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Men and women members of Mainuswagon nga Mandaragat sa Sais Association (MAMSA) fisherfolk organization in Barangay 6 in San Roque municipality take comfort in each other during the psychosocial support activity held after Typhoon Tisoy badly hit Northern Samar which destroyed their houses and livelihoods.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD-BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM

Creating A Space for Healing: CERD's Psychosocial Care Efforts in Fisherfolk Communities During Disasters

This case story presents the CERD's (Center for Empowerment and Resource Development) disaster response intervention with its partner coastal communities in Mondragon, Northern Samar, Philippines addressing the people's psychosocial and mental health concerns caused by the successive typhoons they experienced. Disaster Response refers to the provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety, and meet the basic subsistence needs of the affected people. Sometimes

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called “disaster relief”, it is mainly focused on immediate and short-term needs, which include assistance on medical services, alternative livelihoods, temporary shelter, relief delivery efforts and psychosocial support.

Introduction

When typhoon Nona struck, I hid in our comfort room, I did not know what happened to my family, it was as if I was out of my mind. I did not know what to do. I was hopeless that time.”, based on the accounts of Marcos, a federation leader.

Millagrace, a member of a fishers’ organization, recalled, *“I am too frightened when typhoon Nona struck. I cried hard while I prayed with my children, as powerful winds and heavy rain hit our place. Thinking that our house, made only of nipa shingles and wood, could be swept away by the strong wind, we immediately left our house and evacuated to my mother in-law’s place. On the next day, after the typhoon, we went back. Our house was no longer there. All our things are wet. I cried because we have no money. And we could not go fishing. How could we start again our life?”* These were what they felt prior to the psychosocial support effort extended to them. After they participated in a psychosocial support activity, their narratives spoke of hope, support, better relations, and optimism. *“When there is an impending calamity, we are prepared, we know that we could recover, because we have each other, we have each other’s support. We just have to persevere.”*

Destroyed houses, schools, roads, and other infrastructures, washed out fishing boats and other implements, damaged crops—these are the effects of disasters visible to the people. What is less discernible yet has a lasting impact on the lives of the survivors are the trauma, stress, and grief they experienced during disasters such as what Marcos and Millagrace had experienced. Such effects on their mental health may continue for years which could affect their coping abilities and resiliency. The already vulnerable farmers and fishers’ sectors suffered the most, as government institutions, often, have limited response or programs to address the community’s psychological and social factors or psychosocial aspect at the time of disasters.

Northern Samar, one of the three provinces of Samar island, is facing the Pacific Ocean, on the east side, where most tropical storms are formed and monitored, making it more vulnerable to risk and hazard effects of typhoons. For years, successive typhoons barreled through Northern Samar such as the super Typhoon Yolanda (International name Haiyan) in 2013, Typhoon Ruby (Typhoon Hagupit) and Typhoon Seniang (Typhoon Jangmi in 2014, Typhoon Amang (Typhoon Mekkhala) and Typhoon Nona (Typhoon Melor) in 2015, Typhoon Tisoy (Typhoon Kammuri) in 2019, Typhoon Ambo (Typhoon Vongfong) in 2020, which destroyed and disrupted the livelihoods of the people, and worsened poverty.

In the absence of a psychosocial support during disasters which is urgently needed by the affected communities in Northern Samar, CERD, a development organization working among the fisherfolks, took the initiative to respond.

CERD Mondragon Program works in seven (7) coastal barangays or projects sites in Mondragon municipality, namely, Roxas, Bugko, Chitongko, San Juan, Dona Lucia, Kauswagan, and expansion sites of Barangays San Agustin and Bagasbas. It organized and continuously capacitate its program partner, the fisher organizations, or people's organizations (POs), in various areas of development work including resource management, gender mainstreaming, livelihood development, advocacy, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to broaden and deepen their participation in fisheries management and governance.

As of December 2019, there are 247 individual members (145 women and 102 men) of the federation or a total of 204 households participating in all activities of their respective barangay-organizations in Mondragon municipality. CERD also formally entered the municipalities of Pambujan and San Roque in the second half of 2018 and thus named CERD Bantayan Bay resulting to the following: organized three (3) POs in Pambujan in Barangays 8, Doña Anecita, and Paninirongan with 118 members (34 women and 84 men) or a total of 85 households, and in San Roque, three (3) POs in Bantayan, Lao-angan and Zone 6 with 203 members (54 women and 149 men).

Mondragon municipality with eight (8) POs—seven (7) are barangay-based POs, and their Federation

- Bagasbas Organisasyon Dapig sa Ligalaton Suporta (BUDLIS)
- Brgy. Doña Lucia Fisherfolk Association (BDLFA)
- Barangay San Juan Fisherfolk Association (BSJFA)
- Bugko Fisherfolk Association (BFFA)
- Bugko Women's Association (BWA)
- Chitongko Small Fishers & Farmers Association (CSFFA)
- Roxas Usuwag Manihar Pagpoytoy San Illegal (RUMPI)
- San Agustin Programa sa Aton Pangabuhi (SAPSAP)
- Mondragon Atamanon Lugar-Dagat Asikasuhon Sunod Nga Henerasyon Upod Gugma I-undong (MALASUGI) Fisherfolks Federation.

Pambujan municipality with three (3) POs

- Doña Anecita Panginanuon Am Kadagatan para sa Kauswagan (DAPAKK)
- Mangingisda a Tais ng Monbon sa Batas at Kalikasan (MATAMBAKA)
- Paninirongan Waraon an Illegal Kauswagan Aton Na Matamtaman (PAWIKAN)

San Roque municipality with three (3) POs

- Lao-angan Mandaragat Dagat Alagaan Ginhaway Abot Natin (LAMADANGAN)
- Mainuswagong nga Mandaragat sa Sais Association (MAMSA)
- Samahang Mangingisda ng Bantayan (SAMBA)

Events that led to DRR Work Focused on Psychosocial Support

The CERD Mondragon was one of the non-government organizations that immediately engaged in relief and rehabilitation efforts in Eastern Visayas when the powerful and deadly typhoon Yolanda (Typhoon Haiyan) hit the country in November 2013, specifically the Visayas islands. The staff, while doing emergency response activities in Northern and Eastern Samar communities, have witnessed deaths, injuries, sufferings of the people and destruction all over the place. At that time, they are new to the field of disaster risk reduction management and climate change. They have very limited experience and capability in handling post disaster related stress, at the level of the organization and partner communities.

