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## Missing: Who is in Charge?

In 2012, Jerry Uy a first term city council member in Tacloban City, Philippines became bothered by the increasing frequency of calamities, in particular, typhoons. These were strong typhoons, triggering flash floods and landslides, causing damage to property and livelihoods, and resulting in loss of life. In most cases, government and private operations were disrupted. Unlike in the previous decades, these typhoons did not normally pass by Eastern Visayas. He was wondering why the storms no longer visited the island of Batanes in the northern part of the country. Instead, they would originate on the eastern side of Mindanao directly hitting the Eastern Visayas. A lawyer by training, he wanted to know where the vulnerable and risk-prone areas were in Tacloban City. He wanted to be prepared not only for his family and business interests, but also for the community. Efforts to make the community more resilient to natural hazards and risks had been nominal. There were hardly any persons in authority helping the city residents understand and manage disaster risks.

In June of 2012, Uy, the chair of the Committee on Laws, Rules, and Privileges moved for the approval of an ordinance in the Sanggunian Panlungsod (city legislative body). This was the Ordinance Creating the Tacloban City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO). Uy saw this legislative measure as a way to help improve the city's safety and resilience. He was confronted with the following questions: Who should lead in protecting residents before, during, and after natural disasters? Which office should capacitate vulnerable sectors in anticipating, coping with, and recovering from the negative impacts of emergency or disaster? Which disaster preparedness structures, measures, and mechanisms are in place? Should a disaster risk reduction management office (DRRMO), with permanent and competent staff, plans, programs, and a budget be created?

## Super Typhoon Haiyan

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In November 2013, the catastrophic typhoon, Haiyan slammed Eastern Visayas. With wind gusts up to 235 mph, Haiyan almost destroyed Tacloban City. The first landfall was in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. The successive killer storm surges landed in Tacloban City. The death toll reached more than 7,000 and damages to property and infrastructure was estimated to reach 571 billion Php (2.81 billion USD).<sup>i,1</sup>

Humanitarian aid groups that rushed to help the area had nowhere to go. They independently chose what to give and whom to give to. No one guided them. Some communities received more help while others got nothing. Duplication and overlap of interventions were common. Who was doing what, where, and when was unknown to the local government unit (LGU). During the emergency phase, more than 100 international non-governmental organizations were registered in the United Nations Office for Coordination on Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to provide aid in the aftermath of the typhoon. “Which office should have synchronized or coordinated the response operations?” Uy wondered. “Should it have been the mayor’s office?”

Two days before landfall, key cabinet officials were in Tacloban. This included Mar Roxas, secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government, Voltaire Gazmin, secretary of the Department of National Defense, the chair of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, and Dinky Soliman, secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. After Haiyan’s wrath, dead bodies and damaged buildings and facilities became the scenery of Tacloban. Looting followed. No one knew who the looters were. Government was not visible. Survivors were crying out for help. They were homeless, orphaned, widowed, injured, bleeding, hungry, and lost. No one was responding to the basic needs of the survivors. National/local wranglings ensued. Nobody wanted to assume responsibility for the massive devastation. Laying the blame became the norm. In one of the emergency meetings between Mayor Alfred Romualdez and Roxas, the latter politely and repeatedly asked the mayor to formally specify what the city needed or could deliver to facilitate central government’s assistance. In his effort to hasten the written request, Roxas uttered “the president is an Aquino and you’re a Romualdez.” Locals characterized the action of the central government as cold and inhuman. Roxas’ statement was read to highlight the rivalry of two major political families in the country. Locals blamed the national government for the disaster.<sup>2</sup>

## Tacloban City: A Political Sketch

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Tacloban City was located in the northeastern part of the island of Leyte in Region 8 or Eastern Visayas. The total population of the city of Tacloban in 2010 was 221,174 with 45,478 households with an average size of 5.1 persons. It had 138 barangays.<sup>3</sup> There were 28 coastal barangays that were located in danger zones, or within 40 meters from the shoreline. In 2013 and 2014, Php 70 million (1.719 million USD) was allotted to the Disaster Risk Reduction Fund.

