaster assistance is delivered to disaster-stricken areas and the way people perceive them.

From people's experiences, we learn about how post-disaster assistance affects local coping mechanisms. Post-disaster responses play a very crucial role in shaping people's attitudes towards disasters and how they respond to the next crisis situation. Relief assistance, for instance creates dependency if it is not based on the real needs of survivors. Even the manner of giving assistance may create confusion and division among the survivors. Hence, this KAI focuses on people's perception of internal and external disaster response mechanisms. This includes an assessment

of the functions of government disaster coordinating councils, as well as an assessment of the responses of non-government agencies. This KAI also allows people to share their indicators of an effective or ineffective response.

DM and Development

As pointed out earlier, disasters occur in a development context and that development interventions can create conditions which make people more vulnerable to disasters. This makes it important for DM to be integrated in development plans and support vulnerability reduction measures.

This KAI assesses the extent by which development strategies address the community's vulnerability to disasters. It explores the types of development initiatives being implemented by government and non-government agencies and how these programmes or projects strategically address underlying vulnerabilities of the community.

This KAI specifically looks into development policies and practices of different development actors like the government, NGOs, and people's organisations, and how initiatives from the different sectors are linked to each other. Furthermore, people's participation in the development planning process is also assessed. This KAI tries to find out if mechanisms for people's

active involvement in the process are in place.

This KAI also seeks to develop a criteria for effective or ineffective development initiatives and process. In other words, people are encouraged to come up with an evaluation of development projects in their communities, assessing how effectively these projects respond to their needs, and how needs and programmes are prioritized within the project framework.

Analyzing Data

PCVA workshops are conducted at the barangay level where residents and village council officials participate in responding to the above KAIs. The data from the barangays are then consolidated (using the CVA matrix) and presented to a municipal workshop where officials from the government and non-government organisations contribute in analysing and validating the responses to the KAIs. At this stage, a municipal level PCVA is already being developed. The process continues up to the provincial level, depending on the scope of the study. PCVA workshops at the municipal and provincial levels make the research more inclusive by obtaining additional perspectives from other key sectors.

The PCVA is continuously developed and implemented to obtain a better understanding of how disasters happen and how they impact on poor communities. For every PCVA research

conducted, improvements are made on the concept, particularly on the formulation of KAIs to make them more sensitive to local issues about disasters and development. As vulnerabilities in communities continue to evolve and affect people in different ways, so does the PCVA. This is the only way to make it relevant and useful in changing the conditions in vulnerable communities.

Through the KAIs we want to learn about the disaster survivors and how they cope with disaster impacts. From their disaster experiences, we want to know their ideas about disasters and development. Having carefully formulated the KAIs towards this end, the next important consideration would be: How do we get the information? How do we ensure people's active participation in the process?

B. Participation in the PCVA

"(Through the PCVA) we discussed our strengths and weaknesses in relation to disasters. The PCVA involved the barangay council, women's association, the Savings and Loan beneficiaries, Catholic association, Iglesia ni Kristo and senior citizens."

*-PCVA participants from
Kilikilihan, San Miguel, Catanduanes
"The PCVA process included individual interviews and*

community meetings. We conducted community mapping of local resources, and compared livelihoods before and after Mt. Pinatubo eruption. We talked about people's livelihoods and effects of the eruption on our lives and surroundings."

- PCVA participants from Sta. Catalina, Minalin, Pampanga

The PCVA gives primary importance to the participation of the vulnerable people in the research process. It follows the principles of Participatory Rural (or Urban) Appraisal or PRA (now also known as Participatory Learning and Action or PLA). The PCVA was conceptualized as an enabling process where poor people can analyse their disaster experiences and take action to address their vulnerabilities.

The PRA is described as a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect (Chambers 2002 January).

But the PRA is not only about appraisal, or getting information. The PRA involves a process where learning and action take place, and where knowledge comes from poor people's perceptions and experiences. In the PRA, poor people are recognized as capable and creative and treated as partners in development (Kotze and Holloway 1996).

Chambers further reminded us: "good PRA is a process, not a one-off event" (2002). And for this process of learning and action to take shape, PRA practitioners should be willing to:

BOX 6

✓ **"Hand over the stick". We are facilitators, not teachers.**

✓ **Listen and learn from the people. Have the confidence that people can analyze, teach, and plan.**

✓ **Be flexible in applying, experimenting, combining different methodologies, aiming to allow poor people to express themselves.**

✓ **Open to commit mistakes, admit that we committed mistakes.**

✓ **Continuously try to do better.**

✓ **Be flexible with people's priorities and schedule. We should be the one adjusting to their priorities, not them to our schedule.**

✓ **Spend enough time with the people in the field.**

✓ **Learn to relax.**

These are only a few of the challenges which face PRA practitioners. But don't be discouraged at this stage. We all have to go through the process of changing our behaviour and attitudes. And it's better to learn in the field, not inside the classrooms. Lessons and insights from actual conduct of PRA in PCVA workshops can be found in Section III on Conducting PCVA.

Improving the PCVA through the PRA

During PCVA workshops, we target and mobilize farmers, fishers, pedicab drivers, workers, carpenters, laundry women, fishpond workers, small-scale traders, vendors, students, children and many others who are relegated to the peripheries of decision-making processes in the community. We would gather together in the barangay hall, in a classroom, at the community stage, or under a tree. We would find any place with enough space for people to engage in open discussion. In Barangay Hinipaan (Bagamanoc) in Catanduanes, sessions were held along the riverbank, shaded by a huge bridge that was damaged by the last super typhoon. (One time, after the morning session, the team went swimming in the river while the mothers did their laundry.)

Using participatory methodologies and PRA techniques help in creating an atmosphere where individuals feel assured that their opinions and insights are valued and respected. This contributes greatly in making the PCVA research a people-

led process, instead of the traditional researcher-oriented data gathering research exercise.

Aside from the participation of the marginalised groups, the PCVA process also involves other stakeholder groups in the community. We invite groups from the government, such as the barangay council members and members of the municipal disaster coordinating council. We also invite representatives from local NGOs, church groups, the academe, local business, among others. Their participation provides a broader perspective to the PCVA.

The PCVA process does not only allow people to do the analysis themselves. It also provides an opportunity for the different stakeholders to discuss community concerns together. In many instances during PCVA workshops, "heated" discussions would ensue because of disagreements in analysis and contrasting opinions. This was especially true between local residents and government officials. But with effective facilitation, those PCVA workshops became a venue for dialogue between residents and local officials, between government and NGOs, and resulted in a more thorough analysis of community problems and issues.

But if the people and other stakeholders are the ones to do the discussing and analysing, what happens to the "researchers"?

With a lot of effort, we try to be effective as

facilitators by engaging people in analysis. Most of the time we just stay in a corner, keeping our opinions to ourselves, asking questions, listening and learning from what the people are discussing.

We also keep ourselves busy documenting the proceedings. (Please see section III for more insights about our experiences in facilitating participatory methodologies.)

Let us now look at some of the PRA methodologies that we use in the PCVAs. Please note that these methodologies are the results of practice, experimentation, and exploration of various ways of using PRA techniques. Some of these methodologies work for us, while others still need to be worked out.

**Oxfam also
wanted the
research to be a
learning process by
encouraging more
input and
participation from
local communities
and key
stakeholders**



Women discuss their gender-specific disaster experiences and coping strategies. PCVA in Pikit, North Cotabato 2000.

Figure 1

Mapping - resource map, community map, hazard map

Mapping helps in visually representing the physical attributes and various resources which can be found in the community. We combine community and resource maps with a hazard map to come up with a local vulnerability map where one can easily identify settlements, resources, and infrastructures which are threatened by certain hazards.

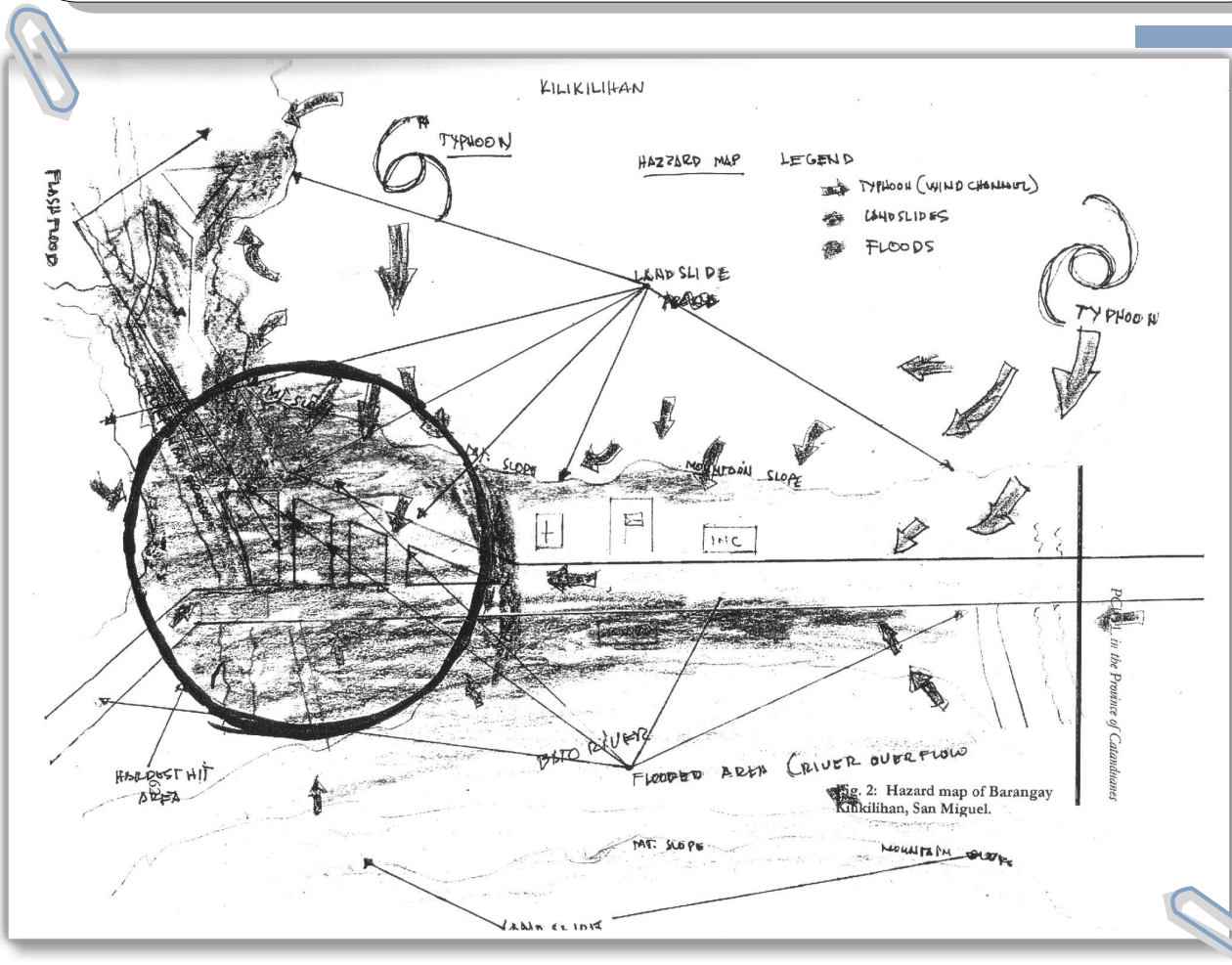


Fig. 2: Hazard map of Barangay Kinkilihan, San Miguel.

Figure 2

Historical Transect

We use historical transects to depict how disasters have affected resources and other physical attributes in the community through the years. It is important that the participants agree on the critical period to be factored in the transect. For example, in the Central Luzon PCVA we used pre-eruption and post eruption as the critical periods.