In February 2014, a psychosocial process called Stress Debriefing was organized which enabled the staff to release accumulated stress and worries resulting from the emergency work during typhoon Yolanda and to move forward. Held in Cebu, through the initiative of CERD's partner funding agency, Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund (SCLF), all Mondragon program staff underwent the psychosocial process which helped the staff reduce psychological stress which stemmed from doing relief work after the Yolanda typhoon. It was done through the Franciscan Sisters Pro Infante et Familia (FSPIF) in cooperation with the University of San Carlos in Cebu.

Another psychosocial process took place with all the partner development organizations of SCLF, including CERD Mondragon program, just days after the Typhoon Hagupit locally known as Ruby devastated Northern Samar in December 2014. Psychosocial concept involves aspects of psychological and social behavior. Dr. David Becker, the resource person and facilitator of said activity, pointed out that "it is impossible to have good development projects without taking into account the psychosocial dimensions, meaning, the psychological and social material reality in any type of project". CERD Mondragon program affirmed the relevance of psychosocial work, in post disasters as well as in the daily lives where conflicts and stressful events are often encountered.

On December 14, 2015, another powerful typhoon Melor (named Nona in the Philippines) made a landfall in Northern Samar which caused widespread destruction. The program's partner communities, including the staff, were greatly affected, with their houses destroyed, fishing boats washed out and crops damaged.

The day after the typhoon, the program staff visited the communities and scanned the damages and needs of the communities and witnessed a myriad of emotions among the people. They looked shocked, disoriented, weary, fearful, and helpless. Some just stood among their damaged houses. The staff saw a man staring blankly at their totally destroyed home. The CERD Mondragon program, when asked by SCLF what possible assistance they need at that time, decided to go through the psychosocial process like what was conducted in Cebu.

Caring for the mental health and well-being of the CERD staff, who are often the first responders

in emergencies and disaster situations is just as important. In the belief that in doing so, they would also be more effective in helping others. They deemed it very crucial to have a psychosocial intervention as they faced the dual challenge at work and personal level. They were getting affected upon seeing the reactions of the people and damages in the communities at the same time feeling worried and stressed because their houses and livelihoods were also damaged.

The first psychosocial support (PSS) tool with the PO leaders was conducted on Christmas Day and the following day in December 2015. Known as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, it was later named as Post Trauma Stress Debriefing as the tool was held several days after and not within the 24-72 hours after a disaster event happened. The PSS included the federation leaders to help them emotionally, prevent possible paralysis of the operation the POs in their respective barangays and be able to assist better in the various agencies' assistance that time.

Compelled by the need to help its program partners and positive feedback received from the participating fisherfolk federation leaders, the group agreed for the replication of the psychosocial support intervention to affected fishers' organizations. Sharing A Space or "*Kumustahay*", an adaptation to local culture of the psychosocial support was later conceived.

Focusing on Vulnerable Communities



CERD Bantayan Bay Program staff explain the whole day program flow of "Paghilom", a psychological first aid activity provided to members of Mainuswagon nga Mandaragat sa Sais Association (MAMSA) fisherfolk organization in San Roque municipality.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD-BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM

Any disaster leaves immeasurable effects on the lives of the people. Especially to the fisherfolk communities whose economic activity is highly dependent on weather and climate changes, making them more vulnerable. Their main source of living is disrupted, which further push them to extreme poverty. The more frequent occurrence of typhoons in Northern Samar prevents the affected communities to return to their normal life and prolong their recovery.

During this period, government units, private groups, and development organizations like the CERD Mondragon engaged in immediate relief work as well as in long term rehabilitation and recovery efforts. Assistance on basic needs like food, hygiene kits, materials for shelter, provision of production inputs such as seeds, seedlings, fishing gears, and funds were extended to the affected communities. No group has yet provided psychosocial help and support which prompted CERD Mondragon to initiate such project.

The MALASUGI fisherfolk federation leaders were the first target participants of the psychosocial support done in 2015. Along the process, the fishers' organizations in the affected communities in Mondragon and Biri were also assisted, and just recently, due to Typhoon Kammuri, locally known as Tisoy, the fishers' organizations in San Agustin and Pambujan, the two expansion municipalities of CERD Mondragon Program.

The Initiative: Building Resiliency through Psychosocial Support to Fishers' Organizations

Addressing people's health, specifically, the psychosocial aspect, is crucial for their recovery and wellbeing. Extensive studies showed various psychosocial reactions to disasters. After the typhoons, the program staff observed emotional reactions of grief, anxiety, helplessness, feeling overwhelmed, and shock due to the magnitude of livelihood, materials and property lost among affected communities. The people also experienced personal loss at varying levels. It is therefore important to understand, recognize and manage these emotions, which if allowed to continue, can adversely affect their mental health, overwhelm usual coping methods, and may interfere with their normal response in life.

Target Group of the Psychosocial Support Efforts

The first psychosocial support or CISD was facilitated among CERD Mondragon staff, members of the MALASUGI Federation, seven (7) POs in Mondragon and two (2) POs in Biri municipalities and some barangay officials in December 2015 and January 2016, several weeks after typhoon Nona hit the areas. More than 500 individuals participated in the stress de-briefing.

“*Kumustahay*” or Sharing a Space, another psychosocial support, was facilitated in two people's organizations in Barangays San Juan and Roxas as well as to MALASUGI federation leaders and CERD Mondragon staff in 2017, and two POs in Barangay Lao-angan (LAMADANGAN PO) in San Roque and Barangay Paninirongan (PAWIKAN PO) or a total of 77 individuals (28 women and 49 men) in Pambujan in December 2019, after Typhoon Tisoy hits Northern Samar. The two



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areas were reportedly the most devastated and affected barangays in the three towns in Bantayan Bay.

Recognizing the importance and powerful effect of sharing to individual members and to the group, “*Kumustahay*” has been integrated in the fishers’ organizations’ meetings since 2017.

A Psychological First Aid (PFA) entitled “*Paghilom*”, another psychosocial support effort, was done in 11 affected communities namely Bagasbas, Roxas, Bugko, San Juan, Chitongco, San Agustin, and Doña Lucia in Mondragon municipality, Zone 6 and Bantayan in San Roque and Barangay 8 and Doña Anecita in Pambujan after Typhoon Tisoy hits Northern Samar in December 2019. Around 220 or 114 female and 106 male PO members were provided with the psychosocial support “*Paghilom*”.



Divided into small workshop groups, members of the Brgy. Doña Lucia Fisherfolk Association (BDLFA) in Mondragon municipality share their experiences, the stress and trauma they felt during Typhoon Tisoy.

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a. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing or Post Trauma Stress De Briefing

Context and Description

After the powerful Typhoon Nona brought massive damages in Northern Samar, the one-day CISD, separately held, was facilitated among staff and 17 leaders (9 female and 8 male) of the fisherfolk federation. Critical incident as defined by International Critical incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) is any event that has significant emotional power to overwhelm the person’s usual coping methods, such as physical or psychological threat to the safety or well-being of an individual or community regardless of the type of incident, witnessing sudden or violent death.

