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World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2011

St. Bernard is getting ready!

St. Bernard, Southern Leyte, Philippines

Population: 26,297 (2001)

Type of Hazard(s): Landslides, Floods, Earthquake, Tsunami, Storm Surge

Saint Bernard Municipality is located in the southern part of Leyte Province in the Visayas Islands in the Philippines.

In 2006, one of the world's worst landslide hit Southern Leyte that almost wiped out the entire 480 hectares in **Barangay Guinsaugon**, one of the 16 villages of the town of St. Bernard. The disaster left in its wake 28 injured, 410 registered survivors and buried alive at least 1,000 people. The town had experienced other disasters in previous years, but St. Bernard was unprepared for the magnitude of the Guinsaugon disaster. After the tragedy, hazard assessments were conducted by the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS), Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and NGOs like CARE Philippines and the results revealed that 70% of the total land area of St. Bernard is highly vulnerable to many hazards.

Disaster Risk Reduction activities

Since it reactivated its Municipal Disaster Coordinating Council (MDCC), St. Bernard in partnership with different NGOs has conducted a series of trainings on disaster preparedness, risk reduction, mitigation & climate change adaptation (CCA) for municipal officials, community leaders and other community members. These capacity building activities covered topics from disaster preparedness, mitigation, emergency response, and many others. Drills on flood, tsunami, landslide, and earthquake were also conducted in villages and schools.

The Local Government Unit (LGU) has also implemented many small-scale flood, landslide and multi-hazard mitigation projects that have helped reduce the risk & vulnerability of St. Bernard against hazards. These mitigation actions include the construction of gabions, dredging of river, mangrove planting to mitigate typhoon surges,

bamboo planting & set-up of coconet (*tough netting made of coconut husks to anchor soil on slopes*) in steep mountain slopes to lessen the risk of landslides, and many others. A comprehensive early warning system (EWS) was also established and vulnerable communities exposed to risk/danger zones were relocated to areas less prone to hazards.

Livelihood programs were implemented especially for farmers who were affected by drought. Alternative livelihoods like the cultivation of fruit trees and associated crops were promoted at the community level. Food security and innovative agricultural systems that can ensure better crop yield are also being implemented by the LGU in cooperation

The LGU has Incorporated disaster risk reduction in its development planning processes particularly in the development and implementation of the Executive and Legislative Agenda (ELA) that incorporates disaster-proofing the development priorities; and the Annual Investment Plan (AIP) innovatively using local resources such as the Calamity Fund & Economic Development Fund, pro-actively shifting from using these funds from emergency response to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and climate change adaptation projects.

- Activities for developing and strengthening community capacities for disaster preparedness and mitigation: Participatory risk assessment, Multihazard mapping; Training on CBDRM and disaster preparedness for community and community trainers.
- Activities for strengthening LGU capacities disaster risk reduction: Developing standards, guidelines and protocols on emergency response; Emergency response preparedness training; Municipal contingency planning; Barangay contingency planning; Evacuation drills for communities and schools.
- Setting-up the St. Bernard Emergency Response Unit (SBERU)
- Setting-up a community-based early warning system
- Provision of disaster preparedness and EWS equipment
- Small-scale mitigation projects: Construction of gabion (*large wire baskets, filled with rocks to stabilize shorelines or slopes*) as flood mitigation measure; Dredging of Lawigan River
- Relocating communities in dangerzones to areas less-prone to hazards
- Establishment of Coconet on mountain steep slopes to lessen landslides in St. Bernard
- Updating the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) using identified risk factors such as results of the READY multi-hazard mapping, capacities and vulnerabilities of communities and municipalities

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- Establishment of permanent relocation sites to relocate households living along the riverbanks prone to flood/ flashfloods and households lying along the coast who are prone to storm surge and even tsunami, through the partnership with Gawad Kalinga.
 - Establishment of Flood Early Warning System by GTZ. The EWS operates by telemetered device that would transmit data (such as rainfall volume and water level of floods at the upstream river) to the Operation Center via radio frequency and thus alert people.