ICIKI KIDNAN

LIKAS NA YAMAN	BEFORE 1995	AFTER ROSING 1995	AFTER VOLCANO 1998	DAHILAN
ABACA				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MABEMING NAGTUMBANG ABACA NAGIKAPUTOL-PUTOL NA'BULOK NAUBOS ANG LABAT NA PANANIM NAMATAY
NIYOG				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAPUTOLANG MGA DANON AT PUKO NG NIYOG KUMUNTI ANG NIYOG NAUBOS ANG MGA PUNO, NAGKAPUTOL-PUTOL ANG KATUBAN, NAUBOS ANG MGA
PALAY				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIBINGING PHYAT, WALANG MGA BUNGA NATUBUNAN ANG LUPA, LABA NG GRABA, WALANG TANI MEN (NATUBUNAN)
KAGABATAN (KAKANUNAN)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAUBOS ANG MGA DANON / NATUBO NDBALI, NATUMBA NAGKAPUTOL-PUTOL, KIBEMIHAN NG PUNO NAMATAY
ILOG AT BATA				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KUNTI ANG IGDA, KUSUG ANG NAHURALI BUMABAW ANG TURBID, ISANG URI NG ISDA ANG NAHURALI
SAGING				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAPUTOL ANG MGA PUNO NG SAGING KUSUG ANG BUNGA NAUBOS / NATUMBA ANG LABAT NA PUNO / WALANG MGA KUNING BUNGA
FRUIT TREES				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NATUMBA ANG MGA PUNONG KANAY / KUSUG ANG NAKAMUHANG PRODUCTO WALA NA ISG MAN NA MAPAPALIHAN

Figure 3

Matrix Ranking/Scoring

Ranking and/or scoring are used to find out the degree to which different hazards affect people, property, community resources, infrastructure, and other elements of the community. A rank or score is given to disasters to find out which has the most or least effects on their community. Participants use a set of criteria that they themselves formulate and agree on.

Wealth Ranking

This is a modified version which focuses on identifying the criteria used to differentiate socio-economic groups within a community. This helps in identifying the most vulnerable groups in the community.

Guiamlong (Storm Surge), Ranking of Impacts of Disasters Community group

Uri ng Kalamidad (Type of Calamity)	Pagbuhay nin mga tawo (Livelihood)	Buhay ning tawo (Life)	Epekto sa pag-iisip ng mga tao at kalusugan (Psychological/Health)	Pagbabago sa kapaligiran (Changes in the Environment)
El Niño	G	G	G	MG
La Niña	PG	PG	PG	PG
Bagyo (Typhoon)	PG	MG	PG	PG
Pagbaha (Flooding)	PG	PG	PG	PG
Pagtilis (Landslide)	PG	PG	PG	PG
Paglinog (Earthquake)	G	G	G	G

Legend:

G - Grabe: diit man ang nauyag (severe; least damage)

MG - Mas Grabe: dai man naubos, may natada (more severe; more damages)

PG - Pinaka-grabe: gabos uyag (most severe; great degree of damages)

Figure 4

Venn Diagrammes

Venn diagrammes are used to assess people's level of engagement with different agencies or individuals that provide DM services and assistance to the community. Again, participants use their own criteria to determine effective and ineffective service.

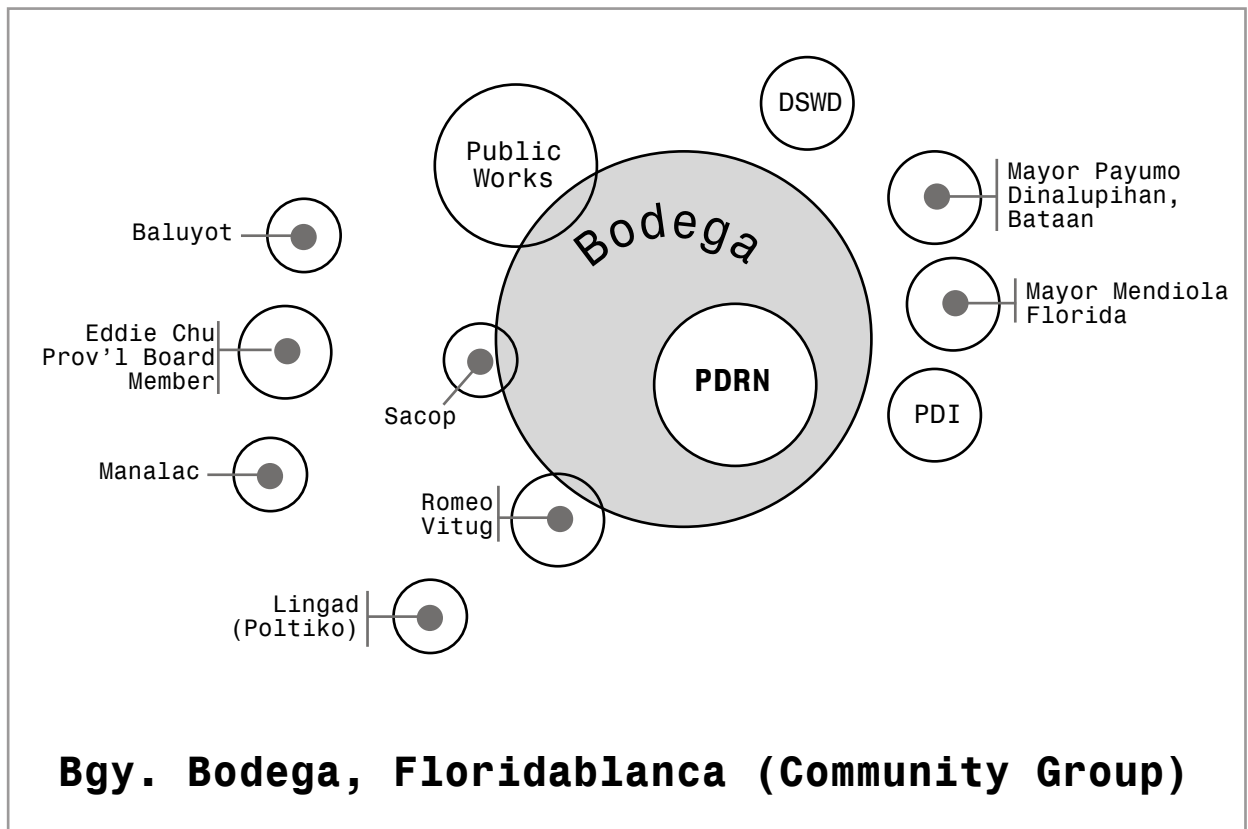


Figure 6

Seasonal Calendar

We use the seasonal calendar to plot the different livelihood strategies of people in the community in relation to recurring hazards. This method helps in assessing how people cope with disasters and seasonality by diversifying livelihood strategies. Some examples show us that people would have different livelihoods during the dry season, rainy or typhoon season, or when there's drought or war.

Timeline

We apply the timeline to trace the different disasters experienced by the community over a certain period of time. This method can show how frequent a certain disaster affects a community and how people have developed response mechanisms over the years.

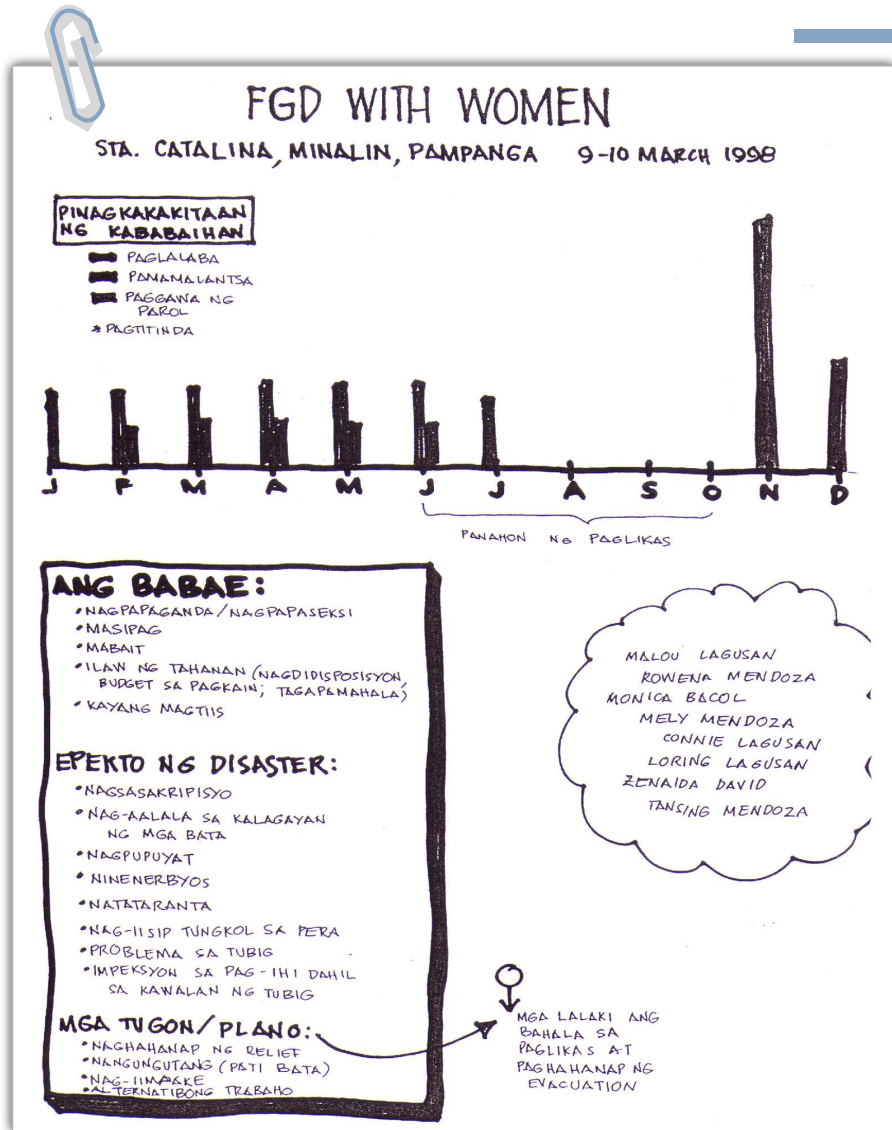


Figure 7

Gender exercises such as focus group discussions with women and men.

Topics for discussion include concepts about women and men, the roles that men and women play in the household and in the community, and the effects of disasters on men and women.



Figure 8

Role Playing

Role playing is used to demonstrate how disasters affect households or whole communities by using symbols, movements, sounds and various indigenous materials. This is a superb way to generate discussions.



Household interviews / Oral histories (storytelling)

Oral histories were done mostly with old people to obtain information about changes in people's vulnerabilities, severity and frequency of disasters, etc. through the years.



Endnotes

ⁱ Please see *Rising from the Ashes, development strategies in times of disaster* by Anderson and Woodrow for cases of how disaster relief may exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities of disaster hit communities.

ⁱⁱ The Local Development Councils are formed to assist the corresponding provincial, municipal and barangay level councils in setting the direction of economic and social development and coordinating development efforts within its territorial jurisdiction. Headed by the local chief executive (Governor, Mayor or Barangay Chairperson) the LDC is composed of the local council members, representatives of non-government organisations who constitute not less than 1/4 of the members of the fully organised council, and the representative of the congressman (The 1991 local government code, Nolleto ed. 2001).

ⁱⁱⁱ Local Government Code or Republic Act 7160 devolves power and resources to local government units at the provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels, and allows for people's participation in local governance and development. The Code is mandated by the 1987 Constitution which states that the territorial and political subdivisions of the Republic shall have "local autonomy" which Congress shall provide in a local government code (Gonzales 2000).

^{iv} Presidential Decree 1566 or "Strengthening the Philippine Disaster Control Capability and Establishing the National Program on Community Preparedness" is the legislation that embodies the government's disaster response policy framework.



Children suffer the most during disasters. Elementary students in a PCVA workshop in Talitay, Pikit, N. Cotabato 2000.

II

Organising a PCVA Research

II. Organising a PCVA Research

We want to present here a listing of the things that should be considered in organising a PCVA research. However, this should not be regarded as the only way to do PCVA research, and should just serve as guide if ever you decide to organise a PCVA in your locality.

This list is divided into three stages: the planning and designing stage, the field work stage, and the synthesis and reporting stage.

A. Planning and designing phase

1 Form a PCVA research team.

We can make it participatory from the very start. We need to identify persons or organisations who may have a stake in the research and invite them to join the team. The PCVA research team is responsible for designing, planning, and implementing the PCVA research. It sets the objectives of the research and in doing so shares among themselves the accountability for the process and findings of the research.

