

Humanitarian leadership in urban communities: an exploratory study on the role of community leaders in humanitarian coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines

Maria Carinnes Alejandria

Sociology and Anthropology Programme, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam, and

Philippe Jose Hernandez, Marie Antonette Quan-Nalus,
Froilan Alipao, Denise Tumaneng, Cathleen Justine Ruiz,
Kay Anne Dela Cruz and Kristel May Casimiro
University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

Abstract

Purpose – In the Global South where humanitarian responses to disasters are often hampered by systemic gaps, community-based humanitarian actors play a crucial but underexplored role in mediating aid to vulnerable populations. This study explores the everydayness of humanitarian action through the lived experiences of urban community leaders during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines. Specifically, it sheds light on their engagement with national-level responders, the typologies of humanitarian activities they undertook and the contextual factors influencing their decision-making.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative approach, this study presents interviews with 35 community-based humanitarian leaders in urban poor areas of Metro Manila, Philippines. Analytical themes were developed inductively from the transcripts.

Findings – Due to mobility restrictions from quarantine protocols, the typologies of humanitarian action shifted to accommodate arising challenges from pandemic management. Engagement with formal humanitarian actors were premised on pre-existing relationships. The study further reveals that, despite lacking formal training, community leaders utilized preexisting networks of care while subscribing to Filipino communal values of bayanihan (working together), malasakit (care) and pagkakaisa (unity). The findings underscore the need for discourse on the realities faced by community leaders and highlight the importance of holistic and gendered capacity building for effective disaster response in vulnerable communities.

Originality/value – This study contributes to understanding the intricate dynamics of humanitarian coordination, particularly in areas where community leaders act as critical intermediaries between their



constituents and external support providers and concludes with critical take on localization as a form of community resilience to disaster events.

Keywords Localization, Disaster management, Humanitarian coordination, Community organization, Urban poor

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Humanitarian response, as a form of aid and assistance, has been a conventional strategy in addressing humanitarian needs and alleviating suffering during periods of disaster. In the Global South where humanitarian responses during a disaster are fragmented by systemic and structural gaps, the role of community-based humanitarian actors is a compelling narrative that needs further exploration to assess the challenges and opportunities in coordination. Humanitarian coordination plays a vital role in the effective implementation of disaster mitigation efforts of the national and international actors. Another set of actors that remains less documented consist of community-based humanitarian workers who perform the role of mediating the needs of their constituents vis-à-vis the aid offered by government actors and external support providers in periods when access to their areas is limited. The extent of discussion on their preparedness to address the impacts of disaster and the needed coordination with other humanitarian actors remain underdeveloped due to gaps relating to capacity building (Camara *et al.*, 2020; Lau *et al.*, 2020). The growing threat of cascading and complex disasters generate the need to develop the skills and knowledge of community-based humanitarian actors as first-line responders during crisis facilitators for recovery post-disaster period (Alcayna, Bollettino, Dy, & Vinck, 2016; Mbeya, Kostandova, Leichner, & Wener, 2018).

Another context that affects the efficacy of humanitarian responses led by community leaders is the type of interaction that they have with national-level responders (e.g. military actors), which have been documented to have challenges in integrating local contexts in interventions (Canyon, Ryan, & Burkle, 2017). Community-based humanitarian actors specifically community leaders serve as the counterparts of these military actors in vulnerable communities. In highly urbanized areas, the effectiveness of interventions typically requires much less direct service delivery and far more engagement of existing services, advocating for access and supporting local governments and private sector partners to scale up and ensure quality of services (Earle, 2016). However, in subaltern communities where basic services remain a challenge, community leaders who may have been thrust into a more active humanitarian role presents a Global South reality notable of discourse, especially since the latter may have done so sans formal training.

These conditions were observed in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic as 5.2 million families experiencing hunger by July 2020 (Nakpil, 2020) and government-led humanitarian response remained insufficient while it initiated its most stringent protocol in managing the threats of the pandemic by implementing a strict lockdown for all households. This policy has impacted the already food insecure households in urban poor areas whose daily subsistence is based in mobility to acquire income through informal labor. Southeast Asia's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the chronic social inequalities that exacerbated its impacts on the livelihood and well-being of the most vulnerable (Ullah, Haji-Othman, & Daud, 2021). Like other countries in Southeast Asia (Ismail, Adnan, & Wahid, 2021; Zreik, 2024) the Philippine government distributed relief supplies and financial subsidy for vulnerable sectors of the population. However, these remained insufficient in supporting households for a protracted period of quarantine.

