



1B. Transformational Conversation  
Conference Output Paper

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# Introduction

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We recall concerned friends and family trying to contact us the first week of November. They heard news that a “super typhoon”, named Haiyan or Yolanda, was going to land in the Philippines. As the storm loomed closer communities prepared as best as they could. Then it struck.

We began to see extremely devastating pictures of the damage every night on the news and hear heart breaking stories of loss on the radio. According to the BBC the death toll is over 5,000- and this doesn’t include the individuals lost in the storm. But the communities affected by this storm remain resilient and continue to rebuild.

We are currently taking a class called Theology, Theory & Practice of Community Transformation through the Asian Theological Seminary. Last January 28<sup>th</sup> the class held a forum called Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management. We participated in the planning and organization of

second forum of the series, Stories of Building Community Resilience: Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management Part II. The first of the series concentrated more on the theological background as well as the theoretical methods while the second involved the stories of individuals directly involved in this work.

## Ernesto Anasarias

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Ernesto Anasarias is the Executive Director of the Balay Rehabilitation Center, “a Philippines human rights NGO providing psychosocial services and rehabilitation to internally displaced persons and survivors of torture and organized violence.” In the first portion of his talk he shared a video filmed by iCyclone.com revealing the progression of the storm as it ravaged through central areas of the Philippines. According to his talk approximately 14 million Filipinos worldwide were affected by Typhoon Haiyan- including individuals living in the affected communities as well as their family members abroad. But even then Anasarias states that “Filipinos are able to stay resilient because of the nature of our culture.”

As each of these areas began to rebuild there were glimmers of hope that citizens would cling to. For instance, one of the first things rebuilt within a community was the school. Although

children in this community were deeply affected by the storm they would “step into classrooms to learn eagerly, with smiles on their faces.” This became a safe haven where they could take their mind off the psychological trauma that they experienced through the storm. His observation was that Filipinos cling to these glimmers of light in the midst of darkness in order to thrive and push on. His final words before ending his portion of the talk: “Although the vulnerability of the Filipino to conflict and disaster is still high, much of the thrust comes from the ability for the community to move forward as one.”

## Mayfourth D. Luneta

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Mayfourth D. Luneta is a very accomplished woman who currently holds a director’s chair in the Center for Disaster Preparedness, Philippines. According to their website this organization “is a regional resource center based in the Philippines that endeavors to promote Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM), facilitate interactive learning and discourse on disaster risk management, and advocate for policies and programs that protect the environment and mitigate disaster risk through its various programs and services in training, consultancies, interactive fora, research and publication, networking and advocacy, through developmental and participatory principles and methodologies.” For the past 14 years Luneta has dedicated her life to helping vulnerable communities prepare for natural disasters that happen yearly in the Philippines.

Before she began her portion of the forum she showed a video about a community called Bukluran in Banaba. They live along the Markina River and because of the density of rain it often overflows and floods the surrounding communities. The main point of the video was to show what it looked like to practice Asset Based Community Development. The model of Center for Disaster Preparedness is building relationships with families within the community. By involving local leaders, each community adapts disaster preparedness as their own and what follows is solidarity and change for the better. Another outcome that she noted came from solidarity within a barangay is efficiency and effectiveness not only in disaster preparation but also in the economic sector. This proved true for the community of Bukluran as well. The network that the disaster training created also opened a venue for livelihood programs, lifting the economic state of many women in this barangay. Disasters affect families in every aspect of life but through this training they were able to minimize the damage, thus helping them progress more economically and financially. Luneta stated “These two are inseparable, disaster preparedness and development.”

The second half of her talk was based on the theological implications of disasters. Mayfourth had a lot to say in regards to religion and the obligations Christians have in not only serving those who have been struck with natural calamity, but also about how to prevent them. As a risk prevention director she comes in contact with many different groups, some religious and others not. Her approach to both of these groups is similar in the sense that they depict what the community should be doing to aid and reduce the risks in natural disasters; however she leaves out the direct links that can be found in the bible. The four biblical examples for disaster

preparedness are: preparedness, migration, relief, and rehabilitation. All of these are sown into her training programs to prepare communities for possible risks.

The first biblical example, preparedness, is found in the story of Noah (Genesis 6:9). This depicts the exact preparedness and attention to detail that individuals should follow when confronting the idea of a natural disaster. Noah was believed to be delusional by his own community for being so prepared for something that was unlikely to happen, but his efforts showed that one could never be too prepared. The second biblical example is migration. Sometimes, the individuals that live in these disasters prone areas are warned before-hand and should move to avoid the calamity. We can see how migration in the bible is used to prosper and protect people, thus moving individuals in preparation for a disaster would be beneficial.