In past PCVAs, the PCVA team included key stakeholders in the community, such as the local partner NGO and PO. In Catanduanes, Oxfam

worked with the local government and another international NGO. The composition of the research team will depend on the scope and target of the PCVA.

2 Team orientation and familiarisation session

We need to help the research team members appreciate what they are getting themselves into. Through the orientation and familiarisation session, we can walk them through the different stages of the PCVA research process.

The orientation sessions are divided into three main components:

- Familiarisation with DM and PRA concepts
- PCVA designing
- Field work preparation

Familiarisation with DM and PRA concepts

The objective of this session is to familiarise the members of the PCVA team with DM concepts and PRA methodologies. It includes discussions on DM theories and frameworks such as the CVA,

For hand outs and other resource materials for this session, you may refer to the following:

DM and CVA. *Rising from the Ashes, development strategies in times of disaster* by Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow

Pressure and Release Model. *At risk: Natural hazards, people's vulnerability, and disasters* by Pieres Blaikie, Terry Cannon, Ian Davis and Ben Wisner

PRA/PLA. *Relaxed and Participatory Appraisal: Notes on practical approaches and methods for participants in PRA/PLA-related familiarisation workshops* by Robert Chambers January 2002 www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/

the Pressure and Release Model (Blaikie et. al. 1994), and sessions on PRA principles and tools.

3 *Designing the PCVA research*

After the lectures and discussions on DM and PRA, the team formulates the research design by identifying the following components:

Over-all objective. As a team, what do we want to achieve at the end of the research process?

Key Areas of Inquiry. Which aspects of the community would you like to focus the study on? Please refer to section IA for a detailed discussion on what KAIs are all about. However, we should formulate our own KAIs based on our research objectives.

Key Questions. Based on our KAIs, what would be the main set of questions for the participants?

Key Informant. Who among the community groups would have a say on the KAI? It is not necessary to have only one key informant per KAI. One KAI can involve one, two, or even three informants. This also serves our validation and triangulation requirements.

Recommended PRA methodologies. What method would best facilitate the discussion of a specific KAI?

Identify persons or organisations who may have a stake in the research and invite them to join the team.

Box. 7

At the end of the session, we should achieve something like this:

PCVA Objectives	Key Areas of Inquiry	Key Questions	Key Informant/Group	PRA Methodology (Recommended)
To identify gaps in disaster management services in the community	Assessment of DM services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Who are the key DM actors in the community? ■ What are the different types of DM services? ■ How do people assess the effectiveness of DM services? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Residents ■ Barangay Council ■ People's Organisation ■ Women (to identify women specific services) ■ Children (to identify services specific to children's needs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Venn diagram ■ Scoring/Ranking of effective responses ■ Household interview

Criteria for selecting PCVA areas

We also need to agree on a set of criteria for choosing the PCVA sites. Just to give you an idea: we can select areas where we can compare variables. For example, we can choose highly vulnerable vs. less vulnerable areas (as we did in Central Luzon), or we can compare experiences of people in coastal, flood and landslide areas (which we did in Catanduanes). Again, this will depend on the PCVA objectives. The important thing is that the areas selected should facilitate trending, comparing and provide different levels of analysis (Barangay, Municipal, Provincial levels).

Field Practicum

Based on past experiences, the members of the research team usually show varying degrees of experience and exposure in facilitating PRA methodologies. This causes some tension among the members. Hence, it is highly recommended that a field practicum follow the theoretical discussion of PRA to "level-off" the team members' appreciation of PRA. The objective of the practicum is to allow the team members to "get a feel" of the principles and tools prior to actual field work. It also aims to identify areas where team members can help each other to improve facilitation.

Preparation for field work

Once the team has agreed on and finalized the design, then it is time to identify the following:

- Field work schedule
- Schedule of courtesy calls
- Materials needed for fieldwork and workshop
- Arrangements for lodging and food in the field work area

It would be better to identify specific persons who would be responsible for each activity and what logistical support (e.g., transportation, cash, etc.) will be needed to implement the activity.

B. Field work

1 **Courtesy call to local officials.** This activity is crucial in preparing the community for the PCVA activity, as well as in establishing rapport with local officials and other stakeholder groups in the community. During courtesy calls, we should remember to do the following:

- Clearly explain to local officials, other community leaders and residents what the objectives of the PCVA are. Explain what activities are to be conducted; who the members of the PCVA team are; and, most importantly, the role that the community and the local officials will play in the PCVA.

- Discuss and clarify expectations at this stage to avoid miscommunication between the team and the community members.

- Identify venue and agree on the time of PCVA activities (FGDs, workshops, interviews) to avoid confusion among participants and to facilitate better participation among participants.

- Make sure that each group has at least one facilitator and one documentor.

2 **Actual workshops.** We should always introduce, in a very clear manner, the KALs as well as the concept of participation. This helps the participants get warmed up for the discussion. People would also participate more actively if they feel that their ideas will be appreciated.

And remember: Hand over the stick. Facilitate. Listen. Be patient. Relax.

3 **Conduct team assessments at the end of the day.** Identify what needs to be improved or maintained regarding the following components:

- Process (Are we going too fast, or too slow? Which tool did not work? What can be done to make it work?)

- KAI (What information has been gathered so far? What needs to be stressed on the next day?)

- Participation (Who is participating in the process? Who is dominating the discussion? What group still needs to be included in the process?)

- Facilitation (Are we handing over the

stick? Who needs help in facilitation?)
- Documentation (Did we get the important points raised by the participants? Who needs help in documentation?)

Based on the result of the assessment, make a plan for the next day.

4 Triangulate and validate information by consulting secondary sources and comparing different but related areas of inquiry. Are there any discrepancies or gaps in the information being generated? What secondary sources do we need to validate the information? What other grouping can be asked the same KAI?

5 Take a rest. Facilitating, listening, documenting and analyzing can take its toll on the team's momentum and creativity. It is not a sin to take break from the research and from each other.

C. Synthesis

Going back to the objectives of the study, the research team's synthesis should identify:

- Trends and patterns, similarities and differences in terms of people's analyses of their

capacities and vulnerabilities;

- Immediate and strategic issues per area of inquiry can be stated in terms of problems, gaps, and difficulties; and,

- Options or possibilities in terms of programme development, direct or indirect interventions, capability building, etc.

D. Sharing and feedback meetings with PCVA participants.

It is best to share the results with the participants (or their representatives) even before finalising the PCVA report and to include their feedback. Furthermore, the PCVA results should be presented in a manner that people can understand and appreciate. If we present a 50-page report, would people appreciate it?



Men discuss their vulnerabilities and coping strategies. PCVA in Buluan, Maguindanao 2000.



The Aetas assess the impact of Mt. Pinatubo eruption on their sources of food. PCVA in Loob-bunga resettlement site, Botolan, Zambales 1998.

III

Conducting PCVA: A Process of Learning and Action

III. Conducting PCVA

This section contains the major lessons gained from the PCVAs conducted in the Philippines. It discusses our experiences in three major stages of the PCVA process: the planning phase, field work phase, and reporting phase.

1 Effective Planning is the Key to Effective Implementation

1.1 Know when to use the PCVA

Before planning a PCVA, we must first be sure that it is the right tool for our particular situation. So far, PCVAs are used in three kinds of situations:

a) When information is needed to upgrade an ongoing DM programme. Such was the case with the PCVAs in Central Luzon and Central Mindanao Region. Oxfam was then working with local partners assessing the situation and needs of Pinatubo and conflict-affected communities, as well as gaps in the disaster responses of various agencies. PCVA information was used to formulate policy recommendations for Oxfam and its partners in improving their DM programmes in the region.

b) When DM needs to be integrated in an ongoing development programme. This was the reason for conducting the PCVA in communities where

ELACⁱ and SIKAT were implementing natural resource management programmes. The PCVA was used to identify areas of integration and what activities could facilitate such integration.

c) When information is needed to develop a DM programme in a new project area. The PCVA findings in Catanduanes were used to develop the BUILD-ACTION project in Catanduanes, a community-based disaster preparedness programme aimed at increasing the disaster preparedness capabilities of vulnerable communities.

The rule is clear: choose areas where the PCVA process is likely to be sustained. This means that there is an intention to implement a DM programme and that PCVA findings will be utilised to address programme needs and local issues, and to continue the process of learning and empowerment in the community even after the PCVA research.

1.2 Design it with Others

Past PCVAs show the importance of planning the research together with key stakeholders. The objective is to make the whole process a shared activity of various groups rather than by just one organisation (like Oxfam, for example).

Since it started using the PCVA tool, Oxfam has always involved local NGOs and POs in planning the research.

In Central Luzon, the PCVA team was composed of local NGOs and POs which were Oxfam's partners in DM programmes in Pampanga and Zambales. In Catanduanes, the absence of an active NGO community encouraged Oxfam to initiate a partnership with the local government.

Collective planning does not only strengthen the participatory nature of the research but also ensures that the stakeholders have a common understanding and appreciation of the PCVA framework. Differences in ideology or perspectives usually surface at this point but in our experience, they were treated as part of the diversity the team had to deal with. Everyone was challenged to be open to other perspectives and to participate in finding out which one will best serve the objectives of the team.

The rule is clear: choose areas where the PCVA process is likely to be sustained.

Since the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder are identified and agreed on at this stage, management of the research is also shared, making everybody responsible for the process and results of the study.

An added value of including stakeholders in planning the research, specifically NGOs and POs, is their knowledge of the local terrain and conditions of target communities where the PCVA is conducted. Since they work mostly "on the ground", they know the people, their schedules, meeting places, etc. This helps in familiarising the team members, especially the "outsiders", with certain details they have to work with in planning the research.

1.3 Enlist Team Members with Diverse Backgrounds

At the beginning of a PCVA process, we organise stakeholders into a PCVA team which will be responsible for overseeing the planning and implementation of the PCVA. This team is also responsible for ensuring that the logistical requirements of the research are met, and that each member is continuously motivated through regular conduct of feedback and periodic team debriefing sessions.

The PCVA teams are normally comprised of community organisers, PO leaders, and NGO staff. Although individual team members have different types of work and offered different perspectives, they all belong to the social development sector. At times, this could be a limitation.

In Catanduanes, for instance, PCVA participants said they heard "explosions" and experienced

"earthquakes" before a landslide. This led them to believe that earthquakes actually triggered the landslides.

The PCVA team found out later, after interviewing government officials, that the ground movement people referred to were in fact the precursor to landslides. However, they were not earthquakes but ground movement caused by soil suddenly starting to loosen and break up.

On hindsight, a geologist could have helped in probing this experience a little deeper. An expert could have facilitated further discussions on people's perceptions of possible causes of landslides in their community. Hence, it is recommended that in organising the PCVA team, one should try to mobilise individuals with diverse backgrounds suited to the specific targets of the study.

Having organised a well-balanced team with regard to expertise, we should ensure that team members:

1.4 A Team Orientation is Absolutely Important

The purpose of the orientation session is to jump-start the learning process among the members of the PCVA team. The two-day workshop-style activity allows the participants to familiarise themselves with basic concepts of disaster management, capacities and vulnerabilities analysis, and PRA/PLA. In cases where the team members would be working together for the first time, the orientation becomes an opportunity to get to know each other better.

During team orientations, participants are asked to reflect on and share their understanding and experiences with participatory approaches in their work. This particular session helps a lot in setting the tone of the research process, especially in determining the members' level of experience in participatory work.

In past PCVA orientations, we found out that most NGOs were familiar with PRA concepts

MUST BE:

- Familiar with the community where the PCVA is to be conducted
- Comfortable in dealing with all types of people
- Willing to deflate their ego
- Willing to inflate their sense of humor
- Able to have fun while doing serious work
- Creative
- Open to learn new ways of doing things and,
- Open to unlearn some bad work habits.

but have different levels of experience. Government workers, on the other hand, encountered the concept for the first time and were initially apprehensive about the idea of participation. In a recent PCVA research in Pampanga, facilitating PRA/PLA processes was a huge challenge for government workers. In the Central Mindanao PCVA, the orientation was conducted in three days, including a one-day field practicum, because the local volunteers were doing PRA for the first time.

