



Strengthening Community Engagement in Local Disaster Management: The Northern Mindanao, Philippines Experience

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	A B S T R A C T
<p>Received: March 23, 2024 Revised: January 20, 2025 Available online: January 31, 2025</p>	<p>Community engagement plays a crucial role in effective disaster management at the local level. As a representative voice of the citizens, civil society has worked alongside the government to broaden service delivery and act as collaborators in developing programs tailored to the community's needs. This study examines the engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the local disaster risk reduction management council (LDRRMC) of Bukidnon Province, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. Employing a descriptive-quantitative approach, the research evaluates CSOs' involvement in the functional areas of planning, budgeting, implementation monitoring, and evaluation, utilizing a structured survey among CSOs and local government units (LGUs). The results indicated that the CSOs were most engaged in the planning stage while least engaged in the monitoring and evaluation. The findings highlight the need for clear guidelines and capacity development to enhance CSO engagement. Global practices from countries like Japan, South Korea, and India underscore the importance of participatory and network governance to strengthen collaboration. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on CSO participation in disaster governance.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Community Engagement; Civil Society Organizations; Local Disaster Management; Participatory and Network Governance</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is considered a fundamental component of disaster management, especially for vulnerable countries like the Philippines. Situated along the Typhoon belt in the Pacific, the Philippines is visited by an average of 20 typhoons every year, five of which are destructive ([Asian Disaster Reduction Center; Domingo & Manejar, 2018](#)). It is located in the "Pacific Ring of Fire," making the country vulnerable to frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Its geographical location and physical environment also contribute to its high susceptibility to tsunamis, sea level rise, storm surges, landslides, flood/flashflood/flooding, and drought. This necessitates strong collaboration between the government and the community ([Pandeya, 2015](#)).

Global frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasize community engagement as a significant component of DRR strategies. Specifically, priority number 1 in the framework highlights the importance of understanding risk assessment by encouraging local communities and other stakeholders to identify risks and vulnerabilities. Moreover, priority number 4 explicitly calls to empower the community in disaster preparedness, emphasizing the need for the community to develop and implement emergency plans. As a member state of the United Nations, the Philippines is also a signatory to the Sendai Framework for Action (SFA), where it is recommended that information dissemination, policy-making, disaster methodologies, and decision-making be science-based ([Ong, 2023](#)).

Many countries in the world, including Japan and South Korea, have developed robust strategies for community engagement in local disaster management. Japan is a disaster-prone country affected by several disasters like earthquakes and

tsunamis. As a result, Japan has been exploring ways to ask for assistance from non-government organizations. Unlike Japan, South Korea is less affected by natural disasters, but in recent years, the country has been hit by major disasters, such as the Gyeongju earthquake in 2016 and the Pohang earthquake in 2017. Because of this, the government has started relying on civil society and NGOs and learning from Japan's experiences ([Park & Yoon, 2021](#)).

Furthermore, the study of Satizábal et al. (2022) scrutinized how community engagement for disaster risk reduction has been governed and translated into practice in Australia, focusing on the experiences of the practitioners and community representatives doing community engagement in a peri-urban and multi-hazard area of Victoria. The study identified and discussed the role of connectors—individuals fostering connections within and among state-led emergency services, local government, and the public—in negotiating change and building relationships. The results showed that the political economy of state-led emergency management hinders the efforts of connectors, contributing to disconnection between the public, community representatives, and emergency agencies. The result is missed opportunities to build meaningful connections among the public.

Civil society has been proven to be an effective collaborator with the government during disasters. The study by [Soriano \(2019\)](#) stated that CSOs, as non-state actors, played essential roles in disaster risk response and management over the years. They contributed to everything from traditional response and relief to rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. All stakeholders have recognized the significance and need for community-based risk reduction in international, national, and local civil society. They endeavored to establish links to the policy

options at the national and local levels (Williamson & Rodd, 2016).

The 2013 Asian Development Bank Publication defined the CSOs in the Philippines from the Filipino concepts of pakikipagkapwa (holistic interaction with others) and kapwa (shared inner self). Voluntary assistance or charity connotes equal status between the provider of the aid and the recipient for Filipinos, which embodies the terms *damayan* (the help of peers in periods of crisis) and *pagtutulungan* (mutual self-help) and the Western notion of *kawang gawa* (charity). CSOs refer to non-state and non-profit associations that work to improve society and human conditions. Basic types of CSOs include non-government organizations, civic organizations, cooperatives, social movements, professional groups, and business groups (Department of the Interior and Local Government Memorandum Circular 2018; Baidhar, 2024).