It is in this light that this paper explored the lived experiences of community-based humanitarian leaders in three urban poor areas in Metro Manila, Philippines. More specifically, this paper inquires on the extent of their (1) engagement with national-level humanitarian actors, (2) the typologies of humanitarian activities they engaged in and (3) the contexts that motivated their decision-making for humanitarian activities.

Methodology

This study implemented a qualitative design to collect the lived experiences of 35 community-based humanitarian leaders in three organizations in the Philippines' National Capital Region. Selected community leaders were invited for interviews to answer open-ended questions on the nuances of their daily interactions and processes of negotiation with civilian-military humanitarian actors and members of their communities during the pandemic. The focus on urban areas for humanitarian action was due to the high population density, which affects a larger number of people and requires urgent attention. Additionally, urban areas present more complex needs and greater diversity, particularly when combined with the context of informal settlements, necessitating localized humanitarian coordination.

The community-based organizations (CBO) included in this study are the *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Kababaihan ng Baseco* (SNKB) [1] in Manila City, *Kababaihang Nagkakaisa sa diwa at Layunin* (KANDILA) [2] in Navotas City and *Basic Ecclesial Community* (BEC) in Caloocan City [3]. These organizations were selected primarily due to the parallelisms in the community members' experiences of vulnerability to disasters, eviction and health access injustices. Specifically, these included (1) protracted experiences of disaster due to natural hazards, being situated in coastal areas; (2) extended negotiation for land tenure; (3) population based on informal economies and (4) gendered community-leadership. These contexts were considered during the data analysis vis-à-vis the typologies of humanitarian responses that the leaders engaged in. However, during this pandemic, these communities experienced vulnerabilities in differentiated levels due to varying socio-political contexts. Following the objectives set in this study, the inclusion criteria for research participants include membership in the community organization and engagement in a humanitarian response during the quarantine period.

All recorded interviews were transcribed and processed using MAXQDA2021 software. As this project employed narrative analysis, an open-coding system was implemented to draw localized contexts and concepts associated with humanitarian coordination. Succeeding graphs presents the percentage of the coded responses per item over the total number of participants.

Results and discussion

Community leaders as humanitarian actors

Cities are often documented as the center of economic growth and technological innovations and development. This concentrated development is a factor driving rapid urbanization predicated by increasing population density resulting from rural-urban migration related to aspirations for employment and higher quality of life. However, gaps in governance exacerbate pre-existing inequalities as built environments and services remain accessible to select sectors of the society. The unprecedented expansion of informal settlements due to the prevailing housing crisis generates risks to environmental and biological hazards. In the 2022 World Risk Index, the Philippines was ranked first among 193 countries using parameters like risk of a hazard turning to a disaster, vulnerability of society, coping and adaptation (Luz, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the pre-existing risks of the most vulnerable. As early as 2020, the World Food Program noted that COVID-19 is transitioning from a public health emergency into an economic emergency that could devolve into a full-fledged crisis.

To address the crisis, humanitarian assistance was provided by various humanitarian actors to the most in-need population in the form of short-term aid, while waiting for the long-term initiatives and solutions of the government and other institutions. Levine *et al.* (2023) stated that despite the general difficulty of delivering services due to policies that restricted mobilities, Civil Society Organizations played a major role during the pandemic as they prioritized helping the vulnerable through fund transfers, as well as providing food and other basic needs.

Livelihood-oriented programs was coded in 63% of the 35 responses from the interviews with the three organizations involved in this study (See Figure 1). The organizations provided training programs for skill-acquisition such as massaging and sewing in coordination with the government’s Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Microfinancing was also made available through the support of national-level NGOs. Health related interventions including medical missions, dental missions and distribution of free medicines such as vitamins were also identified as a key program of the organizations at 52%. This is followed by other projects relating to education (41%), community solidarity (43%), hygiene and sanitation (28%) and spiritual development (33%). The delivery of these services was all in close collaboration with external organizations which provided funding and personnel support. Emphasis is needed on the distribution of relief goods (42%) as the communities have been protractedly managing hazards like flooding and typhoons given their vulnerable location in reclamation areas and along coastlines.