Generally, the orientation includes the following sections:

- Sharing of the participating organisation's programmes and services (to learn about organisational expertise);
- A Basic DM Orientation highlighting the vulnerability framework;
- Discussion of the CVA Framework;
- Discussion of PRA/PLA principles and tools; and,
- A Workshop on PCVA design (PCVA objectives, Key Areas of Inquiry, Key Informants, Key Questions and recommended PRA methodology).

For the discussion and sample of PCVA design, please see section II, Organising a PCVA.

2 On the Ground: Working with the People

The PCVA's use of participatory methods, especially of PRA/PLA tools, is far from being perfect. But in past PCVAs effort was exerted to follow PRA/PLA principles.

Every PCVA is an opportunity to adapt, experiment, and learn from the process. The following are some of the more important lessons learned from experiences of facilitating and promoting participatory methodologies and approaches through the PCVA researches. It is divided into three major concerns: people's participation, facilitation and choosing PRA methods.

2.1 Ensure People's Participation

Mobilising local people for the workshops

It is not easy to mobilise people for PCVA workshops. We realised that people had other more important concerns: they go to work, bring kids to school, attend to household chores, wash clothes, go to the market, etc. Also, numerous workshops and surveys have been done on communities in the past and in some occasions people asked: "What? Another workshop?" Even if they've showed up in the workshops, they would soon leave to attend to their daily concerns which are "more important" than the research.

So what do we do to encourage people to attend PCVA workshops?

Be Aware of their Situation

We try to immerse ourselves into their reality. We deal and work with their schedule, not against it. The team goes to where the people usually congregate. We adjust to their schedule.

In Guiamlong (Caramoran, Catanduanes), workshops were held only in the afternoons when most domestic tasks were already completed. Women attended the workshops after lunch and were joined by men later in the afternoon after coming back from work. Being able to adjust to their normal day-to-day schedule was key to mobilizing and encouraging people to participate in the PCVA process. It was our way of showing them that we valued their time.

In future PCVAs, it might be necessary to extend your stay in the community. You may need to spend more days in the barangay "doing nothing". Just observing the people go about their daily chores. This would provide a lot of information about their daily routine and help you adjust to their schedule.

Seek the Help of Local Leaders

Another option is to seek the assistance of key people in the community. Usually, as part of the social preparations for the PCVA, barangay officials and PO officers are contacted by the team and informed about the PCVA, its objectives, and schedule. They are also requested to help in

explaining to the residents the purpose of the workshops. They are also tasked to invite the people to the workshops.

Ensure Equality of Representation

However, it is important to know the people who are being mobilised to participate in the workshops.

Some people, especially those "mobilised" through the local officials, may turn out to be "pre-selected". They could be political associates of a local official, members of a dominant community organisation, or more influential members of the community (e.g., well-off residents), all of whom might be favored over individuals belonging to the most marginalised or vulnerable sectors in the community. This is not saying, however, that the perspective of the politically and economically powerful is not important. However, we should remember that the primary goal of the PCVA is to make sure that the voice of the poor and the most vulnerable sectors of the community are heard.

In one incident in Pampanga, the PCVA team had to roam around the barangay to literally look for men, since it was mostly women who were participating in the workshops. In conducting the

Every PCVA
is an
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experiment,
and learn from
the process.

PCVA in conflict areas, the team had to make sure that villagers sympathetic to different sides of the conflict — MNLF, MILF, as well as the Christian settlers— were represented in the workshops.

2.2 Facilitation: Drawing Out People's Voices

PRA practitioners are always being told: "Hand over the (teaching) stick. Facilitate. Don't lecture." Every facilitator knows that this is easier said than done. Here are some reasons why:

❑ Poor people assume that they are in a training activity. Hence their tendency to keep quiet and just listen to the "facilitator".

❑ Poor people are used to being asked "yes and no" questions. Most of them are at a loss when asked: "Why is it a problem? How do you intend to address this problem?" They are used to having other people analyse their situation for them.

❑ There is the "mallit na tao lang kami" ("we are just little people") perception of themselves. Poor people usually say: "Sino kami para pakinggan ng mga kinaaukulan?" ("Why would the authorities listen to people like us?")

Sadly, there are agencies whose programme designs continue to reinforce poor people's negative attitude about themselves. Some interventions encourage people to feel that they are mere beneficiaries and their opinions do not

matter.


We need to break the invisible wall between facilitators and participants. This is the wall that keeps them from participating. PRA demands a change in attitude and behaviour from the practitioner in order to break this wall. Do we really believe that poor people can participate, that they can analyse their situation?

Do we really believe that we can learn from their experiences? Are we willing to listen to their stories?

If we do, then it would show in our behaviour. It will be easy to step back, hand over the stick, and let them create their own process of inquiry and analysis.

Our past PCVA experience provides tips to ensure people's active participation.

a. Getting started

 **Mind your body language.** In PRA settings, our body language can unwittingly reinforce the villagers' negative perceptions of themselves. For instance, talking in front of the participants or standing in the middle makes you the center of attention. This encourages listening, rather than discussing. As much as possible, sit with the villagers and avoid standing in front or in the middle. Show that you intend to listen and learn from them.



Earn trust and respect. The process should create an atmosphere of trust and respect. Make them feel that their opinion and ideas will be valued and respected. We always say: "Walang maling sagot." ("There are no incorrect answers.") This would encourage people to share their thoughts and experiences. Be sincere in wanting to learn about their situation and problems, and in listening to their stories.



Create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Drop the formalities. Call them by their first names and ask them to do the same. Tell jokes, share stories. (But don't be rude nor too familiar). This does not only break the proverbial ice but also helps develop their confidence in you.



Get a local co-facilitator. Even while facilitating, you can ask somebody from the group to assist you. That person can make your questions clearer, or can encourage those who are quiet to talk and participate. Just make sure that the co-facilitator does not dominate the discussions.



Learn to wait. Be patient. Don't rush the process. Give the people enough time to think about your questions and relate it to their local experiences. Give yourself time to formulate your probing questions.

b. Major issues in facilitation

We also encountered difficulties in facilitating PCVA processes. These ranged from difficulty in

applying a particular PRA methodology to handling sensitive topics. The following are some of the more major issues we encountered in the field while conducting the PCVA.

Sometimes, participatory processes can really be time consuming. At the same time, the facilitator feels unsure about the quality of information being generated. The participants look uninterested. The following questions could serve as guides for finding out whether you already need to take a break:

- How long has the activity been going on? (e.g., Maybe the group has been discussing the same topic for more than an hour and people are getting restless or sleepy.)
- Do the participants have time limitations? (e.g., Is it cooking time for women? Maybe the men need to go back to farm work.)
- What is the quality of participation being generated by the process? (e.g., How many people are talking? Who is dominating the discussion? Is the facilitator the only one left talking?)

b.1. Using participatory vs. extractive processes.

Various factors could lead to total abandonment of participatory processes. Time pressure could lead to rushing which limits dialogue and participation. It compels the researcher to "get" as much information as s/he could. The researcher resorts to "interviewing" and other more extractive methodologies instead of facilitating.

Extractive methods are not bad per se and should not automatically be avoided. For instance, some information can be best obtained through interviews. However, the quality of discussion and participation should never be sacrificed because of time limitations. We cannot rush the process. We need to make our schedules flexible.

Unfamiliarity with PRA methodologies can also lead to resorting to more traditional processes such as interviews and FGDs. Thus, the facilitator needs to familiarise herself/himself with the PRA toolkit. One way to do this is to team-up with someone more experienced in using PRA methodologies, and do some practice. Fortunately, mistakes are allowed for those who genuinely desire to learn participatory methodologies and aim to do better in the next session.

b.2. Dealing with people's expectations.

In a PCVA research, people undergo a process of

examining issues and concerns that affect their life and livelihood in the community. While this helps them articulate their feelings and opinions about the different aspects of community life, it also raises expectations that something is "coming". In other words, PCVA processes could raise expectations, making people believe that their participation in the research would yield something beneficial.

The following questions from PCVA participants reveal this: "We need alternative sources of income to increase our capacity to cope with disasters. Maybe you (the research team) can help us get funding for a livelihood project?" or "Can you help us build an evacuation center in the village?" We should remember that people have been surveyed and "researched" for so many times in the past. And frequently they have been disappointed. Expectations must be handled carefully.

What do we do when people press us for concrete responses and make requests during PCVAs? Here are some suggestions based on past PCVA "encounters":

- Make sure that you have clearly explained the objectives of the study. This may help in lowering expectations.
- Make sure that the process of the research has been clearly explained, and say further that it would be inappropriate to address these concerns when the team is only at the information-gathering stage. However, tell them that their concerns will be included in the report, together with the recommendations from other groups/stakeholders.
- Tell them that you will be back after the research has been completed to give feedback on the results of the study.

Of course, it also helps a lot in handling people's expectations if you are aware that your group has post-PCVA plans for the community.

b.3 Handling sensitive topics and disagreements

Since PCVA allows for the convergence of different actors and perspectives, the facilitator must be prepared to handle situations

where conflicting opinions lead to "tense" discussions, or when a certain topic is considered "sensitive" by the participants. If not handled properly, this could affect the quality of participation.

In the Central Mindanao PCVA, for example, the team was extra cautious in introducing mapping exercises (e.g., hazard and resource mapping) because some leaders and residents were worried that maps may compromise the security of the community.

In another context, some PCVA participants in post-Pinatubo Pampanga did not feel comfortable doing the Venn diagram because they felt it was unfair to "evaluate" those organisations and individuals who helped them during the crisis. They were hesitant to assess the effectiveness of agencies which provided relief assistance to the community because according to them: "Lahat naman sila ay nakatulong sa komunidad." ("All of them were able to help the community.")ⁱⁱ. It was only after they came up with a clear set of criteria to assess the effectiveness of relief assistance, and were assured that they were only trying to look for ways to make relief more effective, that they agreed to do the Venn diagram.

In Catanduanes, some participants were very vocal about their grievances against officials in their barangay. During the provincial workshop, a government official openly accused the residents

of a village of illegal logging activities which allegedly caused landslides in the barangay. The facilitator had to intervene and explain to the participants that the workshop was held to identify options in addressing problems in the community. These experiences show that PCVA has the potential to generate different perspectives from different stakeholders. However, if not handled properly, conflicting perspectives could sometimes lead to serious divisive positions among participants. Hence, the PCVA facilitator must be sensitive to arising "tensions" and lead the discussion towards more constructive ways of analysing things and avoid aggravating conflicts.

b.4 PCVA fatigue: Is there such a thing?

This refers to a feeling of tediousness after conducting PCVA research over an extended period of time (even if done in different barangays). One suddenly feels that the process has become monotonous. You keep asking the same set of questions and get, more or less, the same kind of responses. Feeling tired, the team members become impervious to local nuances.

The following are a few measures which can be taken when the PCVA team begins to experience any of the above indicators of fatigue:

Try rotating KAIs to different teams. For instance, if team A focused on the biophysical aspect of barangay A, they can take on disaster experiences in barangay B. This will also give them the chance to try a new PRA methodology.

Encourage the use of a variety of PRA methods on a KAI.

Encourage experimentation and improvisation on some PRA methods.

Encourage individual reflections on their own participation in the process or what needs to be improved in the research process.

Take a break. Energize. Take the PCVA team on a picnic by the lake, or swim in the sea, or just hang around with the local residents and talk about non-PCVA matters (and don't take out your manila paper and permanent markers, please!)

2.3 Choose the Right PRA Tools

PRA tools seek to empower people by allowing them to reflect, analyse and act on their situation through a variety of methodologies like mapping, diagramming, listing, estimating, visualizing, scoring, ranking, etc.

PRA tools are used to help generate discussion and facilitate participation. They are designed to enable the marginalised sectors of a community to analyse, voice out their opinions, and to play a more active part in formulating policies.

On the other hand, people have preferences, and the facilitator should be sensitive to these preferences. S/he should be able to tell when people are still freely expressing and enjoying themselves while doing a matrix ranking or mapping, or when they are just following instructions "to get things over and done with". The facilitator should keep in mind that PRA empowers and should not burden people. This should guide him/her in choosing PRA tools. PRA should not be done for PRA's sake.