Local context

The province of Bukidnon is a landlocked plateau located in Northern Mindanao (Region 10). Like many other provinces in the Philippines, Bukidnon has experienced severe disasters that have devastated homes and communities. Flooding and landslides were the most notable natural disasters in the Municipalities of Valencia and Lantapan, Bukidnon, in 2023. (ASEAN Disaster Information Network, 2023). Over the years, the Philippine government has developed strong coping mechanisms based on its long history of disasters. The Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act institutionalizes the national disaster risk reduction management plan in the whole country (Republic Act 10121, 2010). It further stated the significant role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as members in every local disaster risk reduction management council at the provincial, city, municipal, and barangay levels. Similarly, Republic Act 7160 (1991), or the Local Government Code of 1991, along with various legal circulars, emphasized the significance of community engagement through the involvement of accredited CSOs in local disaster risk reduction planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028, 2023; Republic Act 9729, 2009; Ruvalcaba-Gomez, 2019).

While significant research has focused on disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and CSO humanitarian aid perspective, few studies examine the level of CSO engagement at the local level of decision-making, particularly at the local disaster risk reduction management council in a disaster-prone country like the Philippines. Although existing literatures emphasize the value of CSO and government collaborations, especially during disasters, challenges like funding and limited resources often constrain its effectiveness (Protik et al., 2018; Rafique & Khoo, 2018). This highlights the need for further studies exploring the practices and challenges of CSOs' engagement in local disaster management, especially in the areas of planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Participatory and Network Governance

Globally, participatory governance has become a mechanism for fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in public decision-making. Participatory governance is a significant component of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The Open Government Partnership is based on the concept that an open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more

accountable to citizens. Improving the relationship between people and their government has long-term, exponential benefits for everyone. OGP is a broad partnership that includes members at the national and local levels as well as thousands of civil society organizations. It ensures that civil society organizations or direct citizen engagement have a role in shaping and overseeing governments (Open Government Partnership, 2019). In essence, CSO engagement contributes to the effective integration of a participatory framework as it actively supports and enhances participatory governance (Cook & Andersson, 2017).

Ballesteros and Ancheta (2018) elaborated on participatory governance as a variant of governance theory whereby citizens are directly engaged or involved in managing resources for economic and social development. They also emphasize that locally based economic development is more likely to be successful if initiated at the community and local level (Blakely & Leigh, 2010). Moreover, Fischer (2018) argued that participatory governance goes beyond democratic participation in elections or transparency. Its practice results in direct purposive engagement of citizens in pressing issues in the community or society. A typical application of participatory governance is in delivering public goods and services by the government or civil servants (disaster management and environmental concerns). However, citizens can play an active role in the programs, projects, or activities that are important to them. The concept of participatory governance arose from political and social science disciplines grounded in the theory of democratic engagement. It is important to note that these processes encompass practices beyond the democratic right to vote or the right to transparency (Fischer, 2018). It includes practices in both "public deliberation" and "co-production." Participatory governance contextualizes the involvement of the CSOs in resource management of the local government unit in governing the local community and populace.

Chen (2023) highlights the importance of CSOs and government interaction, especially during a crisis. Accordingly, the central government and the society empower each other in public governance, and the central government's capability of turning CSOs into partners secures the mutually beneficial relationship between them (Orbista, 2012). However, Chen noted that the fragmentation of the local government and its affiliated institutions leads to the co-existence of conflicting modes of government-CSO interactions at the local level, which is the institutional basis for the survival and growth of CSOs even in localities with very conservative local political environments. It turns out that distinguishing the roles of heterogeneous "state" actors helps to unravel the complexity of government-CSOs relations and provides new insights into the role of CSOs. This further implies that the interaction between government and CSO is crucial for addressing crises and improving governance.

Network governance aligns with the principles of open government partnership and participatory governance. A study in China was conducted among civil society organizations and local government. Civil society practitioners initiated open-ended processes of communication, consultation, and cooperation. Such processes help promote cross-sector collaboration between Chinese civil society organizations and local government agencies. The developments signified an incremental change from government control (*guan zhi*) to public management (*guan li*) and to network governance (*zhi li*). The study further looked at strategies for the establishment of cooperative relations, focusing on steering mechanisms and process factors. Additionally, to further understand the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration,

the study explored the social capital dimensions of the principle of reciprocity and trust. The findings revealed that successful experiments with cross-sector collaboration not only depend on structural factors but also the skills and strategies of the individuals and organizations involved (Fulda, Li, & Song, 2012).