In March of 2020, as the Philippine government initiated its strict quarantine protocols that limited the mobility in the country especially in urban centers where high transmission of COVID-19 was recorded, CBOs were catapulted to the role of primary aid and service providers in their communities while their external partners were unable to provide personnel and in-person support. Figure 2 shows the greater nuance in the programs that the CBOs developed to address the shifting needs of their community partners as COVID-19 impacted livelihood, food security, access to education and mental health. Advocacy in the form of soliciting funding from donors was the primary activity engaged in by the two CBOs (Kandila and BEC). This was due to the gap in the funding sources that the organizations faced as their external partners’ funding were prescribed for usage in pre-pandemic programs like education and livelihood. However, the quarantine restrictions redefined the needs of the community. Leaders of CBOs were pressed to secure fundings to support programs addressing food security and internet access for online education. While SNKB had more flexible funding agreement with donors, it could be seen that it diverted all its resources to delivering basic needs for its community members. It must be noted that SNKB is situated in the largest informal settlement area in the city of Manila.

Engagement agencies and actors for humanitarian action

While additional support through humanitarian aid and assistance from other development actors such as international humanitarian organizations complemented the efforts of the

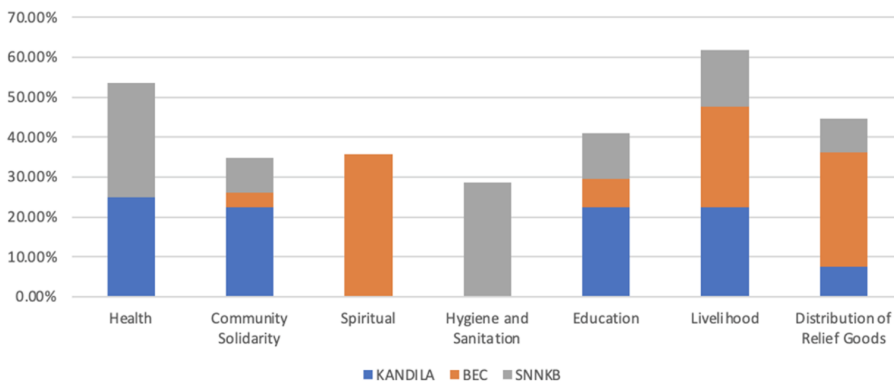


Figure 1.
Pre-pandemic programs of the CBOs

Source(s): Figure by authors

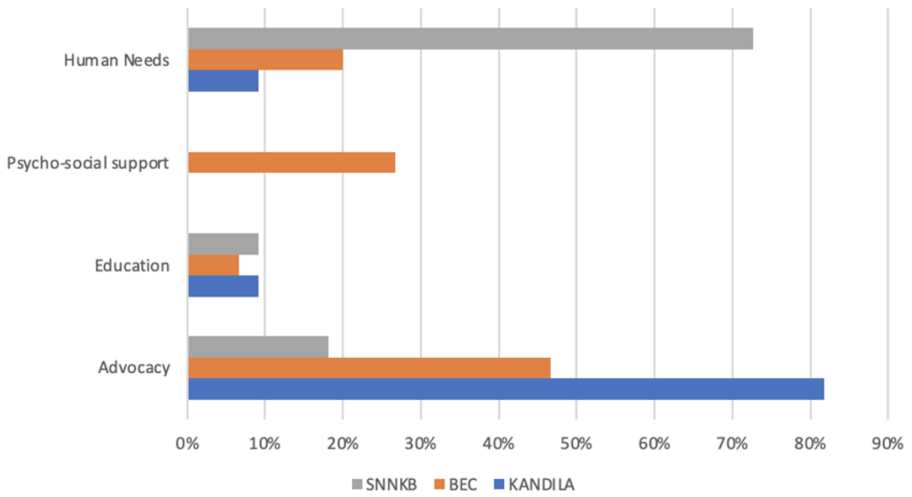


Figure 2.
Pandemic programs
of CBOs

Source(s): Figure by authors

Philippine government in its battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic downturn and its resulting financial restrictions impeded the operations and activities of some humanitarian organizations (Reliefweb, 2021).