The CISD introduced basic concepts on the nature of trauma and stress factors and emphasized how it affects the person. It also guided the affected individuals deepen their understanding on coping and resiliency and enhanced the participants’ skills and ability to help others in similar circumstances of risk, danger, conflict, and disasters.

The process involved conversation and sharing among the participants, of their emotions and feelings on the effects of the typhoon as well as deep-seated problems such as domestic violence. “Through the different structured learning activities, they could discover and rediscover how events that are meaningless, hopeless, helpless, terrifying, tragic or shameful can be transformed into occasions of emotional growth, hope, spiritual deepening, and fullness of life”, as stated in the 2017 CERD’s *Kumustahay* document. It enabled the affected people deal with the emotional and traumatic effects brought by the typhoons.

The participants also learned ideas and skills in providing emotional support to those who need psychological first aid. It highlighted the transition from victims or survivors to becoming volunteers and helpers in conducting psychosocial intervention to trauma victims.

Duration

One Day

Description of the Six Sessions

Phase 1. Introductory Phase or Building Trust among Participants

It focuses on introducing the facilitating team members and participants, the processes they are about to experience, and the activities for each process. Here, facilitators emphasize confidentiality, and give assurance that all information and materials they will disclose, and use will be treated with utmost confidentiality.





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Phase 2. Session Proper or Actual De-briefing

This part starts with “What is the Purpose” Structured Learning Experience (SLE), drawing an object representing oneself, and questions such as vision in life after ten years, wish this year, greatest fear in life, reasons for thanking God, are answered individually and shared at the plenary, with the team leader or facilitator doing the processing of their answers.

Phase 3. Individual Recollection

It allows the participants to think about what happened during the incident, allowing them, individually, to reflect on what had happened. To guide the participants in their introspection, questions included “What have you done prior, during and after the disaster? What were your thoughts during the incident? How did you feel? What was your behavior during and after the incident? What are you supposed to do but did not do? Where did you get your strength? What motivates you to continue? What are the lessons you learn from the experience? How do you see yourself after the incident?”

Phase 4. “My Recovery Plan”

This exercise aims to help the participants think and define their recovery plan. Using a hand symbol, each finger represents a corresponding question to guide them in their self-reflection (refer to Figures 1 and 2). This part hopes to instill hope and for participants to be able to identify the good things that happened despite the trauma they experienced during the typhoon and how could they share these to other people.

Figure 1. My “Recovery Plan” SLE

My “Recovery Plan” Using a Hand Tool

Guide Questions

What are my immediate plans and actions for myself?

What are my immediate plans and actions in helping my organization and community?

What assistance I/we received and from whom?

What are the good things that happened to the community?

What are the good things that happened to me and to my organization?

What did I discover for myself?



Figure 2. Example of “My Recovery Plan” formulated by a participant from affected community

Example of “My Recovery Plan”

My plan is to continue to help those in need; to improve my work; and be more persistent in everything that I do

We received food packs, shelter assistance, and CISD from CERD

People in the community become more helpful; they noticed the barangay local officials’ presence, extending assistance to strengthen the community

Close monitoring of organizations; continue lobbying and dialogue with the community as to their concerns and needs

Have stronger relationship with God and my family; Become more patient in helping other people; More courageous in dealing with any life’s challenges

I become a stronger and resilient person. The organizations become more cohesive and with initiative in extending assistance in times of need





To guide them in their individual reflections towards recovery, members of the Roxas Uswag Manihar Pagpoytoy San Illegal (RUMPI) fisherfolk organization in Mondragon, Northern Samar, answer specific questions using the Language of the Hand exercise. PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD-BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM

Phase 5. Affirmation

It focuses on affirming one’s heroic deeds, despite all the things that had happened, and drawing on the people’s spirituality. Each participant’s hand symbol is offered to God. Affirmations were read silently. The messages or wishes written on leaf-shaped papers were placed in the branches of a tree drawn by the participants.

Phase 6. Celebration

With each participant holding a candle, the group, including the facilitators, sing the *Pananagutan* song while lighted candles are passed on among themselves. The activity reminds the group that they should not look at themselves as victims, and that they could also be a resource to every one even before, during, or after any disaster.

b. *“Kumustahay”*: A Sharing Space

Context and Description

With stories of positive impact on the recovery of affected community after the typhoon Nona because of the earlier psychosocial support efforts, CERD Mondragon realized the powerful effect of sharing or storytelling to the individuals and to the organizations. As they “heal” each other’s emotional hurts and stress, learning from each other, and sharing their experiences, the group somehow develops into a kind of social support network which could be practiced at the organizational level.

Called a “Sharing Space” it was later termed *“Kumustahay”*, by the locals themselves, to put it in their perspective. *Kumustahay*, meaning an interactive “getting to know or asking “How are you? when asked to another person draws out a positive environment, a way of expressing concern and interest to the other person. CERD Mondragon is resolved to sustain systematically this good practice of “sharing” in the culture of the members of the communities they work with, and to the CERD organization. *“Kumustahay”* is a psychosocial activity conducted even in the absence of a disaster. It aims to strengthen group cohesion and psychosocial support among the community organizations through regular sharing sessions.

In the Sharing Space Community Facilitators Training in October 2017, the members of the federation defined *“Kumustahay”* as “an invitation to a gathering and story-telling as friends, colleagues, co-workers in development work for the community, to strengthen relationship and connection with each other...where there is cooperation, helping each other, and unity in the group through listening, sharing, and expression of inner self and realize understanding, harmony and cohesion, in mind and heart, among members of the community. That they are united in discovering or finding ways in addressing their problems individually and as a community. They envisioned to do *“Kumustahay”* sessions regularly, and as part of the activities of the organization.

Duration

One Day

Description of the Sessions

Before the sharing proper, the importance of respect and confidentiality as the *Kumustahay* protocol is emphasized.

General Guiding Principles and Protocol to be observed in Kumustahay

- a. *Kumustahay* must be a *safe place* (“do no harm”) where “sharing becomes an affirmative process (appreciation, acceptance, affirmation of the person); a bridge connecting members; and a coping strategy individually and as a group, at the staff and community level

- b. *Kumustahay* is a *process* of opening oneself and expressions of emotions, where sharing becomes a liberating experience; makes the heavy emotions less overwhelming; provides “traumatized” people with a very valuable psychosocial support such as feeling understood, alleviate loneliness and prevent post-traumatic stress syndrome; and increase openness and facilitate problem-solving.