Another significant cornerstone of participatory governance involves an active civil society that can question public authorities and suggest different government interventions. CSOs' role as watchdogs of the government is to ensure the proper delivery of essential services and hold government officials accountable. CSOs' constructive engagement increases citizens' trust and confidence in the government, advocating for a better and more transparent government (Munene & Thakhathi, 2017).

This study explored the level of engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the local disaster risk reduction and management council in the province of Bukidnon as perceived by both CSOs and local government units. Specifically, the study focused on their involvement in the functional areas of planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

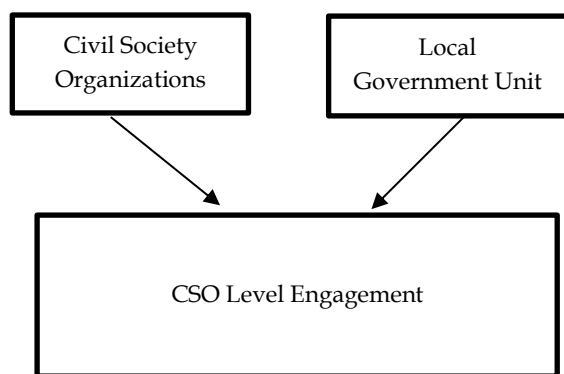


Figure 1. The framework of the study

METHOD

The research utilized a descriptive-quantitative design to examine CSOs' level of engagement in the local disaster risk reduction management council. It focused on CSOs' involvement in key areas of planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The study was conducted in the province of Bukidnon, Philippines, among all accredited CSOs and selected local government unit members of the provincial disaster risk reduction and management council (Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan 2020-2025). Data was collected using a structured survey questionnaire employing the 5-point Likert Scale: 5-Highly Engaged, 4-Engaged, 3-Moderately Engaged, 2-Fairly Engaged, and 1-Not Engaged. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation were used to treat the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CSOs' Level of Engagement in the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council

The results in Table 1 revealed that the CSOs' overall level of engagement is rated as engaged in the Local Government planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This means that CSOs participated and contributed to the results achieved, as well as the sustainability of programs,

projects, and activities following legal provisions and established goals and objectives. The CSOs are at the forefront of the community before, during, and after a disaster. When disaster strikes, the CSOs, along with barangay officials and staff, are usually the first responders. The result exemplifies the significant role of CSOs in disaster management. In 2015, a study conducted in cyclone Aila-affected areas in India revealed that the role of NGOs in disaster management was providing relief materials, involvement in rescue operations, arranging temporary shelters, organizing health camps, and developing communication facilities (Mondal et al., 2015).

The CSOs were recognized as the government's key partner in the localization of Disaster Risk Reduction Policies. They helped translate significant law provisions while strengthening community cooperation, especially in disaster response and relief. All stakeholders have recognized the significance of community-based risk reduction and their different capacities in supporting efforts at the local and national levels. The local government unit perceived that the CSOs respond promptly to disasters because of their strategic location. Compared to the barangays, the CSOs perform their functions beyond just eight hours a day. The citizens are more likely to call for their help during a disaster. From the citizens' previous experience, the CSOs responded promptly. According to some CSOs, they are always visible in the community and make sure that they are always ready to help the community (Ursulom, 2021). They conducted foot and motor patrols during nighttime to ensure the safety of the people in the community. The local government unit noted that the citizens felt more comfortable and at ease with the CSOs (Ibones et al., 2024).

Strong citizen participation is essential in substantially reducing disaster losses during disasters. This is done by enhancing the inclusion and meaningful participation of vulnerable community members disproportionately impacted by disasters. Promoting and strengthening local leaders, including grassroots, increase effective community mobilization and representatives (Arab Network for Environment and Development). One of the strongest typhoons recorded in world history hit the Philippines in 2013, according to the final report by the Philippines National Disaster Risk Reduction & Management Council (NDRRMC); super Typhoon Haiyan, locally called "Yolanda," affected 44 provinces after landfall in Eastern Samar on November 8. It has affected 3,424,593 families, with 6,300 casualties, 28,688 injured, and 1,062 missing. The estimated cost of damage was ₱9.46 billion.

