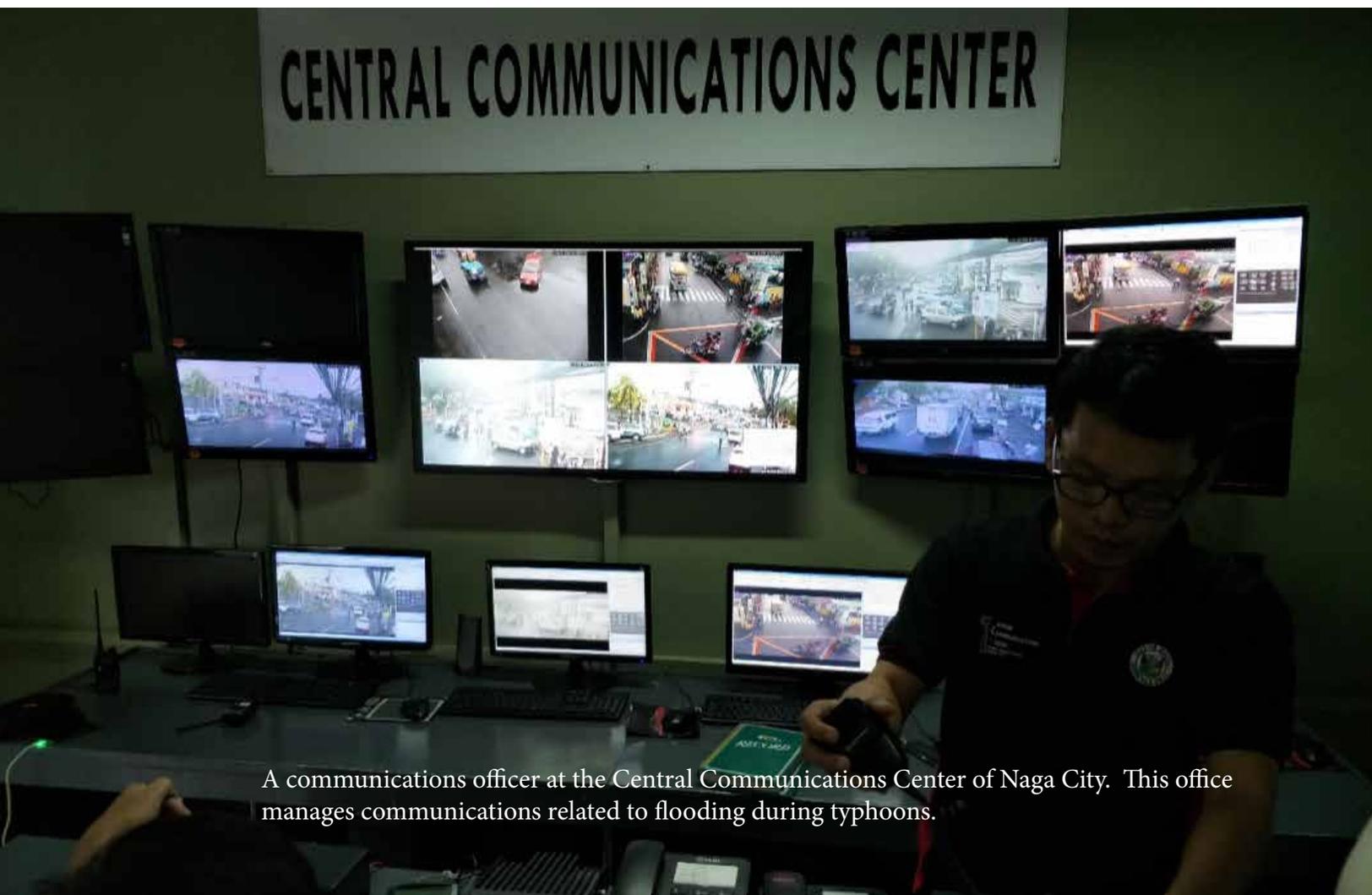


Risk Communication Strategies: Case of Riverine Communities in Philippine Cities

Alvidon F. Asis, League of Cities of the Philippines

Almost all of the cities of the Philippines are situated in proximity of rivers, with settlements along the waterways that are highly vulnerable to floods. Effective risk communication - the real time exchange of information between experts, officials and people facing a threat to their wellbeing - can help communities be better prepared and respond timely when disasters occur. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Framework includes provisions for risk communication - but how are these provisions implemented at the local level?



