

Tsunami Community Education and Awareness: The Philippine Experience

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PHIVOLCS' Tsunami Community Education and Awareness program has evolved through the years. The program which involves development of appropriate tools and materials as well as site-specific designed capacity building activities, takes off from lessons learned from local events such as the 1976 Moro Gulf and 1994 Mindoro tsunamis. These are combined with lessons learned from recent major tsunami events that occurred outside the country such as the 2004 Banda Aceh, 2010 Chile and 2011 Great East Japan.

Ensuring community participation entails establishing good relationships and fostering collaborations with community leaders, residents, schools and its teachers and administrators, and other local groups. For example, involvement of residents and officials from preparation stage of the evacuation maps to actual implementation of the drill is important. Community-level orientation sessions are held for enhanced understanding of earthquakes and tsunamis and aims for increased awareness and for people to seriously consider preparedness measures. The sessions are not limited to giving talks about earthquakes and how tsunamis form, but include discussions on preparedness measures, what to do before during and after an event. The hands-on experience on familiarization with hazard maps, application of all acquired knowledge in the preparation of the community evacuation map and testing evacuation plans by conducting drills are the highlights of community-based activities. In relation to evacuation plans, community activities also include putting up of pieces of signage at appropriate locations for tsunami warning, evacuation routes and identified evacuation areas.

Through the years, significant improvement in terms activities and of materials developed have been achieved in terms of content and design. Materials put emphasis on understanding of the science – specifically, the relationship of undersea earthquake and tsunami. The materials emphasize the consciousness to utilize observational skills focusing on the natural signs of approaching tsunamis and what to do. Tools and materials come in various forms possible such as print and video and disseminated through various channels.

Establishing links and partnerships not only locally but internationally as well, has enhanced our program. Most of PHIVOLCS activities have been implemented using locally-available funds, augmented by support from various partners. Collaborations with international partners include development and enhancement of PHIVOLCS Tsunami SOP in collaboration with UNESCO- ITIC-PTWC, Philippines' participation in the first-ever Exercise Pacific Wave (EPW) in 2006. This was followed by drills for pilot communities under the AusAID-UNDP funded READY Project, UNESCO-UNESCAP Project, RIMES, and JICA.