A case in point would be the experience in an Aetaⁱⁱⁱ resettlement village in Botolan, Zambales, where one group of participants made a pre-eruptation map of their former villages on the ground, using stones, sticks, leaves and other available materials in the workshop area. They claimed it was easier that way since they were not comfortable using pens and manila paper. In

contrast, a group of Aeta women were delighted to write instead of visualise the effects of Mt. Pinatubo on their community resources. When asked why they seem to like writing so much, they responded: "Para ma-practice kami kasi katatapos lang naming mag-literacy training." (We want to practice what we have just learned from literacy training.)

Experiences show that PCVA has the potential to generate different perspectives from different stakeholders.

3. Reporting: Translating Voices into Action

3.1 PCVA Analysis: Validation and Broadening Perspectives

Although primarily focused at the community (barangay) level, the PCVA also involves key actors at the municipal and provincial/regional levels (depending on the requirements of the research objectives). Barangay level analysis of capacities and vulnerabilities are consolidated and presented to a municipal or provincial level workshop. Representatives of government and civil society groups usually attend the municipal and provincial workshops.

These workshops have two main objectives: to validate the initial findings of the research and to come-up with a municipal or provincial level perspective. The workshops also become a forum for different stakeholders at the barangay and municipal levels to assess their situation and propose actions to address development and DM issues in their municipality.

3.2 Strategy development

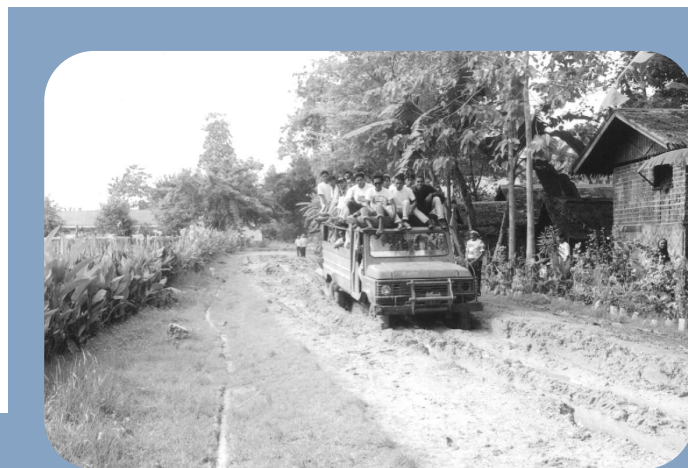
Strategic issues and recommendations are firmed up in a strategy development workshop. In this workshop, key organisations involved in the PCVA assess their capacity in supporting programme interventions that were identified through the study. The results of the strategy development workshop are used as the basis of proposals for a post-PCVA intervention.

3.3. Report writing

This stage includes the drafting of the main findings of the research and the recommendations for post-PCVA interventions. This is written mainly by the lead researcher with assistance from the research associate, in collaboration with the key person from the initiating organisation (e.g., the Oxfam programme officer).

ENDNOTES:

- i ELAC (Environmental Legal Assistance Center) and SIKAT (Sentro Para Sa Ikaunlad ng Katutubong Agham at Teknolohiya) are Oxfam's partners in Assets and Power in Markets programme. ELAC is based in Palawan while SIKAT programmes are in Zambales.
- ii The PCVA participants used different sizes of circles in assessing effectiveness of disaster relief: large circles meant bigger assistance, etc.
- iii Aeta is an indigenous group who were displaced when Mt. Pinatubo erupted in 1991.



Learning by observing how people spend their day in the community. PCVA in Pikit, North Cotabato 2000.



Strengthening local vulnerability analysis. Houses buried in Lahar in Pampanga.

IV

*Lessons from the review:
Improving the PCVA*

IV. Lessons from the Review: improving the PCVA

This section presents key results of the review of the PCVA tool conducted in 2001 by Marisol Estrella, a PCVA research pioneer in the Philippines. The review was part of Oxfam's efforts to further enhance the PCVA framework and methodology as applied in researches since 1998. It primarily assessed the PCVA framework and participatory processes and how these contributed in identifying disaster and development issues in vulnerable communities. (Estrella 2002)

Estrella and this writer went back to PCVA sites in Pampanga, Zambales, Catanduanes, North Cotabato and Maguindanao, talked with former PCVA participants, and asked them what they remember about the research process and their participation in it. They were asked whether the PCVA proved useful to them. Ways to improve the over-all process were also elicited from them. These feedback meetings were conducted in an informal, kuwentuhan (story telling- type) manner.

Aside from pinpointing ways to improve the PCVA tool, it is hoped that the lessons from this review will help build local concepts and the practice of participatory processes of assessing vulnerabilities and capacities of communities.

The following are some of the feedback gathered from former PCVA participants

What people remembered about the PCVA

"The PCVA process included individual interviews and community meetings. We conducted community mapping of local resources. We compared livelihoods before and after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption and talked about people's livelihoods and effects of the eruption on their lives ("kabuhayan") and surroundings ("paligid"). We assessed local capacities and vulnerabilities. We identified how best to prepare for calamities and how to improve development. PCVA helped in the process of identifying problems and solutions and it helped build skills in conducting assessments".

Sta. Catalina, Pampanga

"The purpose of the PCVA was to understand threats faced by Indigenous peoples and their experiences and to see how they coped. We assessed our situation before and after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption. The PCVA involved women, children and men. We talked about livelihoods ("kabuhayan"). From the PCVA process, we were able to learn how to gather data and what kinds of approaches to take, for example, using FGDs or "kuwentuhan", not just through survey style."

Loob-bunga, Zambales

"We discussed our strengths and weaknesses in relation to disasters. We looked at different types of disasters. We conducted hazard mapping and risk analysis. The PCVA involved the barangay council, women's association, the Savings and Loan beneficiaries, Catholic association, Iglesia ni Kristo, and senior citizens. The PCVA was conducted in order to avoid disasters and reduce disaster impacts. The PCVA helped broaden our understanding and perspectives about disaster and how to respond ("para lumawak ang kamulatan at kaisipan tungkol sa disaster at sa pag-tugon"). It was to help us prepare for disasters. For example, the PCVA helped identify safe areas for evacuation".

Kilikilian, Catanduanes




"We identified and assessed the different types of potential disasters in the area and discussed local responses to disasters. We assessed livelihood and identified needs and problems and how these can be addressed. We also talked about disaster preparedness. The PCVA was conducted to help improve local disaster preparedness and response. It also aimed to increase people's awareness of disasters in order to reduce disaster impacts (such as accidents and deaths). The PCVA was supposed to make people less afraid ("para mapalakas ang kalakasan ng mga tao")."

P. Vera and Summit, Catanduanes

An important feature of the PCVA is that it presents disaster concepts and experiences from a community perspective. It focuses on how people experience disaster impacts (post-disaster conditions) and how these shape their attitudes and belief systems towards managing disasters in their communities. Through the PCVA workshops, individual households and whole communities are given an opportunity to discuss how to respond to and cope with disaster impacts, and engage with different disaster management actors in their localities.

By examining local concepts and experiences of disasters, we also learn how varying vulnerabilities of different groups of people determine different levels of disaster impacts. This is important in drawing up the context-specific nature of disasters.

The review, however, raises three main aspects that the PCVA needs to improve. These are:

-  **Strengthening analysis of local capacities and vulnerabilities;**
-  **Encouraging fuller participation; and**
-  **Maximising PCVA potentials.**

A. Strengthening analysis of local vulnerabilities and capacities in the PCVA

The Oxfam review shows that the PCVA tended to concentrate on assessing disaster impacts rather than on more in-depth local vulnerability analysis (pre-disaster conditions). Its main strength was in developing KAIs and using PRA methodologies to analyse post-disaster scenarios. The latter includes a disaster's effects on the social life, health, education, means of livelihood, and physical environment of the community.

The review also shows that the PCVA needs to enhance its analysis of pre-existing conditions in the community, specifically of social and economic vulnerabilities. There may have been attempts to compare life in the community before and after a disaster, but even these failed to develop a deeper analysis of local vulnerabilities. For one, the comparison focuses on physical changes such as how the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo changed the physical environment and people's means of livelihood. Social and economic factors that amplified the effects of the eruption on people's suffering were largely overlooked. Questions that could have been asked to shed light on this area include:

- What were the communities' assets and level of access to resources prior to the eruption?
- To what extent did these resources contribute to effective response and coping mechanisms especially among poor communities?

- Did the level of access to resources change as a direct effect of the disaster? If so, how did the change affect people's disaster coping mechanisms?

Furthermore, since the PCVA failed to thoroughly analyse pre-existing vulnerabilities of communities, it was also unable to assess whether these vulnerability factors persisted after the disaster. A weak analysis of the local vulnerability context also leads to limited discussions regarding the link between disasters and the underlying development issues and poverty concerns in PCVA areas.

The Catanduanes project is an illustration. In the PCVA conducted in this province, there was very limited probing done to link the local negosyantes' (businessmen) monopoly of the abaca (hemp) markets in the province, and the poor abaca farmer's dependence on these negosyantes for production loans, to the over-all socio-economic vulnerabilities of the province. With abaca as the major agricultural product, the process could have included discussions on how local economic conditions in Catanduanes further contributed to the poor farmers' inability

An important feature of the PCVA is that it presents disaster concepts and experiences from a community perspective.

to effectively respond to and cope with the effects of annual typhoons. The PCVA could also have explored how recurring hazards such as typhoons and landslides exacerbated prevailing socio-economic vulnerabilities.

In addition, the PCVA could also have helped identify vulnerable groups, instead of limiting its analysis at the community level. Identifying vulnerable groups is important in formulating recommendations that are sensitive to the specific conditions of these groups.

Since the Catanduanes PCVA did not fully assess local vulnerability contexts, PCVA recommendations also did not emphasize post-PCVA actions that could lead to local vulnerability reduction. Instead, recommendations prioritised DM-specific interventions like preparedness training, planning and organising of community DM machineries. While these interventions aimed to increase local capacities in disaster preparedness and response and address social vulnerabilities, it was not clear how these interventions promoted or were linked to reducing long-term vulnerabilities of the communities.

To a limited extent, the recommended interventions under the BUILD Action project in Catanduanes attempted this by proposing an advocacy programme "towards (formulating) policy recommendations aimed at disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction in the province of Catanduanes". (OXFAM 2002) Still,

the proposed project was not very explicit about addressing economic vulnerabilities of communities.

The Catanduanes experience stresses the need to fine-tune the conduct of vulnerability analysis. This means looking at pre-existing social, economic, political and cultural conditions of communities, and examining how these affect people's responses to disaster events. The formulation of PCVA objectives, KAIs, and key questions must also be reviewed in order to effectively facilitate vulnerability analysis, and establish the link between local development context and disasters. More importantly, the PCVA should help determine interventions that will contribute to overall vulnerability reduction in communities.

The Oxfam PCVA review also presents ways to enhance various PCVA elements.

Understanding local capacities

Capacities analysis in the PCVA was limited to assessing skills and resources which people could use to prepare for and recover from disaster impacts. In addition, the PCVA reports showed that local capacities were not fully examined in relation to local vulnerabilities. For instance, the PCVA could have determined whether or not social safety nets were available to abaca farmers in Catanduanes to enable them to recover quickly

from their losses due to a typhoon. Resources and skills that the local people in Maguindanao or North Cotabato could use to continue earning while in evacuation camps could also have been examined.

Like in vulnerability analysis, the PCVA should look into capacities and other forms of local resources that people can utilise not only to recover from disaster impacts, but more importantly, to pursue their long-term development. The PCVA should explore and examine social and economic capacities such as social networks, credit sources, savings, insurance, as well as local skills, traditions, belief systems, etc. and assess how these can contribute to local vulnerability reduction efforts.

In her review, Estrella stressed the need to enhance PCVA's analysis of local governance and its link to DM, gender analysis, and adopting micro and macro perspectives in order to further sharpen the assessment of local conditions. These are discussed further below.

DM and Local governance

The PCVA initially attempted to link DM and local development processes in Catanduanes and Central Mindanao. Separate workshops were conducted with key development actors such as the barangay councils, the Municipal Disaster Coordinating Council, council of elders, and POs. Government officials were also interviewed.