1. Group Conversation Structured Learning Experience (SLE)

Participants are divided into small groups of 4, 5, 6 or 7 members. This is an exercise to know how they are and how aware is every one of the situations and issues in their environment and how these affect them, their community, what concerns them, what they find good, what they fear, and what they hope for. Each group is given four (4) questions to talk about and share with each other (see Table 1). In this session, participants know the difference of a meeting and a sharing or *kumustahay*. They are also reminded of observing respect, sensitivity, patience, empathy and listening during the whole duration of the activity.

Table 1. Group Conversation SLE Guide Questions

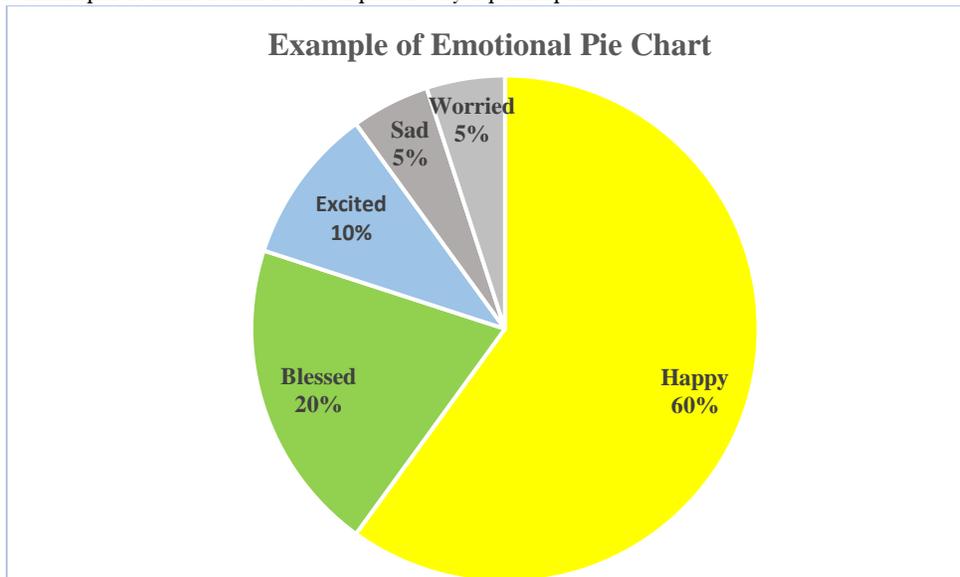
Group Conversation SLE. <i>Getting to Know Each Other</i>	
What do you see as good and positive developments happening in your community? How do you feel about it?	What do you see or observe as challenging and bothersome situations in your community? How are you affected?
What are you afraid of might happen to your family, community, and to the country?	What do you wish and hope for your family, community, and country?

2. Conversation on Emotions SLE

Using the Emotional Pie tool, the participants were to identify their emotions at present, acknowledge the emotions at play within the self and within one’s body or the psychophysical state. They are to plot these emotions in a pie, color, and rate them according to intensity (see Figure 3). They are also asked to recall the circumstances and reasons that caused such emotions. The results of each emotional pie, the stories behind it, are shared in a small group or in triad.

This is a self-awareness process which help the participants keep in touch with their emotions and knowing its source and cause will help them analyze and understand when and how these emotions affect them physically, mentally and in their behavior towards others.

Figure 3. Example of Emotional Pie tool plotted by a participant



Kumustahay is not just a structure, a space, or a form of communication, but about people coming together, bringing with them their life stories, psychosocial issues, and challenges, their psycho-physical or body pains and incapacities, and their dreams and aspirations. In this exercise, three main questions guide the participants namely, 1) What concerns and issues you carry in your mind (head part - yellow color); 2) How does your body feels? How is the health condition of your body (body part - red color); and 3) What are the desires of your feet? Where it wants to go or what it wants to accomplish?

Inputs, discussion and sharing follow on the four levels of relationships, namely:

- Personal aspect which includes beliefs, psychosocial issues, emotions, physical health conditions, dreams, and values
- Interpersonal or social relationships with family, friends, neighbors, other people
- Organizational area or may refer to fishers' organization, project staff, co-workers, colleagues
- Community level or at the level of the barangay, municipality, province, region, country

An illustration of these four levels guides the group in sharing with emphasis on the first level, or the personal aspect to strengthen the person and his/her connection to others (family, colleagues) to help become a developed, stronger, and resilient community.

c. *"Paghilom"*: A Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Context and Description

Another psychosocial support initiative similar with *Kumustahay* is the Psychological First Aid (PFA) themed *Paghilom* (To Heal) facilitated after Typhoon Tisoy hits Northern Samar in

December 2019. To equip them in facilitating the “*Paghilom*”, 30 community facilitators (20 or 17 female and 3 male PO members in Mondragon, Pambujan and San Roque, eight (8) or five female and three male CERD Mondragon staff, and two, female and male, personnel of the Pambujan local government under the LDRRM Office) participated in the three-day PFA trainers’ training held in January 2020. Afterwards, the *Paghilom* psychosocial support intervention was rolled out to 11 fishers’ organizations, with a total of 220 participants or 114 women and 106 men.

The facilitators were divided into three groups, composed of two to three (2 to 3) staff and seven to eight (7 to 8) CFs per group and simultaneously conducted “*Paghilom*” activity.

The PFA (“*Paghilom*”) is aimed at providing an opportunity, a space, to share their personal stories that caused stress and trauma with group sharing, deepening, input, and reflection processes.



The PFA provides a venue for members of SAPSAP fisherfolk organization (San Agustin Programa sa Aton Pangabuhì) in Barangay San Agustin, Mondragon, Northern Samar to reflect upon their experiences in disaster.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD-BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM

Duration
One Day

Description of the Sessions

The facilitators’ team, composed of CFs and program staff, designed it for a one-day activity, and divided the session into three parts.

Part I covers the introductory section namely opening prayer, introduction of participants by using adjectives to describe him/herself and presentation of the topic “understanding PFA”.

Part II covers three activities and corresponding topics:

1. Self-assessment on the stress and trauma experienced
2. Language of the Hand SLE (see Figures 4 and 5) talks about understanding stress and trauma, learning to accept the situation for what it is and what the individual cannot change, and regaining hope to move forward. Participants share their stressful or traumatic experiences, describing what happened and their reactions and emotions at that time.