Tacloban City was headed by Romualdez who was serving his last term as mayor. He was the former congressman of the first district of Leyte. Romualdez took over the mayor’s post after his father finished his term. Also, his wife, Cristina Romualdez was an elected member of the city council while his first cousin, Ferdinand Martin Romualdez and aunt, the former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos were

i 1 USD = 43.00 Php as of January 2013.

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members of the Philippine Congress. Five years before Haiyan struck Tacloban, Romualdez vigorously and successfully campaigned for the city's upgrading to highly urbanized status. On December 18, 2008, Tacloban City became the first highly urbanized city in Eastern Visayas.

## **The Legal Framework**

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During the presidency of Corazon Aquino (1988-1995), who happened to be the mother of the incumbent president, Benigno Simeon Aquino, landmark legislation known as the Local Government Code of 1991 or RA 7160 was enacted. The law provided ample power to LGUs, particularly in its General Welfare Clause. This enabled LGUs to adequately respond to the needs of affected people before, during, and after an emergency.

### **Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) Law**

On May 27, 2010, RA 10121 otherwise known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (PDRRM) Act became law. It acknowledged, among other things, the need to adopt a disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) approach that was holistic, comprehensive, integrated, and proactive in lessening the socio-economic and environmental impacts of disasters. The PDRRM Act focused on disaster prevention and risk reduction by putting more emphasis on strengthening communities and people's capacity to anticipate, cope with, and recover from disasters.<sup>4</sup> It aimed to promote the participation of all sectors and stakeholders concerned at all levels, especially local communities.<sup>5</sup>

The law provided the basis for the development of policies and plans as well as the implementation of actions and measures pertaining to all aspects of DRRM, including good governance, risk assessment and early warning, knowledge building and awareness raising, reducing underlying risk factors, and preparedness for effective response and recovery.<sup>6</sup>

Section 12 of RA 10121 stated that there must be an established local disaster risk reduction management office (LDRRMO) in every province, city/municipality and barangay, which would be responsible for the direction and coordination of DRRM programs within their respective jurisdictions. Under the law, LDRRMOs were to be equipped with three staff assigned to handle disaster administration and training, disaster research and planning, and disaster operations.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ordinance No. 2012-11-111**

In 2012, the local legislative body of Tacloban City deliberated ordinance No. 2012-11-111 known as An Ordinance Creating the Tacloban City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO), defining its organizational structure and functions and providing funding. However, Romualdez did not support the legislative measure.

The main purpose of the Tacloban CDRRMO was to serve as the secretariat of the Disaster risk reduction management council (DRRMC) as well as the disaster operations center, which would attend to the coordination, preparedness, humanitarian response, early/full recovery, and rehabilitation of the city, in cases of calamity or disaster (see **Appendix A** for the functions of the Tacloban CDRRMO).

The said ordinance provided for staff with corresponding salary grade. While the law mandated three core staff members, the ordinance provided for more (see **Table 1**):

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**Table 1**

Personnel Composition of Tacloban City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office

Position	Salary Grade
City Disaster Risk Reduction Mgt officer (Department Head level II)	26
Asst City Disaster Risk Reduction Mgt Officer (Asst. City Government Head)	24
1) Administrative Training Officer	22
1) Research and Planning Officer	22
1) Operations and Warning	22
1) Administrative Training Assistant II	15
1) Research and Planning Assistant II	15
1) Disaster Warning and Monitoring Officer II	15
1) Electronics and Communication Technician III	9
1) Electronics and Communication Technician II	8
2) Data Encoders	6
2) Driver/Mechanic/Messengers	4
1) Utility Worker	4
2) Warehousemen	4

Source: *Sangguniang Panlungsod of Tacloban City*

The bill creating the Tacloban CDRRMO was sponsored by a Liberal Party council member and was unanimously endorsed by the members of the Sanggunian Panglungsod, surprisingly without a corresponding appropriation. During its formulation, the Sangguniang Panlungsod invited city department heads in to advise and assist the mayor in the drafting of the ordinance before it was transmitted to the members of the Sangguniang Panlungsod. These were the heads of office for human resources, budget, and DRRM. For the members of the local lawmaking body, this was their way to care for and protect city dwellers by institutionalizing measures for reducing disaster risks and enhancing disaster preparedness and response capabilities at all levels in the city.<sup>8</sup>

The draft ordinance was transmitted by the Sangguniang Panlungsod to the mayor's office for signature August 6, 2012. However, a month later, it was returned unsigned. By virtue of section 54(B) of RA 7160, the ordinance was, nevertheless, approved. It officially became law on September 6, 2012.

