

## Resilience dividend



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I am writing this from Geneva, Switzerland, where I am with a team from the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), which forms part of the Philippine delegation to the United Nations' Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) meeting. Our delegation, headed by Undersecretary Ric Jalad of the Office of Civil Defense and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council, is composed of individuals from national government agencies, local government units, nongovernment organizations, the academe and the private sector.

The GPDRR meets once every two years and brings together some 4,000 disaster risk reduction professionals, scientists and policymakers for one week to discuss a wide range of topics and projects on disaster risk reduction. With dozens of dialogues, presentations and learning labs running simultaneously during the day, it's the perfect place to catch up with old and new contacts in the field to exchange ideas and learn new ones.

This year's theme is "Resilience Dividend: Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Societies," something close to our hearts at the PDRF since the concept of the Resilience Dividend was at the core of our decision and plan to reorganize and reorient our mission from a purely disaster response and recovery organization to one dedicated to the fuller spectrum of disaster resilience (from prevention to preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery).

For years, the Philippines has been known as one of the “disaster capitals” of the world. Indeed, we are ranked the third most vulnerable country in the world in terms of natural calamities. While we had developed half-decent response mechanisms, we lagged in the past in terms of disaster preparedness and prevention.

That is no longer the case. Many agencies and organizations in the Philippines are now recognized as global experts and leaders in disaster preparedness and prevention. Throughout sessions here at the Global Platform, Philippine experts from different agencies and organizations are spread throughout a wide range of panels on topics ranging from education to health, social welfare and development, local governance, science, risk assessment and community resilience. Not a few foreign speakers even cite their experience working on Philippine projects as among their ideas of best practice.

One area where the Philippines is recognized as a leader is in public-private collaboration. Mainly as a recognition that Mother Nature could be a formidable force, both government and the private sector realized that there was strength in numbers; that together we stood a far better chance of managing our risk and responding to it than if we were to act separately.

The PDRF was organized along these lines back in 2009 following Typhoon “Ketsana” (“Ondoy”), and was reinforced in this position following our reorganization in 2013 after Supertyphoon “Haiyan” (“Yolanda”). Our programs and operations were designed to run interoperably within the business community and between the business community and government. Joint exercises, drills, training programs and business continuity programs down to the barangay level have been a regular feature of our work at the PDRF.

As a country, our collective public and private investments in disaster resilience has begun to pay off. Since Yolanda in 2013, casualties due to natural calamities have dropped dramatically (though that is of course also attributable to less severe calamities), while recovery after disasters appears to have sped up.

For PDRF, our programs for the Emergency Operations Center, Training (known as PrepLab), Business Continuity for MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises), Service Continuity for Government, Community Resilience and Participatory Mapping, Information Systems, and our Cluster System will continue to expand as areas of investment in resilience. Relatively new areas of work in such projects as Safe Schools, Safe Hospitals, Getting Airports Ready for Disaster, and others will also scale up. Partnerships with government, LGUs, academe and NGOs, as well as with international organizations like the United Nations, Connecting Business Initiative, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, Asian Preparedness Partnership, Brown University, World Food Program and others, will also be expanded to tap into their expertise and to extend our reach for sharing of ideas and practice.

It is our belief that these investments will yield a resilience dividend, and that this dividend will benefit people even before any natural calamity strikes.