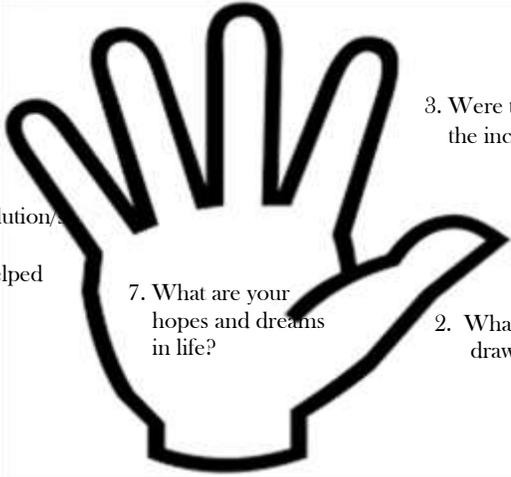
Figure 4. Language of the Hand

Language of the Hand SLE

Guide Questions for Reflection

5. Who are you with during the incident and what happened to them?

4. What are the positive and negative effects on you?



6. What is/are the solution/s you did after the incident? Who helped you?

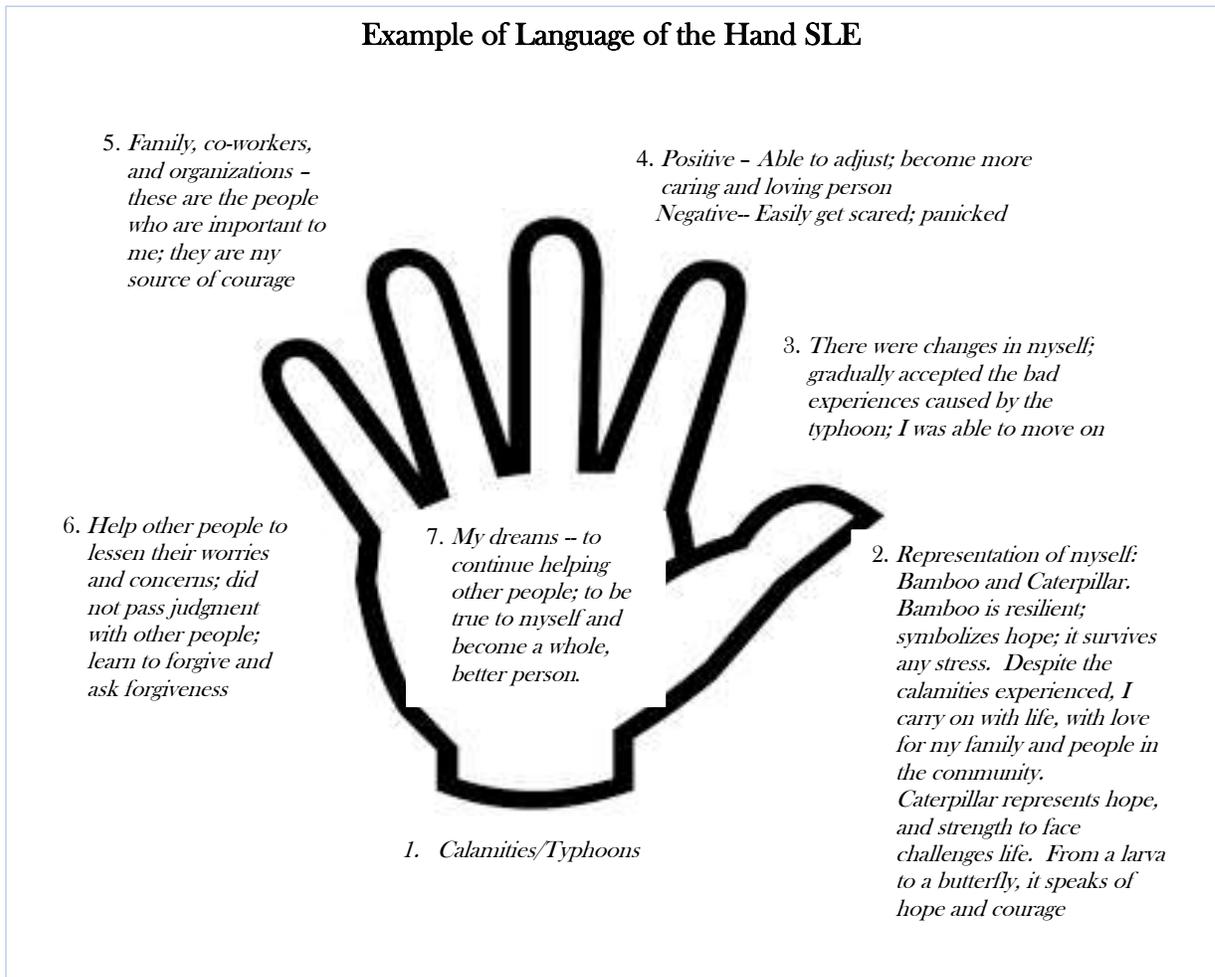
3. Were there any changes in yourself after the incident? What are these?

7. What are your hopes and dreams in life?

2. What happened to you? Describe or draw.

1. Identify the stressful or traumatic event you experienced

Figure 5. Example of Language of the Hand

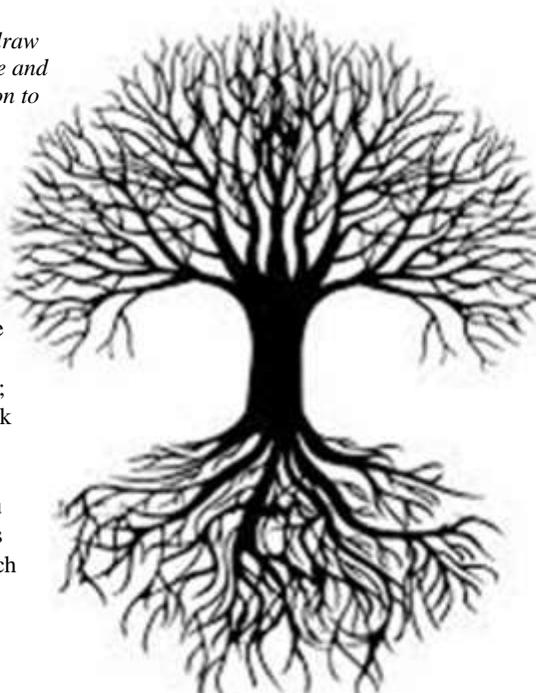


3. The Tree of Life SLE highlights exploring oneself in relation to other people, relationships and building a support system. The different parts of the tree represent something about the individual's experience in disaster in relation with other people. Participants identify significant persons including family members, friends, neighbors, and other groups who were with them during the stressful or traumatic experience such as disaster (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Tree of Life SLE