Discussions delved on how development initiatives are prioritised, what informs decision-making about the allocation of limited resources, and how other sectors are allowed to participate in deliberations and decision-making processes. These inquiries, however, were more focused on determining how DM interventions were being integrated into the overall development plan of the municipality. The contribution of development plans to vulnerability reduction was not assessed.

Also, the PCVA tended to put the local disaster coordinating councils in the DM "box", by confining the assessment of their roles in terms of their DM functions. The extent to which these DM "actors" could influence long-term development planning was not explored.

The PCVA needs to further develop its DM and local governance KAI by probing how local development processes and structures contribute to reducing people's vulnerability to disasters. It should look into the processes and mechanisms by which development priorities are determined and how limited resources are allocated. It should also assess how local people and other key actors participate in these processes and influence local policies and plans. In so doing, we can also determine the extent of people's influence over programmes or interventions that may contribute to vulnerability reduction in their community.

The PCVA should also help promote awareness and greater understanding of what community participation in local governance entails, and recommend ways to achieve greater participation from various stakeholders.

Improving gender analysis

Past PCVAs held separate workshops with men and women in an effort to obtain "genderised" livelihood strategies, as well as gender-specific disaster experiences and coping strategies. Effects of disasters on certain gender roles in the community were examined. In several of these workshops, for example, many women claimed that during disasters, most women helped their husbands earn additional income to cope with the crisis situation. In some instances, a greater number of women also said that disaster situations led to their taking on more work in agricultural production on top of their household chores.

Some gender analysis questions

- How does a disaster affect men and women? Do these different impacts result in changes in their gender roles?
- What are the different ways by which men and women cope with the effects of a disaster?
- Why is it that it is always the women who line up to get relief packs during relief distribution? Does this have any connection with gender division of labour during disasters?

However, because the PCVA was too focused on analysing post-disaster impacts, its examination of pre-existing gender roles operating in the community, and the changes these roles underwent due to disaster impacts, was weak. The PCVA could have assessed men and women's level of access to resources in the community, or who exerts more influence on decisions done inside the household (e.g., who decides where to spend the limited household income; what coping strategies should be taken to increase household income). Assessing pre-disaster gender roles could help in sharpening the PCVA's gender analysis in relation to disaster impacts.

A strong gender analysis in the PCVA will help determine interventions that are more sensitive to the specific needs, skills and capacities of men and women in the community, especially in times of crisis. Needless to say, the PCVA should not contribute to the continued marginalisation of sectors in a community, especially in the aftermath of a disaster. For example, how will activities related to the formation of disaster preparedness machineries in the villages affect men and women's work schedule, women's household tasks, family time, etc.?

It is noteworthy to point out that there was a suggestion to integrate tools such as Oxfam's gender gap audit tool to improve gender analysis and elicit genderised responses.

Adopting a macro and micro level perspective

Despite limitations in analysing local vulnerability contexts, the PCVA's ability to obtain community level perspectives of disaster experiences and responses remains one of its major strengths. By targeting key community stakeholders to participate in the process, PCVA provides insights on how people and institutions in vulnerable communities respond to disasters, as well as how different realities in these communities contribute to either increasing or reducing people's vulnerabilities to disasters.

However, the review also points out that the PCVA's micro-level analysis could be enhanced by linking this analysis with a macro-level assessment of disaster and vulnerability contexts. This micro-macro link would provide a wider perspective and help assess how national and global socio-economic and political systems and processes are directly linked to and could exacerbate local vulnerability contexts.

Using Oxfam project areas as examples, strengthening the micro-macro analysis link means, for example, that the PCVA should explore how the national government's economic development priorities could have contributed to non-prioritisation of the agricultural sector; how this led to low agricultural production in Catanduanes and Maguindanao/North Cotabato; and how this eventually contributed to the people's increased vulnerability to the economic impacts of flooding

(in Catanduanes) and war (in Maguindanao/North Cotabato).

Another example would be to determine how globalisation and trade liberalisation policies of the government have impacted on the local economy and how this translates into poverty conditions in PCVA areas.

A macro-level perspective could be developed by conducting a review of national or regional laws, policies, as well as of processes related to the study and how socio-economic and political global trends may have affected national and local policies and priorities. This review should be conducted in the beginning of the research phase, and integrated in the research framework to guide in assessing local vulnerability contexts.

B. Attendance vs. participation

A limited assessment of the PCVA methodology was also conducted to examine the degree and quality of participation based on the perception of those who participated in the PCVA workshops. This was done by revisiting PCVA sites and interviewing former PCVA participants. It should be noted, however, that the assessment relied mainly on feedback from former PCVA participants and did not use specific indicators to evaluate the degree and quality of participation during the PCVA process.

The review shows that the PCVA was able to mobilise key stakeholders in the communities where the PCVAs were conducted. Participants included residents, people's organisations representing various sectors such as farmers, fishers, and women, barangay officials, local government units (municipal and provincial levels), as well as representatives of NGOs and church groups. In Maguindanao/North Cotabato workshops, youth groups, children, council of elders, as well as MILF and MNLF commanders were represented in the workshops.

But did attendance lead to participation?

The PCVA review found some limitations in facilitating participation in the PCVA process. Feedback from former participants revealed that lack of understanding of the PCVA objectives and processes hindered full participation of some workshop participants. Some of them initially did not understand what the PCVA was all about and why they were asked to attend the workshops. A better understanding of the importance of their role in assessing local conditions would help in eliciting more substantive participation from the people.

While the PCVA was able to mobilise representatives of various stakeholders in the community, the review found that the process must ensure that marginalised groups are represented in the workshops. This refers, for instance, to daily wage earners who cannot

afford to miss a single day of work, mothers who cannot join the workshops because of household chores, or others who may be shy (nahihiya) about participating in the workshops.

One way to address this problem is by ensuring that different groups in the community have been carefully identified and that their schedules have been considered in selecting PRA tools and in planning the schedule. For instance, if some women would not be able to attend the workshops because they have to attend to house work, or men would only be available in the afternoon or evening after work, then, household interviews would be appropriate in reaching out to them. Also, the team should spend longer days in the villages to make sure that workshop schedules and methodologies are flexible enough to accommodate the varying schedules of different stakeholders.

C. Maximizing the PCVA potential

Programme development, monitoring and evaluation

Oxfam and its partners have so far applied the PCVA in programme development, where information gathered through the PCVA was used in identifying strategic issues and developing strategies and plans. This was also the case, to a limited extent, in barangay Guiamlong, Catanduanes where the barangay council directly

benefited from the PCVA by using research results in formulating the barangay development plan. Since the PCVA was also used for developing the BUILD Action Project in Catanduanes, it likewise provided useful information in monitoring and assessing the progress of the said project. This shows that the PCVA can also be developed as a community monitoring and evaluation tool.

Advocacy tool

It was mentioned earlier that PCVA should enhance the link between micro and macro levels of analysis to situate local vulnerability conditions in a broader context. This can be done by improving the analysis of local and national policies to determine how they exacerbate local vulnerabilities. Once this is achieved, it would then be possible for PCVA to be used in developing policy advocacy agenda for Oxfam and its partners.

The PCVA provides a rich source of information that can be used for reviewing or developing local and national policies that are sensitive to vulnerabilities of communities. In Catanduanes, for instance, the PCVA paved the way for the passing of a local ordinance forming the Provincial DM office which was tasked to lead in disaster preparedness efforts in the whole province.

PCVA results also lead to identification of local issues that are useful in conducting dialogues between and among stakeholders. In the most recent PCVA conducted in Pampanga (2003), the

research was aimed to identify options for DM capabilities of LGUs in two flood-prone towns in the province. But since three major community stakeholders -- the LGUs concerned, PDRN, and the Community Based People's Organisations - conducted the study, it became an ongoing process of dialogue among the three actors about emerging disaster and development issues in their respective communities.

Sustaining the Process

One way to really sustain the PCVA process is to ensure that there will be a post-PCVA engagement in the community where the research was held. The PCVA should not be treated as a single event detached from the long-term development process in communities.

Also, PCVA research results should be disseminated and discussed with those who participated in the process. This feedbacking should encourage local people to share their thoughts about the results of the research, the process, and more importantly, how the PCVA results can be of significant use to their community. As pointed out in the review, conducting follow-up visits to communities after the PCVA report has been finalised recognises the significant contribution of community participants to the PCVA process.

It is also strongly suggested that reports on PCVA results be written in a way that is easy for the

community to understand and appreciate. Translating the report to local dialects and using popular education materials could also help in making it less technical and more understandable to the local people.



Understanding local capacities and how people cope with disasters. A coconut farmer in Pikit, North Cotabato (PCVA 2000).



*CVA helps in assessing poor people's access and control over assets in the community.
Fishing in a lake in Buluan, Maguindanao (PCVA 2000).*

ANNEX

Voices from the Rubble: Summary of Key Research Findings

Voices from the Rubble: Summary of Key Research Findings

Introduction

The first PCVA was conducted in 1998 and included four provinces in Central Luzon—Pampanga, Zambales, Bataan and Tarlac—which were affected by the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption and by subsequent lahar flows and flooding events. The PCVA was undertaken primarily to guide Oxfam GB and its local partners in reviewing and improving their DM engagement in Central Luzon. The research involved community field work (using PRA methodologies) in Pampanga and Zambales and key informant interviews in Bataan and Tarlac. The research findings became the basis of policy recommendations for Oxfam and its partners in developing more appropriate and effective disaster response strategies in the region.

Oxfam conducted the Catanduanes PCVA in 1999 in partnership with CARE Philippines and the Provincial Government of Catanduanes. The research was aimed at providing baseline information on the disaster experiences and response strategies of local people and other development actors in the province. Specifically, the research results were used to further develop the components of the BUILD-Action project, a

community-based disaster management programme.

The Catanduanes PCVA assessed and compared local experiences and concepts of disasters and responses in different hazard contexts, as villages in the provinces are exposed to multiple threats like typhoon, floods, landslides and storm surges. It also strengthened its analysis of the linkage between disaster management and local development planning.

The PCVA in conflict areas in Maguindanao and North Cotabato took place in year 2000, around the time when peace talks between the government and MILF were beginning to collapse. The study's objective was to help TRIPODⁱ, Oxfam's local partner in Central Mindanao Region, review its DM programme in the context of the intensifying armed conflict and worsening flood situation in many communities.

The research was at the stage of developing programme recommendations for TRIPOD when it was aborted due to the onset of a full-blown war in May 2000.

In 2001 and 2002, Oxfam helped ELAC and SIKAT organise and conduct PCVAs in communities where natural resource management (NRM)

programmes were being implemented. The research was designed to help the local NGOs identify strategies on how to integrate disaster management into their NRM programmes. The researches were conducted in Zambales and Palawan. In these researches, the PCVA attempted to look into the link between disaster management and asset management. Oxfam implemented the PCVA in partnership with ELAC and SIKAT organizers, and local POs in Zambales and Palawan.

The following are some of the key learnings about people and disasters in the course of our use of the PCVA: how people look at disasters and how disasters affect them; how they cope with the impact of disasters and the factors which influence their coping strategies; and, how people view disaster responses by government and non-government organisations and the factors affecting disaster response. Lastly, we included what we think are some significant trends in disaster management. Though in their formative stages, we believe that creating links between DM and development planning, and DM and asset management, are significant steps towards increasing capacities and reducing vulnerabilities of our local communities.

A. How People Look at Disasters

Disasters are Defined by People

People define disasters mainly in three ways: an event's immediate impact on populations (death,

injuries, and psychological effects), its impact to the productive assets of the community and to properties (farms, kaingin, rivers, farm tools, fishing gears, houses), and its impact on people's sources of income. They associate disasters with income instability, hunger, death, injuries, sickness or disease, and psychological trauma. In all the PCVAs conducted, it is interesting to note how people emphasize a disaster event's immediate impact on their means of livelihood and how they had to endure days or months after a disaster with little or no food and income to support basic survival needs. Table 1 summarises people's perceptions of disasters.

It is also important to note that people usually equate disasters with the pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities in their communities. Disasters exacerbate poverty and in people's perception the economic crisis, politics or too much p o l i t i c k i n g , government neglect, lack of social services and lack of production capital are also forms of disasters.