Four months after the creation of the CDRRMO, a city DRRM plan without recovery and rehabilitation components was submitted to the Sanggunian Panlungsod. By 2015, it still had not been amended, even after Haiyan's catastrophic landfall and devastation.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Tacloban CDRRMO History**

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### **Buddy Estudillo**

The Tacloban CDRRMO was first headed by Salvador "Buddy" Estudillo. In 2008, he was initially invited by Romualdez as a consultant. Before joining the local government of Tacloban, he was the regional director the Office of Civil Defense for 15 years. However, he ended up assuming a full time department head position at the Traffic Operations, Management, Enforcement, and Control Office (TOMECO) and as city DRRM officer. Prior to the enactment of RA 10121, the office did not have a permanent staff. In times of disaster, traffic enforcers were converted to function as rescue teams to assist in evacuation operations. When RA 10121 was passed, Estudillo initiated the drafting of the ordinance creating the CDRRMO and the city DRRM Plan. He tried proposing the purchase and installation of an early warning system, hiring the required personnel for the CDRRMO, conducting a public awareness

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campaign in 138 barangays, and establishing an operations center. He did not, however, receive the support of the mayor. With the approval of the ordinance, Estudillo thought he would be able to work efficiently as CDRRM officer. But things never changed. Instead of recruiting staff for the office, he was given three warm bodies from the different offices of the city who were on job order status, which meant that they were on contract for a short duration and their contracts may or may not have been renewed. Estudillo also encountered difficulty in using the DRRM funding.

With his transfer to the city, Estudillo brought one staffer from the Office of Civil Defense, Rene Amano. Like him, Amano's appointment was not for DRRM but as an administrative officer of TOMECSO. Amano helped him research the draft ordinance and the DRRM plan. He read RA 10121 and coordinated with and visited some LGUs and national government agencies to firm up the draft ordinance.

Estudillo believed that the reason behind the lack of functionality of the office was with the fact that Uy, who sponsored the bill, was not a political ally of the mayor. When he personally asked the mayor why he did not sign the bill, the mayor's response was, "*D pa napapanahon*" ("It's not yet timely.") Frustrated as DRRM officer, he gave up his post and concentrated on his position as department head of TOMECSO.<sup>10</sup>

### **Jabs Lagutan**

Jabs Lagutan from TOMECSO was appointed to the office and served for less than six months. When he received the order, an executive assistant of the mayor quipped, "*pag di mo tanggaping mawawalan ka ng trabaho*" ("if you don't accept, you will lose your job.") He had no choice but to accept the additional work. Barely warming his seat in office Typhoon Haiyan greeted him. During his watch, he inherited the three staffers, all of whom were nurses. By June 2015, these three were no longer with the CDRRMO.

Lagutan was provided an office but no chairs, tables, or computer. He bought all these by himself. There were only two major trainings: these were exclusively for the rescue teams. For Typhoon Haiyan, Lagutan convened the DRRMC. When the council met, there were very few members who showed up since the mayor was out. Lagutan vividly remembers that the mayor arrived in Tacloban from Manila in the afternoon on Wednesday, two days before the scheduled forecast for Haiyan's landfall. The mayor ordered the release of Php 3 million (64,125 USD) to cover mobility and other related expenses.

Lagutan could not use the designated calamity fund because it had been used up. When Typhoon Haiyan struck he witnessed how his office was relegated to the background. He could not uphold the mandate of the office because of the different groups trying to wield control inside the local government. He likened CDRRMO as a baby trying to direct the elders, an odd scenario.<sup>11</sup>

### **Deric Anido and Ildebrando Bernadas**

After the resignation of Lagutan, the mayor assigned Deric Anido to the office. Anido only served for six months. He was followed by the Ildebrando Bernadas, the assistant city administrator, on concurrent capacity.