The Tree of Life

**Participant is invited to draw and name the type of Tree and its characteristics common to him/her*

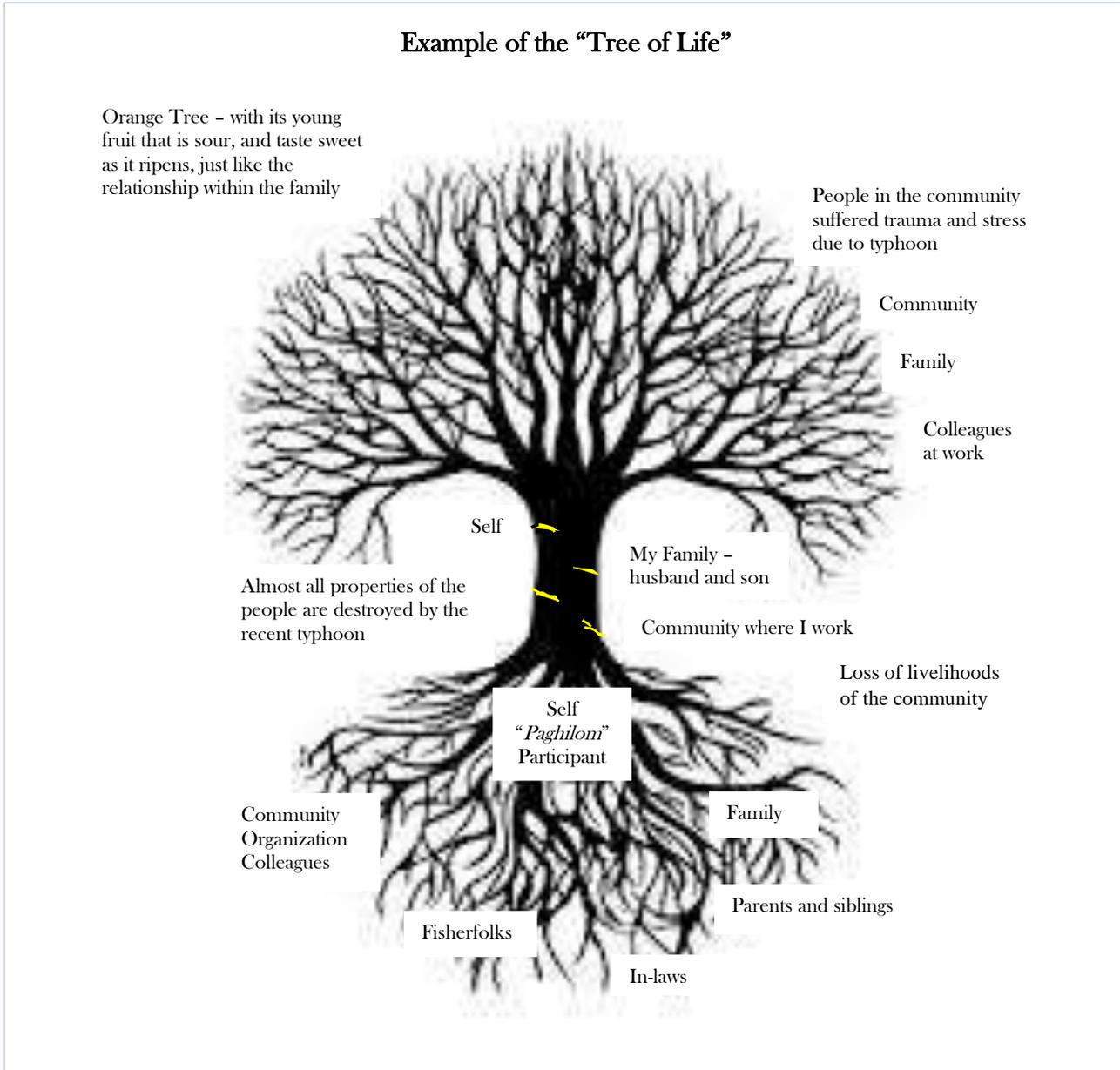


Trunk: Write markers or wound which represent the effects of disaster on you, your family or community; the degree or depth of trunk wounds or markers symbolizes the extent of effects of the disaster. You may write down the names of the people. Describe each mark or wound.

Branches: Write down the names of the people or things that were affected by the disaster. Describe the effects.

Roots: Write down the names of family members, neighbors or other people in the community who are with you when disaster happened.

Figure 7. Example Tree of Life SLE



Part III or the concluding portion stresses having a positive outlook in life, or a celebration of life through offering, thanksgiving, and affirmation.



Participants from Barangay Doña Lucia Fisherfolk Association (BDLFA) in Mondragon, Northern Samar, engage in conversations and self-reflection during the “Tree of Life” structured learning activity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD-BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM

Program and People Organizations’ Response on the Initiative

The processes in the various psychosocial support provided to the fisherfolks allow conversations, sharing, and healing while they, on the individual level, work up the courage to talk about their experiences, and emotions. Even long held personal concerns surfaced out during the process which somehow relieved and uplifted their spirits.

The psychosocial support drew positive feedbacks from the participating program staff, community leaders and members. It helped them cope, manage stress and recover from the trauma brought by the disaster. It strengthened their inner resolve. They also adapted better contributing to resilient individuals and community against disasters. According to them, because of the psychosocial support extended to them, they were able to:

- Understand the effects of trauma on their emotions, acknowledge fears and worries
- Share their trauma and allow to ventilate their feelings or emotions particularly on the impact of the typhoon on their personal and family security, shelter, and livelihoods
- Realize the importance of other people, that in worst experiences, they have companions, friends, and group that will go with them in their journey in life



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- Help eased the emotional pain
- Help manage stress and cope
- Help realized that they are lucky because they are still alive
- Overcome the stress and look at the problems in different way
- Know themselves better, identify their strengths and limitations in dealing and managing problems
- Regain a hopeful perspective in life, become more optimistic despite what happened to their lives caused by the typhoon
- Help enrich their spirituality, understanding that God is on their side as there are people who assisted them
- Make them aware of the situation of others
- Discover oneself, having the courage to tell problems and fears



Lighted candles, a symbol of hope, and prayers as the culminating activity in the “Paghilom” psychosocial support, bringing them closer together with their shared experience from Typhoon Tisoy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CERD- BANTAYAN BAY PROGRAM



Effects on the Organizations and Community

Growing awareness on environmental issues

The psychosocial support initiatives develop further the community members' concern on the environment, and increase their awareness on the interrelatedness of things, and ecosystems. The participants realized, during the *Kumustahay* after typhoon Tisoy, that flooding was caused by improper management of wastes, as plastic and other domestic garbage clogged water drainage. They understood that people's practices at times aggravates the effects of disasters.

Learning Organizations

Fishers' organizations also bear the brunt when disasters happen. Their activities and plans are disrupted, as members focus on recovering what was left of their homes and livelihood. The "*Kumustahay*" psychosocial support initiative rebuilds leadership, group cohesion and foster emotional growth. It promotes a dynamic interaction of the group which involved sharing common and unique experiences, understanding the difficult situation one has, listening actively to one's stories and being empathetic to them. It also makes the individual's spirituality deepen. Their skills for coping with the impacts of disaster improved.