A communications officer at the Central Communications Center of Naga City. This office manages communications related to flooding during typhoons.

Objectives

The study aimed at identifying and analyzing risk communication strategies of riverine communities in six cities in the Philippines. In particular, the research aimed at identifying how local governments are mainstreaming the risk communication provisions of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Framework and at providing policy recommendations to address any gaps.

Approach

Six cities within major river basins were identified, from the three island clusters - Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Focus group discussions, interviews and site visits were conducted to identify the local risk communication strategies and document initiatives of the local government.

Results Overview

All of the cities analyzed address risk communication in their disaster plans. All risk communications strategies, even though at different stages of approval and implementation, are aligned with the standards set by the DRRM Framework.

Examples of risk communication from the six cities include agreements with local radio and television stations to provide preparedness messages and timely announcements in case of flooding; mobile applications that allow users to report and access real time information about

the floods; and investments in dedicated teams to monitor and share content on social media platforms. Several factors affect the quality of risk communications strategies, including awareness among local leaders, access to funding, and community engagement.

Conclusion

Risk communication strategies compliant with national standards have been drafted in all the selected cities. Because of the lack of centralized coordination and support, the strategies are often prepared with the help of external organizations, leading to inconsistent quality. Districts with better knowledge of disaster risk reduction, more resources, and more support from the communities tend to have better strategies.

The findings of this research were presented to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council - Technical Management Group. It was also presented during the Urban Environmental Accords, Melaka Summit in Malaysia in 2017 and during the National Executive Board meeting of the League of Cities of the Philippines, where mayors had the opportunity to learn about strategies and approaches in place in the six cities analyzed during the study.

The findings were also used by the League of Cities of the Philippines to draft resolutions supporting the prioritization of risk communication to riverine communities.

When fully operational, this tool can be used by stakeholders in planning and risk management, as well as in risk education and communication.

The journey continues...

Alvidon Asis has remained in contact with other fellows, and has invited some of them to present their research at the 3rd International River Summit in 2016. In July 2017, the League of Cities of the Philippines organized the ASEAN Mayors Forum and PARR sponsored two fellows to speak on disaster resilience.

The fellowship provided precious opportunities to connect with experts at the regional scale. For example, Alvidon presented his research at the Urban Environmental Accords (UEA Summit) in Melaka, Malaysia in September 2017. He is planning to expand the research activity to include other cities and to present the results during the next International River Summit.



Alvidon F. Asis heads the Environment Programs of the League of Cities of the Philippines, the country's mandated organization of 145 cities. He is a member of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council's Technical Management Group and of technical working groups on issues related to cities. He holds a Master's degree in Environmental Science.



Ready for Action: A behind-the-scenes look at disaster preparedness in the Philippines

By Alvidon F. Asis

Left: Mandaue City experiences flooding once or twice a year. The central command center monitors all the city's critical areas, including those prone to flooding. During flood events, *Bantay Mandaue*, the city's communication center, sends key information to Barangay officials, as well as local radio and television stations. Massive training programs about flood risks and prevention are regularly organized and reach all the population.

Top right: The Emergency Response Team maintains equipment in the disaster office of Naga City. The city has also put in place a team focusing exclusively on social media, broadcasting information during disasters, monitoring and validating the information shared online. Social media are widely popular and well accepted in Naga City and are the fastest way to communicate during disasters.

Bottom right: City officials and barangay captains exchange ideas on improving river management in Cotabato City. Two major rivers flow through the city, and early warning devices alert the community in case of flooding. The local government has initiated dredging efforts to mitigate the effects of flooding, and has requested additional funding and equipment from the Department of Public Works.