People do not necessarily make distinctions between hazards, disasters and vulnerabilities; they perceive pre-existing conditions that result in poverty and suffering as disasters.

Local Concepts of Disasters from PCVA Researches

PCVA Area & Types of Hazards	How communities defined "disasters"
<p>Central Luzon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lahar Flooding 	<p>Events that damage livelihoods and assets and negatively impacts on people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government neglect Lack of production capital
<p>Catanduanes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typhoons Flooding Landslides Storm Surges 	<p>Equated with deaths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional distress Destruction of houses Destruction of community infrastructure Destruction or disruption of livelihood Increase in prices of basic commodities Negative impact on family cohesion as household members search for work elsewhere and become separated from each other for long periods
<p>North Cotabato & Maguindanao</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Armed Conflict Flooding Drought Pest infestation 	<p>A form of crisis which is associated with hunger, death, sickness or disease;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological trauma, specifically tension and fear Destruction or disruption of livelihood sources Subsequent separation of family members Disruption of educational services, which hampers the development of knowledge and skills
<p>Zambales - SIKAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typhoon Flood Lahar from the slopes of Mt. Pinatubo El Niño Political conflict 	<p>Crisis period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destruction of properties and means of livelihood
<p>Palawan - ELAC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental degradation 	

Since they do not necessarily make distinctions between hazards, disasters and vulnerabilities, they perceive pre-existing conditions that result in poverty and suffering as disasters. According to them, "Disaster lahat yan, kasi nagpapahirap sa tao." ("All of these are disasters, because they cause hardship to people.")

War as Disaster

While communities in Maguindanao and North Cotabato also suffer from the effects of flooding and drought, people still consider armed conflict as the most severe form of disaster they have ever experienced. War do not only bring about the destruction of their physical environment and means of livelihood, it also causes the disintegration of family and social relations. In evacuation centers, they have to share classrooms with people from other communities. They also have to endure uncertainty when male family members join armed groups or stay behind in the villages to safeguard their properties from looting and burning. Prolonged armed conflict also result in the migration of family members in search of new jobs.

War deepens cultural prejudices, as well as anger and suspicion. In one village in North Cotabato, for instance, the children consider the military - whom they call Bisaya, referring to soldiers who come from the Visayas — a kabinasan or disaster. Children also associate government soldiers with

disasters as they symbolised death and destruction.

Disasters Create New Vulnerabilities

Mt. Pinatubo's eruption and consequent lahar flows may have changed the geography of Central Luzon forever, creating long-term physical vulnerabilities which affect people's lives and livelihood.

In several municipalities in Pampanga, for instance, pre-eruption flooding was considered a minor and regular event. Floods lasted only for less than a week. Many people actually waited for floods because it caused nearby fishponds to overflow, sending fish onto the streets and inside their homes. Floods also replenished rice fields with soil nutrients and prepared their farms for the next planting season.

Post-eruption flood events in Pampanga are now considered destructive. Floodwaters would come rushing with the deadly lahar which bury and destroy structures permanently. Because of this, farms, rivers and fishponds become unproductive.

Floods also took a longer time to subside, causing diseases and isolating communities from town centers for weeks and even months, severely affecting people's social mobility and economic activities. Relocating in resettlement areas oftentimes prove non-viable for most displaced

families because it brought them away from their sources of income and did not offer livelihood alternatives. This new physical vulnerability only meant one thing to poor people: a decline in or total loss of income.

Another example of how disasters create new vulnerabilities is the case of Maguindanao and North Cotabato. Residents recalled that armed conflict disrupted children's education for long periods because evacuees preferred to stay in evacuation centers even after cessation of hostilities. They also narrated how armed conflict and floods severely depleted their household income and made it extremely difficult for them to continue supporting their children's education. Adding to this, children were also forced to get jobs to augment declining household incomes.

As a result, many children are unable to finish basic education, depriving them of the knowledge and skills needed to compete and function effectively in the labour market. With limited skills and knowledge, their access to productive assets in the community also becomes limited.

People's Attitudes: You Can't Do Anything About Disasters

It is also a common finding in the PCVAs that disasters were perceived as "god's punishment" or a "fact of life". Since a disaster was considered to be a "natural phenomenon", many people expressed doubts that they can

actually do something about it. This fatalistic attitude is also reinforced by strong religious beliefs. "Bahala na ang Diyos" ("God will take care of everything") is the usual prayer in the face of an impending disaster in the community.

Another factor which contribute to this passive attitude is the repeated exposure to disasters. In Catanduanes, typhoons of varying intensities hit the province almost annually, making people "accustomed" to living through typhoons.

Still another factor is the lack of trust in warning systems. Catanduanes residents recalled that in 1998, a typhoon warning was broadcast over the radio. However, the typhoon changed its course and did not hit the province as predicted. A few months later, the warning against typhoon Loleng was also made but this time, most people did not take the warning seriously. People hoped that like the previous typhoon, Loleng would spare their province. The warnings proved accurate this time and typhoon Loleng became one of the most destructive typhoons in the history of Catanduanes.

B. How Disasters Affect People

Understanding people's vulnerabilities

People have different degrees of vulnerabilities. Individuals, households, and whole communities suffer different disaster impacts based on their

degree of susceptibility to disasters, which in turn is dictated by the degree of access and control they have over assets and resources in the community. (Please refer to Table 2 for a list of the range of disaster impacts that communities experience, regardless of type of hazard.)

As the CVA framework pointed out, physical vulnerabilities are the easiest to notice and assess. In all PCVA sites, most homes were built on unsafe locations. People's houses were found along riverbanks, at the foot of or along mountain slopes, and near the ocean. In Pampanga, barangays located along major river tributaries were directly hit by lahar flow and flooding, resulting in massive displacement of populations and permanent resettlement of whole villages.

In Catanduanes, households along river banks or on the base of mountain slopes were more exposed to the impacts of flooding and landslides. Communities located along the Rio Grande de Mindanao in Pikit, North Cotabato were also vulnerable to flooding. Since most of these communities live mainly on agriculture and/or fishing, the PCVA revealed that access to the community's physical resource base—rather than safety—was the main reason why families settle in these hazardous locations.

The PCVA also discovered that most of the households who participated in the PCVAs were tenants, agricultural workers, fishers, and fishpond workers. They did not own or have

control over assets and other resources in the community. This meant high economic vulnerability. Their insufficient income and lack of formal education and training limit their capacity to improve their livelihood strategies. Income of poor households was found not only to be insufficient to pay for basic necessities but was also unsustainable as most of their livelihood strategies were not protected from natural and economic shocks.

Poor agricultural communities also have very few livelihood options, hence their tendency to concentrate on one economic activity which results in the unsustainable use of the environment. This has been observed among the slash and burn and abaca farmers in Catanduanes whose unsustainable farming practices may result in long-term environmental problems in the province. In some communities in Bataan and Catanduanes, some people have resorted to "illegal" means of livelihood like dynamite fishing and logging to increase household income.

In the Central Mindanao Region, the combined forces of several different hazards contribute to the continued underdevelopment of agricultural resources, resulting in limited benefits for poor farmers. The exposure to multiple hazards makes poor people extremely vulnerable to disasters. As the impact of different disasters accumulate, people become increasingly incapable of recovery.

Common disaster impacts experienced by communities affected by disasters

- Physical: injuries, casualties, illnesses
- Displacements or evacuations- as a result of natural disasters or armed conflict
- Effects on livelihoods: decline in local productivity and household incomes due to damage or loss of resources and productive assets and disruption of production activities
- Food insecurity: food scarcity in the aftermath of a disaster due to limited income, damaged resource base, high food prices, isolation from food sources (town centres, farms, etc.)
- Indebtedness
- Reduced or lack of access to basic social services, especially in health and education: destruction of infrastructures and facilities, disruption of classes due to damage of buildings or use of schools as evacuation centres
- Psychological effects: shock/trauma, fear, anxiety, depression
- Increased incidence of social problems (e.g., gambling, drug use, drinking, domestic violence, violence against women, marital problems)
- Weakening or dissolution of social and community relations and other extended support networks
- Changes in household gender division of labour - may result in increased women's work since many are forced to find jobs for extra income but are still expected to continue with household responsibilities (caring of children, cleaning, cooking, etc.); women may seek work elsewhere (as domestic workers or OFWs) and men assume household responsibilities; men seek work elsewhere and women are left behind to shoulder both household responsibilities and economic production activities; etc.
- Increased child labour- children are forced to stop schooling and supplement household incomes

When a disaster strikes, it exacerbates the community's pre-existing vulnerabilities. This is especially true for those sectors who have been previously marginalised, such as the indigenous peoples. In Zambales, the Aetas have been subjected to further marginalisation due to ethnic discrimination. When the PCVA was conducted in an Aeta resettlement village, the research team found out that the Aetas had less access to electricity, water, health services, and alternative livelihood sources, compared to non-Aeta settlers.

Disasters result in losses to poor people's already insufficient income. They usually do not have properties or assets which can be sold or mortgaged for extra cash during crises or emergencies. Hence, most become indebted to moneylenders, relatives, and neighbors. The experience of Catanduanes abaca farmers (Table 3) shows that existing vulnerabilities may actually worsen the impact of disasters and make it more difficult for communities to recover from disasters.

Table 3

Battling against typhoons in Catanduanes

In Catanduanes, many households rely on abaca farming as their major source of income, followed by fishing. A network of local traders, who control the prices of processed abaca fibers, controls the abaca market. Farmers usually borrow from these traders to finance abaca production costs. But abaca farms are quite fragile and are unable to withstand strong winds and rain. Because of limited availability of and access to good agricultural lands in the province, farmers plant abaca trees on steep mountain slopes without contouring.

Hence, when a strong typhoon strikes, many abaca farms are completely or partially damaged. Farmers have to wait for another year or two to fully rehabilitate their farms. Landslides are common and are becoming more destructive in recent years, resulting in casualties and heavily damaged infrastructure and properties. Farmers become even more indebted to local traders and moneylenders in order to rehabilitate farms and pay for immediate expenses. When the next typhoon arrives and destroys newly rehabilitated abaca farms, the cycle begins anew.

C. How do People Cope with Disasters?

How do poor people cope? What coping strategiesⁱⁱ do they use to recover from the disaster situation? Let's look at the way people cope in three stages: the pre-disaster stage, the emergency period, and after a disaster event.

Pre-disaster stage: Relying on Age-old Warning Systems and Nothing Else

People with long history of disaster experiences usually have more developed strategies in preparing households for a disaster. People in Catanduanes still relied on indigenous warning systems handed down from older generations. This included traditional knowledge about cloud formations, wind direction, insect sounds, and behaviour of animals that are supposed to provide signs of an impending disaster. People also normally combine this with warning information obtained from radio broadcast. In all PCVA areas, radio remains the most common source of information about disaster warning. In Maguindanao and North Cotabato, people rely on information released by the mayor and passed around the community through the barangay council about troop deployment or possible armed confrontation in their community.

Sad to say, very few of the villages visited by the PCVA have community-wide preparedness systems. Barangays do not usually have

community preparedness plans, except for warning systems that alert people only when danger is imminent. Individual households are left on their own to monitor official warning information and decide on what actions to take.

However, household preparedness systems are limited by lack of resources. As people would say: "kung merong itatabi, magtatabi na kami ng bigas, asin at tubig." ("We would stock up on rice, salt and water, if these are available.") Otherwise, they would resort to other means such as the early harvesting of vegetables and other food crops.

The Emergency period: Being Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place

It was observed that people still panicked despite warning information obtained from different sources. Since there were no community-wide preparedness plans, individual households remained responsible for their own safety and survival. This resulted in disorganised movements of people which further added to confusion and sometimes led to injuries and casualties. In Pampanga and Catanduanes, children related how their neighbors died of drowning because they did not know where to go during evacuation.