Kumustahay becomes part of the organization's culture. The federation and member fishers' organizations integrated it in their plans. Some do it every quarterly meeting, others, every semester. CERD Mondragon realized that story telling or sharing results generated a strong sense of affiliation, sensitivity, solidarity and support among the sharers or members of the organizations. Trust is also built as a result of constant sharing.

The critical incident stress debriefing activity and later called *Kumustahay* develops into a community owned psychosocial support mechanism, which allows a sharing space among community members not just during disasters but in their daily lives. It is also interchangeably referred to as stress de-briefing or psychological first aid by the community facilitators and other PO members. "*Kumustahay*" is becoming a common practice in the POs' lives, which underscores the Filipino values of *bayanihan* spirit, collectively extending help to neighbors without expecting anything, and *malasakit* or showing care and concern to other people.

The POs become an instrument for their community to cope from the impact of typhoons. "Healed" from emotional stress, they volunteered in other agencies doing relief work like Philippine Red Cross, Tzu Chi Foundation, Social Action and Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Developing Informal Social Support Mechanism

Kumustahay, aside from being a formal structure already embedded in the organization's life, also develops as a social support mechanism between the trained staff and community facilitators and members of the community. Malou, a community facilitator and officer of the fisherfolk federation, often visits members of the organization in their homes, asking them simple questions

about their work, how is their life in general, and just listens to their stories. All the members of the fishers' organizations are aware of *Kumustahay* purpose. "We strengthen each other", as Malou puts it.

Other community members are also becoming interested in joining *Kumustahay*. They approached the CFs and staff asking if they could participate or if the community could also have it after positive feedback from the participants spread in the neighborhood.

Reynaldo, a leader of the federation, combines his knowledge and skills as community facilitator with being a pastor. He applies *Kumustahay* with other church members, particularly in handling and managing problems. He tells them to share this to other people in their community.

The staff had been accustomed to have *Kumustahay* whenever someone needs it. Ronnie, a CERD staff, did a *Kumustahay* with an enumerator before doing a fishing gear inventory activity, due to a pressing problem at home. Just sharing it provides immediate relief to the person.

While the various psychosocial support – CISD, FPA (*Paghilom*) and *Kumustahay* – aimed at the level of the staff, fishers' organizations and their respective individual members, other residents of the community indirectly benefit from it, with Malou and Reynaldo and other community facilitators, having "*kumustahay*" in their respective communities. Neighbors are aware that it is not just idle talk when the community facilitators ask them "how are you, how are you doing?" *Kumustahay*, when constantly practiced, will become part of the community values and culture, and will contribute to improving their unity, resiliency, and solidarity.

Lessons Learnt

- In the conduct of the psychosocial support, the community facilitators need to consider the extent of the effects to the people and may need to prepare and be ready for another line of support such as referrals to formal health support (counsellors, psychiatrists, doctors) in case serious emotional instability manifests during the activity. They have a standing agreement now, in case serious or sensitive issues surface out during the activity and they are not capable of addressing them, to continue with the process until the sharer or participant had recovered. Afterwards, they will refer the person to any formal health support professionals or group.

During the CISD, *Kumustahay* and PFA (*Paghilom*) for disaster affected communities, gender related issues such as physical, financial, and emotional abuse, and other issues like family conflict, health problems particularly of senior citizens, malnutrition, lack of livelihoods surfaced out. Follow-up house visits, having frequent talks with them, were done to those PO members with gender concerns, which resulted to strengthened family relations.

- The psychosocial support evolved to adapt to the culture and values of the community, from "critical incidence stress debriefing", and "sharing a space" which are too technical and hard to explain, they come up with "*Kumustahay*" or an interactive "getting to know" and define it in their own language. Localizing the psychosocial support makes it more real and relevant to the people.



- In the actual “*Kumustahay*”, challenges are encountered. Participants or sharers may hesitate to open, or trust is not yet fully developed, despite the SLEs conducted. In one incident, the woman participant spoke less because of unfamiliar co-participants. To address the issue, the CF went to her house after the activity and followed up the process.

In earlier psychosocial support activities, the staff and community facilitators easily got affected with the participants’ emotional outburst as they share their stories. They agreed adopting a buddy system of two to four facilitators per team to monitor and assist one another.

Some participants tend to treat the process lightly, with comments like “we have no problems”, “there’s nothing we can do about it”. It is crucial that participants are aware of the whole process and objectives of the “*Kumustahay*”. As Kuya Lukoy said, the psychosocial support and its goal should be explained in its entirety, and not by activity or tool.

Milestones of the Initiative

Focusing on Psychosocial Care to Reduce People’s Vulnerabilities

CERD Mondragon has been doing emergency relief, disaster rehabilitation and recovery efforts since 2013. It was after the Typhoon Nona in 2015 that holding a psychosocial support activity not just for the staff but for its partner fishers’ organizations deemed urgent. The people’s lives were greatly affected by the impact of the disaster, with their houses blown away and their fishing boats lost in the seas. They said that they were still just recovering from the powerful typhoons Ruby and Seniang in 2014 and then comes another strong typhoon in 2015. They were becoming more vulnerable, as they faced their loss with grief and without hope.

A review of the results of the Damages, Needs and Capacity Assessment (DNCA) showed that government agencies and other organizations provided temporary shelters, food, hygiene kits, housing materials, livelihood recovery assistance like distribution of fishing gears and seeds. There was no assistance on the psychosocial dimension on the impact of disaster.

The psychosocial support, based on the reactions of the participants, helped them a lot in handling problems. It improved their coping skills with the impacts of disasters and reduced their emotional stress and reactions as they share, listen, and learn from each other.