Immediately after the landfall, a group of government and non-government agencies and institutions joined in responding to the challenge. In disaster response and management, Soriano (2019) highlighted CSOs as proven effective in helping governments address calamities and disasters by raising funds for the affected community, mobilizing networks to operate on the ground, deploying humanitarian missions to complement government efforts, and demanding accountability from the State. Governments have recognized the significant help that CSOs contribute to addressing disaster reduction, response and management, environmental issues, health, education, political awareness, and poverty alleviation. The CSOs, among others, were observed to be effective in raising awareness in the following areas: advocacy service provider, capacity builder, and representative.

Table 1. CSO Level of Engagement in the Local Disaster Risk Reduction

Management Council		
Overall Mean	3.90	Engaged
CSOs' Engagement	Mean	Interpretation
Local Government Planning		
giving inputs to local government units in the formulation and preparation of the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan of the Province	4.46	Highly Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the review of the plan consistent with other national and local planning programs annually	4.38	Highly Engaged
assisting the local government unit in the development of the plan consistent with other national and local planning programs annual	4.15	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption into local development plans and strategies in sustainable development and poverty reduction	3.92	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the testing of the plan consistent with other national and local planning programs annually	3.77	Engaged
Local Government Budgeting		
supporting the local government unit in the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption into the budget as a strategy for sustainable development and poverty reduction	4.15	Engaged
the deliberation of budget prioritization for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption	4.08	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in raising awareness of the different functions and, responsibilities and deliverables in the local budgeting process	3.77	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the finalization of financial resources and budgetary allocations applicable to their respective jurisdictions	3.54	Engaged
Local Government Implementation		
assisting the local government unit in the implementation of the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (LDRRMP)	4.38	Highly Engaged
supporting the local government unit in convening of the local council as the need arises	4.38	Highly Engaged
supporting the local government unit in integrating disaster risk reduction	4.00	Engaged

and climate change adaptation into programs as a strategy for sustainable development and poverty reduction		
giving inputs to local government units on recommending the implementation of the forced preemptive evacuation of residents, if necessary	3.58	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the promulgation of their respective internal rules and regulations for their meetings	3.54	Engaged
Local Government Monitoring and Evaluation		
supporting the local government unit in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (LDRRMP)	3.46	Engaged
supporting the local government unit in the submission of Reports on the implementation of Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (LDRRMP)	3.23	Moderately Engaged

Table 2. Summary of CSO Engagement

Key Areas	Mean	Interpretation
Planning	4.13	Engaged
Budgeting	3.89	Engaged
Implementation	3.98	Engaged
Monitoring & Evaluation	3.35	Engaged

The result further showed that the CSOs were more engaged in planning the local disaster risk reduction management council. The result implies that since CSOs knew the community's situation, they could provide essential data for disaster planning. They are a reliable source of information for the local disaster risk reduction management council. The CSOs perceived that being immersed in the community as first responders could contribute a lot to preparing the local disaster risk reduction management Plan. The CSOs stand true to spreading the spirit of volunteerism in the community. On the other hand, the local government unit perceived the CSOs' inputs as relevant in preparing the plan. They were genuinely committed to performing their roles while ensuring that they delivered their advocacy.

However, effective governance can be compromised if CSOs lack influence in local decision-making. The study of [Bhuiyan et al. 2023](#) in Bangladesh assessed the degree to which the CSOs have made the local government's decision-making and activities more participatory at the grassroots. It was found that the CSOs have been less effective in mobilizing public engagement and affecting decision-making to promote participatory governance in the study area. Moreover, a key reason behind less participatory local governance is the high-power distance culture, where the power of local governance is concentrated in the hands of a few powerful elites ([Rafique et al., 2021](#)), and the general public is distancing itself from the local government. As a result, the local citizens become apathetic to local governance, growing a lack of trust and interest in the decision-making process and the activities of the LGUs'. This lack of interest and lack of trust eventually contribute to the people's lack of participation in the local governance process, creating a vicious

cycle of less participatory local governance (Henry et al., 2019; Guragain, 2024).