## **What's Up for the Next Calamity?**

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Due to the impacts of Typhoon Haiyan and succeeding weather disturbances Uy started to think about revisiting the 2012 ordinance. He knew very well that the CDRRMO needed adequate institutional and financial support to function responsively, particularly to further increase disaster preparedness and resilience. He wanted a DRRMO that was manned by a professional, responsive, and efficient staff that found the community interest to be of paramount importance. As he put it, "life is at stake" during every

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natural catastrophe. So he was wondering why the 2012 ordinance creating the CDRRMO was not implemented. But in May 2015 the mayor wrote the local legislative body respectfully requesting the amendment of the ordinance. Romualdez was interested in amending Section VII, which increased the salaries of the CDRRMO workers and defined their responsibilities. Uy questioned, "Where does the City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office stand vis a vis the national DRRM Law? How compliant is the office?"<sup>12</sup> Uy also stressed to the Sanggunian and the human resources chief that a competent DRRMO should be appointed as soon as possible.

As the original sponsor of the 2012 Ordinance, Uy had already studied the local legislation for the creation of the DRRMO. He knew that the 2012 ordinance did not incorporate climate change adaptation. Aside from a desk review, he visited and communicated with local award winning DRRM officials in Palawan and Surigao.<sup>13</sup>

Second, considering the extraordinary catastrophes, he believed that the calamity fund was small and should be increased. After all, the local government code provided for the fiscal autonomy of the subnational units.

Third, he thought that there should be civil society participation in the DRRMC. The ordinance provided for four slots. Should it be given to women, youth, and other vulnerable sectors?

Fourth, he saw the need to craft an ordinance declaring safe and unsafe zones in the city.

## Appendix A

### Ordinance No.2012-11-111

#### Section 5. Functions of the Tacloban City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office

The ordinance provided for the functions of the CDRRMO:

1. Set the direction, development, implementation, and coordination of DRRM programs within the City of Tacloban.
2. Design, program, and coordinate DRRM activities consistent with the national council's standards and guidelines.
3. Consolidate city disaster risk information, including natural hazards, vulnerabilities, and climate change risks, and maintain a city risk map.
4. Organize and conduct training, orientation, and knowledge management activities on DRRM at the city level.
5. Operate a multi-hazard early warning system, linked to DRRM to provide accurate and timely advice to national or city emergency response organizations.
6. Formulate and implement a comprehensive and integrated city DRRM plan in accordance with the national and regional frameworks and policies in close coordination with the local development council (LDC).
7. Prepare and submit to the Sangguniang Panlungsod through the CDRRC and the LDC the annual CDRRMO plan and budget.
8. Conduct continuous disaster monitoring and mobilize entities of the city government, civic social organizations, private groups, and organized volunteers to utilize their facilities and resources for the protection and preservation of life and property during emergencies in accordance with existing policies and procedures.
9. Identify, assess, and manage hazards and risks.
10. Disseminate information and raise public awareness about hazards and risks; their nature, effects, early warning signs, and countermeasures.
11. Identify and implement cost effective risk reduction measures and strategies.
12. Maintain a database of human resources, equipment, directories, and critical infrastructures.
13. Develop, strengthen, and operationalize mechanisms for partnerships with the private sector, civic social organizations, and volunteer groups.
14. Take all necessary steps on a continuing basis to maintain, provide, or arrange for the provision of suitably trained and competent personnel for effective DRRM.
15. Organize, train, equip, and supervise the city emergency response teams and the community disaster volunteers.
16. Respond to and manage the adverse effects of emergencies and carry out recovery activities in affected areas, ensuring that there is an efficient mechanism for immediate delivery of food, shelter, and medical supplies to women and children.
17. Within the city, promote and raise public awareness of and compliance with RA10121.
18. Serve as the secretariat and executive arm of the CDRRMC.
19. Coordinate other disaster risk reduction and management activities.
20. Establish linkage/network with other local government units for disaster risk reduction and emergency response.
21. Recommend through the CDRRMC the enactment of local ordinances consistent with RA 10121.
22. Establish a city DRRM operations center.
23. Prepare and submit through the CDRRMC, reports on the utilization of the city DRRM fund.
24. Act on matters that may be authorized by the CDRRMC (Ordinance No. 2012-11-111).

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## Endnotes

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- 3 Tacloban Recovery and Sustainable Development Group. "Inception Report." 2014.
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- 8 Glova, Neil. Personal interview. Council Member of Tacloban City. 5 June 2015
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