Creating a Group of Community Facilitators for Communities’ Psychosocial Support

“*Kumustahay*”, CISD or PFA are all community-based psychosocial support. They are conducted by community facilitators with the CERD. CERD Mondragon deemed it necessary to develop community facilitators to equip them in helping other people in their area. At present, 11 of the 13 POs have trained CFs (refer to Table 2) or a total of 20 individuals (16 women and 4 men):



Table 2. Number of trained CFs per municipality and organization

Municipality/ Barangay	Fishers' Organizations	Community Facilitators	
		♂	♀
Mondragon			
Brgy. Bugko	BWA	1	
Brgy. Bagasbas	BUDLIS		1
Brgy. Chitongko	CSFFA	1	
Brgy. Roxas	RUMPI	3	
Brgy. San Agustin	SAPSAP	1	
Pambujan			
Brgy. Doña Anecita	DAPAKK	2	
Brgy. 8	MATAMBAKA	1	1
Brgy. Paninirongan	PAWIKAN	3	
San Roque			
Brgy. Lao-angan	LAMADANGAN		1
Brgy. 6	MAMSA	1	1
Brgy. Bantayan	SAMBA	3	
Total Number of Community Facilitators	20	16	4

Prior to the conduct of the three psychosocial support in the affected communities, they underwent a facilitators' training, or a refresher course, and a hands-on facilitation in a community. A general guide flow of *Kumustahay*, guiding principles and protocol to be observed in “*Kumustahay*” CISD and PFA guidelines in listening, are prepared and discussed, including the SLEs for better facilitation. Helpful tips in facilitation and tools are also translated in *Waray*. They also changed to smaller groups or 6 to 10 individuals when doing the sharing and processing which is more conducive to their participation. They continuously engaged in feedback giving, processing their experiences in handling groups, drawing out lessons and recommendations to improve their facilitation skills.

An innovation on the part of CERD Mondragon, the psychosocial support is conducted not by professional groups or academe but harnessed the human resource of a community, in this case, the leaders of the fishers' organizations. As a product of periodic reviews with the CERD Mondragon, the fishers' organizations, through their community facilitators, crafted their adaptation of the psychosocial support, or what they called *Kumustahay*.

Ways Forward

Leveled up Capacity

Further trainings to improve facilitation on psychosocial support is recommended. A training on self-care to further manage emotions or release stuck emotions after facilitating where strong emotional release are in play is recommended. As Malou, a community facilitator, points out, “we need to improve our skills on that aspect. At times, my heart felt heavy after the activity, as we listen to other people's stories of hurts and pains.” A training solely for that purpose is needed.

Community issues and community life in general are dynamic. There is a need to step-up the community facilitators' capacity, in terms of knowledge and skills, such as in conflict management, managing anxiety, basic counselling for non-practitioners, and others.

Newly developed community facilitators need to undergo a certain level of “internship” and closer guidance given their limited experience and preparedness with sensitive issues like domestic violence. It was agreed that they will pair the new CFs with an experienced community facilitator to mentor and assist them during the process.

Potential Replication of Psychosocial Support with other Stakeholders

Possible partnership with LGUs' Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council/Committee (MDRRMC) in Pambujan and San Roque for holding a Training of Trainers and Facilitators (TOTF) on Psychosocial Support is currently underway. Two LGU personnel, from Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (LDRRMO) of Pambujan, attended the January 2020 TOTF on PFA and were very receptive on the training's results. Integrating it in their respective municipal plan is part of the program's advocacy.

Aside from fishers' organizations, the psychosocial support could also be implemented with other community members. Barangay Councils, being one of the first responders at times of disasters and emergency situations also need to be included, as they play a vital role in the development and recovery of the community.

As a disaster response effort, extending psychosocial support to typhoon affected individuals, fisherfolk organizations, and communities in Mondragon, Northern Samar contributed significantly to building the people's resiliency, to “bounce back” from their traumatic and stressful experiences during the typhoons and return to their normal lives.

“We Strengthen Each Other”

Anecdotes of Change of Two Community Facilitators

Malou Galdones, 46 years old, a mother of five, a leader of the MALASUGI federation became a community facilitator in 2016. When typhoon Nona hit Mondragon, their house collapsed. At that moment, seeing their house destroyed, she felt hopeless, disoriented, thinking how they could recover, how their lives could be normal again. Participating in the psychosocial support activity or the CISD helped her eased the pain and trauma brought by the impact of typhoon Nona. She learned how to cope with stress, become stronger and more optimistic.

As a community facilitator of psychosocial support, what she now calls as the “*Kumustahay*”, she also applies what she learned in her community. She listens, allows her neighbor to share, says words of affirmation, and to look on the positive side of life. “We also do “*Kumustahay*” in the federation before a formal meeting is held. Especially at this time of “Covid” where each of us has

a lot of concerns. We listen to each other. And this matters to us. We help each other, we get strength from each other.”

As a community facilitator, one of the challenging roles is listening to the people’s stories. Malou, together with a team of CFs, facilitated a psychosocial support “*Kumustahay*” and PFA to affected communities of typhoon Tisoy in December 2019 and January 2020. She said that as a facilitator, one must manage better his/her emotions. During the sharing, the people are all crying since their homes and fishing boats are gone in just one night. “It is very hard not to be affected. Though oftentimes, I coped. I still want to improve my skills in facilitation, to effectively manage or regulate my emotions.”

She very much appreciated CERD Mondragon’s effort to assist them especially at times of disaster, with the psychosocial support “*Kumustahay*”. “It is an urgent need of us. *Kumustahay* benefits us, as individuals, and an organization, by being positive despite the difficulties we experience. It makes us stronger, and united as a group.”

Reynaldo Besarte, or Kuya Lukoy, as he is called, is a 43-year-old father of four, the Vice Chair of MALASUGI Fisherfolk Federation, a Pastor, and community facilitator. In December 2019, he participated in a refresher course on *Kumustahay* and a three-day Training of Trainers and Facilitators on Psychosocial Support or Psychological First Aid, with the theme *Paghilom*.

Kumustahay and *Paghilom* have a big impact on him as a participant and a community facilitator especially with what he had experienced in the past. He was released from jail in 2018 due to personal concerns and became active again in the organization since then. He was one of the active members of BUDLIS organization when it was still in the formative stage in 2014. “*Kumustahay* does not only help heal the emotional pains that I have experienced in the past, but it also lightens my heavy heart. Together with my faith in God, the knowledge, and skills I gained from the psychosocial support, I learned that one can face life with hope and courage.”

The *Kumustahay* aims at reducing the emotional pains and stress, he also shared. There are tools used to allow a person to articulate or express one’s fears, dreams, emotions, and others. “*Nalalaman namin ang kanilang mga hugot*. As a community facilitator, on some occasions, I start the sharing when participants are reluctant to speak. When they hear my story, what I have gone through, and what I am doing right now, they are encouraged to speak and share their deepest feelings.” He listened to their stories. He knew that being a facilitator requires a certain discipline, not imposing or telling solutions to a problem, allowing the sharer to speak spontaneously.

Kumustahay is done even without disaster. In BUDLIS fishers’ organization, where Kuya Lukoy is a member, it is implemented once a year. He recommends having it twice a year. He proposes for its integration in the community, also two times a year, and not just when there is a calamity. He believed that the psychosocial support will greatly help the whole community and its people, fostering unity and cohesion and assist individuals to cope and recover.

*WRITTEN BY MA. JESSICA TOLENTINO FOR NFR

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Endnote:

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