



Jeanette Vidal

Women's leadership in disaster risk reduction post-earthquake and typhoon resiliency

The island province of Bohol is located in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines. On October 15, 2013 at 8:13am, a 7.2 earthquake shook the island and surrounding regions. The strongest earthquake to hit the region in 25 years, there were more than 1.3 million people affected¹ and 348,507 who were displaced² from their homes. Among those affected was the barangay of Napo- a coastal community in north-western Bohol island.

The powerful earthquake flattened much of the community including a large portion of the homes and the local school. And as monsoon season arrived in the following months, the community found themselves wading through knee-deep water unable to be absorbed by earth unsettled during the quake. Without homes, the majority of the community, lived in one of three main evacuation sites for two months, while for others remained displaced for upwards of three years. Despite the disheartening gravity of the community's situation, Jeanette said that **“even though the evacuation site wasn't very comfortable, with the people you are with it's still a home.”** Because many homes were deemed only “partially damaged” the

“If there's a perfect time for me to help, it's now. I took it as a challenge; no one wanted to run,” said Jeanette Vidal who became Napo Barangay Captain after the community experienced a severe earthquake. “You have to be in touch with your femininity and that will make you a strong leader. Even if people downplay you because you're emotional, my emotions are what lead me to care about my people and the environment.”

majority of household did not qualify for much of the aid pouring into the community, and it remains too expensive for residents to repair or demolish.

As the rumbling earthquake dissipated, the community noted that the ocean had dramatically receded. Fearing the imminent arrival of a tsunami, the community hurriedly evacuated to higher ground. Although thankfully a tsunami never developed, the community came to learn the shift in tectonic plates permanently moved their coastline—stranding fishing boats, depriving the community of a port, and limiting the dominant source of income for many: shell collection.

Given the physical changes to Napo's coast line, the community has seen a shift in their sources of livelihood. Shells collected for crafts are less available and their fisheries have suffered as a result owing to many household attempting to make up for lost income by catching more fish. In the five years since the earthquake, Jeanette has been working with her community members to develop alternative sources of income. For instance, the community has engaged in cultural work- such as weaving, community theatre, and ecotourism- and established a sense of pride in their fishing traditions that respect a short fishing season that allows a robust hatching cycle.

In the face of these challenges, the community of Napo was in the midst of setting up elections for Barangay Captain—leader of the smallest political unit in the Philippines. Motivated by the needs of her community, Jeanette Vidal ran and won the seat. Her dedication to her community and building their response plans for future disasters has led Jeanette to be a trusted Captain who fights for the needs of her community. Because the lower school was entirely destroyed in the earthquake, children of all ages were placed in a temporary learning facility without all the necessary amenities. In her efforts to rebuild the school quickly, Jeanette was quick to run into roadblocks as she navigated getting approval for the construction of a new school. When Jeanette was told



that the ground for post-earthquake construction of a new school was unsafe, she suspected that outside interests geared towards turning Napo into a tourist destination might be interfering with the results of the initial study. A second opinion from an independent engineer confirmed Jeanette's hunch and, after three long years of fighting, construction of the elementary school commenced.

Jeanette's work illustrates the power of community and the spirit of participatory planning. In Jeanette's tenure as Barangay Captain the community has seen not only the rebuilding of the school, but a concerted effort to diversify the means of income generation for her community, multiple workshops and capacity building events for developing disaster response plans, and the creation of the disaster risk reduction committee of Napo. Each year on the anniversary of the earthquake, Napo holds a celebration to commemorate the aftermath, remember the importance of staying vigilant in their disaster response planning, and to celebrate how fortunate they are to have their community.

1 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Bohol%20Earthquake%20Action%20Plan%20%28BEAP%29%20Revision%20FINAL.pdf>

2 https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data&sa=D&ust=1557337718203000&usg=AFQjCNG-m8Ut9trf18_9JglDh7Le3EX80Q