Most communities also lack safe places and structures where people could evacuate during emergency periods. Public school buildings are

usually not equipped with basic facilities such as clean water, toilets and space large enough to accommodate huge numbers of evacuees. In Maguindanao and North Cotabato, as well as in Pampanga and Zambales, former evacuees face the following difficulties in evacuation centers:

- Cramped or severely limited living spaces for families;
- Absence of or limited water and sanitation facilities;
- Illnesses (diarrhoea, malaria, dengue, respiratory problems, skin diseases), especially among children;
- Food scarcity;
- Limited income and livelihood opportunities;
- Insufficient or shortages in relief supplies;
- Deaths;
- Emotional distress (fear, depression, confusion);
- Noise / lack of privacy.

Because of these, many survivors usually choose to remain in their barangays and live in high-risk conditions rather than stay in evacuation centers. As far as these evacuees were concerned, it was better to face risks in "familiar environments" such as one's own house. At times, sentimental value

attached to houses and properties would prevail over the need to evacuate.

Post-disaster stage: Exacerbating Vulnerabilities

The following are the most common coping strategies of survivors at the post-disaster stage: There is an observable pattern to the use of the various coping strategies at the post-disaster stage.

- They seek external sources of income. This is either through outmigration (domestic and out of the country) or through local sources. People usually seek other income sources if the main source of livelihood such as farms have been totally destroyed and rehabilitation would be too costly and would take a long time;
- They diversify livelihood strategies, like engaging in construction work, petty trading, and other short-term paid labour work;
- They retrieve materials to repair houses;
- They retrieve crops for household consumption or for selling;
- They seek loans or borrow from relatives or usurers/traders to pay for household expenses; and,
- They seek relief assistance from government and other external agencies.

First, households would use up resources that were left undamaged or those which were still useful. People would salvage agricultural and root crops, or exhaust sources of raw materials so that they can continue selling products. As experienced in some areas in Catanduanes and Mindanao, this strategy could put a strain on the physical resource base of the community and contribute to the depletion of natural resources.

Then people would combine several jobs in an attempt to increase the household income. But the effectiveness of this strategy may depend on several factors like availability of jobs and the skills required for them to get hired. If no local jobs are available or if the people don't have the required skills, they usually migrate. At this stage, they would need extra cash for transportation. They could obtain this by selling or mortgaging properties, or by making loans. They usually end up at the mercy of money lenders, becoming heavily indebted even before they are able to recover from the crisis.

These coping mechanisms exacerbate unequal social relations in a community. Poorer households, for instance, would always end up seeking loans or selling properties to richer households (who, in most cases, control the community's assets). Hence, in times of disasters, poor households become poorer, while already better-off households become richer. In Catanduanes, abaca farmers rely on the traders for loans in the aftermath of a disaster, further giving the traders the economic

power to dictate the buying price of abaca fibers.

Factors Affecting People's Coping Strategies

What could enhance or limit local coping strategies? The following points were gleaned from people's experiences of coping in various disaster contexts.

Awareness of disaster history. Previous knowledge of disaster events enhances the community's capacity to prepare for and cope with disasters. In Catanduanes, for example, households have learned to diligently monitor the arrival of typhoons because of their long history of typhoon experience.

Community DM system. The presence of an organised disaster response system in the community increases chances of surviving the effects of a disaster. In Pampanga for instance, the influx of external DM actors helped in raising awareness of communities regarding the importance of organised actions to mitigate the effects of lahar and flooding. This particular intervention paved the way for the formation of community-based disaster response mechanisms, as well as the activation of government DM structures such as the disaster coordinating committees. In contrast, DM systems in Catanduanes and Mindanao were found to be very reactive.

Social support system. In cases of

massive evacuations like in conflict areas or during the Mt. Pinatubo and lahar related evacuation, support from family members, relatives, and neighbours disintegrated, which in turn affected the effectiveness of their adaptive measures.

Location. The remoteness or proximity of communities from sources of external assistance — town centers, offices of relief agencies, evacuation center — affected people's coping strategies. Communities with greater access to town centers or more developed areas like in Pampanga appeared to have better chances of coping more quickly and efficiently compared with remote barangays in Catanduanes and Maguindanao or North Cotabato. In the latter provinces, the ongoing war resulted in limited mobility of people and isolation of communities for weeks and even months, making them less effective at coping with the crisis.

Degree of destruction. People's coping mechanisms are also affected by the degree and scope of destruction brought about by the disaster. In conflict areas in Mindanao for example, survivors would stay inside the communities or, if evacuated, would attempt to sneak back to their farms just to be able to harvest crops which they sell or consume in the evacuation centers. This coping strategy, however, becomes impossible if the area is declared a "no man's zone" or if the farms become flooded. In Pampanga, the destruction resulting from Mt. Pinatubo did not end with the eruption. Survivors still had to cope

with the effects of lahar and flooding. In Catanduanes, people's coping mechanisms were severely hampered by widespread landslides which isolated them from their livelihood sources and made access to external assistance extremely difficult.

D. Experiences in Disaster Response

PCVAs also examined existing disaster management systems which provided various forms of disaster responses to communities. Various actors respond to the needs of disaster survivors: government agencies, non-government organisations (development and disaster specialist organisations, church, business and media foundations), and concerned individuals. Most of the time, these included politicians, personalities and prominent individuals. In the main, the PCVA was used to study the disaster coordinating councils, the different forms of DM services, and people's criteria of effective disaster responses.

Different Agencies, Different Responses

Government responses focus mainly on disaster preparedness trainings, structural mitigation measures (such as dikes), public information and warning, emergency responses and rehabilitation assistance. People cite emergency relief, rehabilitation support services such as agricultural inputs as the most common services provided by the government.

On the other hand, NGOs also provide relief and rehabilitation assistance but usually on a smaller scale. In Pampanga and Zambales where disaster specialist NGOs operate, people say they benefitted from community organising and trainings on disaster preparedness.

The disaster coordinating councils (DCCs) at the barangay, municipal, provincial, regional and national levels are the main government mechanism for disaster management. Its main task is to take the lead in counter-disaster planning and coordination at their level of responsibility. The PCVA found that the DCCs were usually active only during emergencies. They would usually meet and develop their plans when there is already an impending disaster. There was no comprehensive disaster management programme that links or coordinates the programmes and services of various government agencies towards reducing vulnerabilities of communities to disasters. DCCs cited inadequate funding, lack of facilities (e.g., transportation and communication equipment), lack of political will to implement DM laws to be the main hindrances in fully activating the councils. In Catanduanes, for instance, several DCC member agencies reportedly held separate DM trainings, duplicating each other's efforts and wasting resources.

At the barangay level, most barangay councils did not have any counter-disaster plan. In several barangays in Maguindanao and North Cotabato, the council members were not even aware of

the functions of the disaster coordinating council. As pointed out earlier, there was no community-wide disaster management plan that guides the residents on what to do in the pre, during and post disaster stages.

On the other hand, functional BDCCs were more focused on dissemination of warning information, disaster monitoring and evacuation, and conducting damage and needs assessment.

People Assess Disaster Response

Equal access to disaster relief is very important to people in disaster situations. They believe that disasters affect everyone in the community and is therefore deserving of support. This is regardless of the degrees of impact experienced by the particular household. They believed that equity in relief assistance would help avoid misunderstanding among members of the community, as well as corruption and favouritism.

People also expected agencies to be transparent in giving assistance. Transparency for them meant being aware of the criteria of selecting beneficiaries and of the rules and policies that guide the distribution of assistance. This criteria springs from past experiences where decisions in choosing relief beneficiaries were done solely

People expected agencies to be transparent in giving assistance.

by the relief agency and barangay officials. They observed that when decisions involved only a few people, there were higher possibilities of corruption and favouritism. They also suggested that agencies should monitor the distribution of goods to make sure that the assistance reached its intended beneficiaries.

People gave importance to the need for disaster responses to be sensitive to the culture of the survivors and responsive to conditions in the community. In Zambales for instance, many Aeta households opted to just sell or exchange the goods they received for more appropriate relief items. People in resettlement areas also complained of inadequate social services and lack of livelihood opportunities in their new villages. Hence, people in PCVA areas recommended that consultations should be held with beneficiaries to ensure that assistance are appropriate to their needs and situations.

Factors Affecting Disaster Response

Geographical location affects poor people's access to emergency assistance and services. Obviously, proximity to resource centers such as towns or cities provide easier and faster access to post-disaster assistance. Because of their proximity to Manila, Mt. Pinatubo affected communities had greater access to media coverage and received major support from government and foreign donor agencies. In Catanduanes, on the other hand, poor communities are mostly

located far from the provincial capital and Manila, causing survivors to receive less support from agencies. Being an island province itself limits access to emergency and rehabilitation assistance.

E. Mainstreaming DM in Development Planning

To a limited extent, the PCVA also attempted to assess how disaster issues and gaps in disaster responses informed the overall development plans of local government units and how people participated in the development planning processes. In general, the PCVA revealed that poor people did not participate in development planning processes at the community level. Prioritisation of problems, identification of responses, and most decision-making processes only involved leaders and officers of organisations. Mechanisms for people's participation in development planning such as the barangay assembly meetings were not maximised to stimulate critical participation from the people.

Because of the people's lack of participation in prioritisation of problems and identification of interventions, most development plans addressed immediate needs (e.g. dredging of river systems, building basketball courts, waiting sheds, barangay markers). Although people in the community may have benefited from these projects, local development plans usually did not prioritise disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction.

F. Initial attempts to look at DM and asset management

The PCVA also attempted to examine the role DM plays in asset management. In Zambales and Palawan, the PCVA found several factors that affect people's ability to manage and benefit from community assets. As have been pointed out earlier, a major disaster event may have created new physical vulnerabilities that could affect a community's means of livelihood. Fishers and farmers in Cabangan, Zambales for instance still suffer from decreased productivity of agricultural lands and fishing areas in the

South China Sea because of the effects of ash fall and lahar. Because of limited skills and knowledge,

and lack of appropriate technology, farmers and fishers in these areas were not able to cope with the decreased productivity of community resources.

This is further aggravated by the fact that most poor farmers and fishers do not own production tools, and they either have to rent or borrow from richer households to be able to continuously engage in

farming and fishing activities.

Land disputes also affect people's control and access to resources in the community. Households in a barangay in Cabangan reported that powerful individuals were trying to claim ownership of a large portion of their barangay. This issue of land ownership has been a source of conflict and tension in their community for a long time, and in a way affected the people's ability to develop these resources and fully benefit from them. Decreased productivity of resources, limited access to production tools and disputes over control of land resources make poor people unable to build their assets, including those which they can utilise for effective disaster preparedness and mitigation.

These accounts may be limited to those communities visited by the PCVA but they nevertheless provide us with insights on how vulnerable communities suffer from, respond to and cope with the effects of disasters. These experiences show how poverty, limited access to resources, and lack of participation in development processes contribute in making people incapable of managing the effects of disasters in their life and livelihoods. They underscore the fact that disasters and development are closely linked to each other, and that if vulnerabilities remained largely ignored, we could be sure that future disasters would result to greater losses and poverty.

Mechanisms for people's participation in development planning such as the barangay assembly meetings were not maximised to stimulate critical participation from the people.

Hopefully though, by learning from people's local experiences and perceptions of disasters, we are able to gain lessons on how to effectively address disasters in the country, and involve people in the process.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ TRIPOD or Tri-Peoples Organisation Against Disasters was Oxfam's local partner DM NGO in the Central Mindanao Region.

ⁱⁱ Coping strategies as defined by Murphy and Moriarty (as cited in Blaikie, p. 62): *Coping is the manner in which people act within existing resources and range of expectations of a situation to achieve various ends... Generally, this involves no more than 'managing resources', but usually means how it is done in unusual, abnormal, and adverse situations. (This) can include defence mechanisms, active ways of solving problems, and methods for handling stress.*



Making the most out of limited resources: a mobile fish vendor in Buluan, Maguindanao (PCVA 2000).

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Participatory Capacities and Vulnerabilities Assessment: Finding the Link Between Disasters and Development

Apart

from life-saving measures, Oxfam holds that even the most urgent of interventions amidst a rapidly unfolding disaster situation must create safe spaces that would ensure transparent, accountable and participatory processes through which even the most vulnerable men and women members of the community could analyse their conditions and identify their own needs.

It is towards this end that this handbook on participatory capacities and vulnerabilities assessment or PCVA was developed, and is now being offered as a tool in creating that space.