Challenges faced by CSOs when engaging in the Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council

The CSOs faced challenges primarily in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Disaster Risk Reduction Management-related programs, projects, and activities of the council. Although DILG Memorandum Circular 2018-89 encourages CSOs to engage in the feedback mechanism of various projects and sub-project monitoring, the lack of needed skills and training hindered their effective involvement in the monitoring and evaluation. Instead, the CSOs diverted their attention to being community responders. In support of this, the local government unit also agreed that the CSOs needed more technical capacity to do the job.

The study of Guce and Galindes (2017) revealed that the existing Republic Act 7160, or the local government of 1991 and other legal issuances, conceptualized citizen participation using a limited lens. The study further suggested that elevating citizen participation beyond administrative, platform-focused standards allows stakeholders to substantially influence government decision-making. Additionally, lessons can be drawn from models and experiments to clarify citizens' roles in the process and to build on their capacities to perform these roles successfully (Guce & Galindes, 2017; Ertan, 2020; Gilfillan & Fee 2017).

The result could also be attributed to the lack of clear guidelines and criteria for monitoring and evaluation, which mirrors Abdula's (2018) observation of CSOs' participation in barangay governance. The absence of specific M&E frameworks for participation may have hindered their ability to contribute effectively to the evaluation processes. Establishing metrics, tools, and indicators for M&E could be beneficial in enforcing CSOs' involvement in local government.

This is in contrast to a case study conducted in the West African country of Ghana, where there was an observed increase in the number of CSOs engaged in independent monitoring and evaluation of government programs and policies. Accordingly, most CSOs rely on a range of M&E tools in combination with advocacy strategies to hold the government accountable and improve the implementation of programs and policies. However, despite the popularity of such initiatives, their effectiveness and impact remain unconfirmed and are not well understood. In addition, little is known about the influence of this type of CSO-led M&E at the district level. The research further suggests that the built-in dialogue space is acting as a catalyst for certain influence mechanisms (Gildemyn, 2014).

The difference between the case of Ghana and this study could be attributed to varied factors like existing policies, CSO culture in both countries, CSO capacities, and the relationship between government and CSOs. For instance, the higher level of engagement of CSOs in Ghana may be due to their established collaboration and the limitation of CSOs' engagement in government. In contrast, in the Philippines, there is a lack of clear guidelines on CSOs' extent of engagement, especially in the monitoring and evaluation of government programs, projects, and activities. Although the case of Ghana suggests that the monitoring evaluation initiatives are considered a powerful tool to assess government accountability and transparency, their effectiveness is still unconfirmed. It is imperative to understand that not all initiatives will lead to tangible outputs, especially at the district level.

International insights and implications

Japan and South Korea's global practices highlight that reliance on NGOs' and CSOs for disaster management underscores the importance of collaboration. Government efforts alone are not sufficient to ensure effective and comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management. Moreover, learning from the experiences of Japan, an established mechanism for community engagement can empower citizens to actively fulfill their role, especially during disasters. The Philippines can also draw insights from India's experiences in strengthening the collaboration with CSOs, especially as first responders. Because CSOs' are at the grassroots level, they can provide faster relief to communities affected by disasters (Iddi & Nuhu, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant yet underutilized role of CSOs in local disaster management in the Province of Bukidnon, Philippines, particularly in the areas of planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Although the results revealed a higher engagement in the planning stage, their involvement in the monitoring and evaluation is slightly lower due to the absence of clear guidelines. This emphasizes the need to establish a clear framework and implement capacity-building programs to ensure meaningful and sustained CSO engagement.

Furthermore, international practices from countries like Japan, South Korea, and India provide significant insights into promoting stronger collaboration with CSOs, especially during disasters. Empowering CSOs as active partners creates a ripple effect for citizen responsiveness and resilience. However, the effectiveness of these collaborations will also depend on the institutionalizing participatory and network governance mechanisms. These will not only strengthen the Philippine local disaster management but also promote collaborative local decision-making aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Philippine Local Government may consider revising, formulating, and issuing clear guidelines on CSOs' engagement. These guidelines may also include indicators as the basis for assessing CSOs' level of engagement, stating the target each CSO needs to attain every year, which will be the basis for renewing their future accreditation.
2. A comprehensive capacity-development program for CSOs may also be considered to address the gaps and challenges faced by CSOs in effectively engaging with the local disaster risk reduction management council.
3. The Philippines may strengthen its collaboration with CSOs by adopting the experiences of other countries like Japan, South Korea, and India.

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