**Biblical Themes of  
Disaster Preparedness**

- Preparedness
- Migration
- Relief
- Rehabilitation

The third biblical theme that Mayfourth explained was relief as seen in famines or other destructive happenings. We are called to aid the poor and relieve suffering. With disaster preparedness, this could be seen as relieving those affected by a flash flood, typhoon, fire, or even giving relief effort to prepare those for a certain situation. The fourth and final biblical theme related to disaster relief is the rehabilitation stage. The bible explains how Jerusalem needed to be rebuilt, undergoing a rehabilitation state after its fall. Rehabilitation is the final step that usually involves rebuilding a community and preventing a disaster from happening again. These biblical samples begin to explain natural disasters and methods to prevent them from happening; however people still have many personal beliefs about the causes of these events.

Mayfourth followed this biblical explanation with a look into the community's understanding of these natural disasters from a religious perspective. The belief of some is that these natural disasters happen because God is angry with them and that it is their punishment. Others believe that natural disasters come from the devil to wreak havoc on the people of earth. Mayfourth then began to explain that the cause of many natural disasters is man made to begin with. Floods happen because of poorly constructed or maintained riverbeds, fires due to electrical issues, and diseases through pollution. Regardless of these disasters causes, the truth is still that God does not want His people to die. Throughout time, God has given people the ability to listen to messengers of God and prepare for the future. This has not changed over time and it is now up to leaders to continue to use their God given abilities to prevent future disasters from happening in communities.

The responsibility for bringing disaster preparedness to a community should not rest just with an organization, but it should be equally distributed among the community. One of the main focuses in disaster prevention within the community, especially while partnering with a religious community, is prayer. "The entire project in the community should be covered in prayer," says Mayfourth, "We pray a lot." The previous speakers illustrated how deeply faith was rooted within the Filipino culture and Mayfourth's focus on prayer supports these beliefs. Aside from prayer, Mayfourth explained that the community should also be prepared physically for a

disaster. There should be extra clothes, food, and water in case of an emergency so that the church could respond in a quick and orderly fashion. This strengthens the relationship with the church and the community, as well as empowering the community to become prepared as well.

The process of disaster preparedness relies upon coordination and networking of both the relief group and the community. These two groups need to work together to create a strong relationship that exudes preparedness and resilience in the midst of disaster. This could manifest itself through financing projects within the community that utilize the resources that can be found around the community. In the community of Banaba that Mayfourth worked in, the community had a lot of recyclables and used them to make handicrafts to fund their disaster preparedness program. This empowered the community not only to look out for the wellbeing of one another, but it also created employment in a community where jobs could be hard to find. It was interesting to see that there is a lot more that can come from disaster preparedness than just reinforcing a community. Mayfourth embodies the teachings of Jesus and how we are called to love one another, serve the poor, and prepare others for what will happen in the future.

## Roland “Dong” Cucio

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Cucio spent 15 years of his life as a pastor among the urban poor and co-founded Operation Compassion. Because of his background in theology his portion of the forum was largely theological. He began by saying “you need to prepare your mind.” There are two different aspects to disaster risk management- the self and the larger community at hand. The emphasis was that in order to help others prepare for potential disasters you must first prepare yourself. This includes preparing yourself mentally, practically, as well as spiritually. He reasoned that if you are able to prepare yourself then the community will be more prepared as well. His talk touched on resiliency of the Filipino culture as well.

## Conclusions

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Each of the speakers brought in different perspectives and stories from their own experience with Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management. Each of them touched on cultural, action-oriented, and spiritual implications of what it means to prepare for disaster. The following are main points drawn from their talks:

- The four biblical themes related to disaster prevention are preparedness, mitigation, relief, and rehabilitation.
- Community Involvement
- Prayer while working with a community
- Supply Preparation
- Action Plan in case of a disaster
- Resiliency of the Filipinos

With these points in mind, the following is a simple graphic that we will share with our community and classmates at ATS. It may be developed into an extended guide in the future and perhaps handed out to vulnerable communities to encourage transformational conversations in terms of disasters.

# DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

HOW TO PREPARE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES FOR DISASTERS AND REDUCE THEIR RISK OF DESTRUCTION

## 1) PREPAREDNESS: Noah's Ark

- Build relationships with leaders within the community
- Locate and utilize already existing assets
- Create action plans for when disaster strikes

## 2) MITIGATION: Joseph and the 7 Year Famine

- Prepare basic necessities such as food, water, and light
- Repair structures that have been damaged by past disasters
- Reinforce structures to withstand flood, rain, and/or wind

## 3) RELIEF: Famine in Judea

- Find outside sources that will provide food and shelter after the storm
- Work together with community leaders to address immediate needs
- Utilize supplies that were set aside before the disaster

## 4) REHABILITATION: Rebuilding of Jerusalem

- Address psychological as well as physiological needs of the community
- Partnering with leaders and organizations to rebuild what was lost
- Encouraging the recognition of hope in the midst of despair

WE WILL REMAIN RESILIENT