Social Institutions such as the state, academe and the church enabled the local community organizations to access more opportunities that are deemed helpful for them. Figure 3 shows the types of collaborators engaged with by the community leaders. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the community leaders developed partnership with academic institutions which supported the programs and activities of their organization. With implementation of quarantine protocols during the pandemic, the CBOs explored other pathways for securing

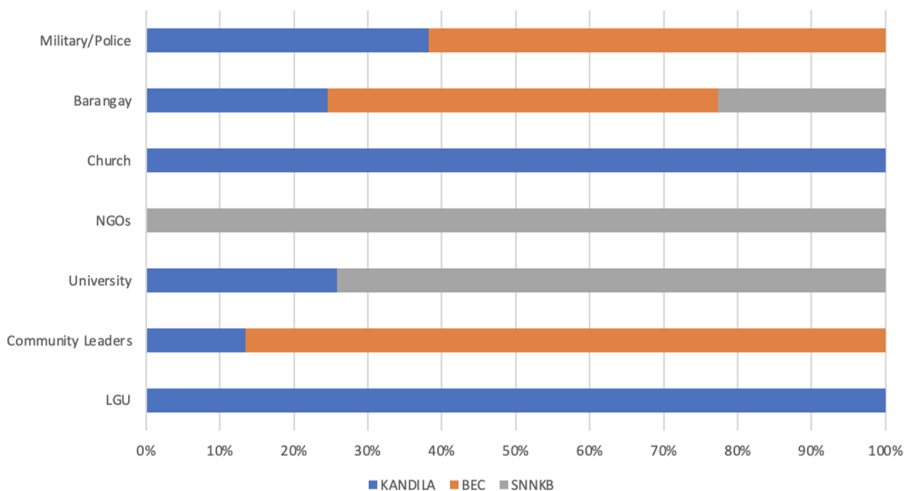


Figure 3.
Collaborators for
humanitarian action

Source(s): Figure by authors

resources. Collaboration with private sector and individuals through the usage of social media platforms became a key tool for the SNKB. For the three CBOs, the village-level political unit (*Barangay*) became a key collaborator for humanitarian action. Pre-pandemic, the engagement of the CBOs with the barangay officials were mostly related to securing permits to hold events (i.e. disaster preparedness training, medical mission). However, with their external partners unable to enter their jurisdiction due to quarantine protocols, the barangay became the conduit of service and aid delivery for the affected households. As the external organizations transfer funds for the project to the CBOs, the barangay officials serve as the intermediary for members of the organization and the military guarding the checkpoints. It was through this process that the continuity of pre-pandemic programs and the implementation of the new programs were ensured in these areas. Engaging local community-based organizations and local humanitarian actors served as the bridge for the humanitarian responses to reach these local communities. Through community local leaders, humanitarian coordination was attained despite the mobility restrictions as they mobilized their valuable networks among their communities, government and other external organizations.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic was addressed by the government using a securitized approach that mobilized the country's state armed actors in addressing the issues and concerns brought by the health crisis, the role of military actors extended from the peace and security operations to being in the frontline of the health response. The development and implementation of COVID-19 protocols and measures, such as the imposition of community quarantine lockdowns, were led by military actors. Military actors have been deployed at checkpoints, performing security checks in public places and ensuring compliance to community curfews during the heightened community quarantine across the country. The characteristics of the three communities being densely populated and categorized as informal settlements, predicated a more securitized setting. As one participant said, "military actors were constantly roving, observing if people are following social distancing and are wearing face mask and face shield." In the narratives of the local leaders, military actors reinforce orders and protocols during lockdowns; thus, their presence helped in controlling the mobility of the people in the community. For the participants of the study, this function aided them in the organized and safe distribution of aid within the community. As the military actors provided not only personnel support in transporting supplies but also ensured a streamlined process in its distribution, the CBOs leaders were able to effectively deliver services to their members.

Understanding context and motivations to humanitarian activities

The idea of fulfilling an action that can benefit other people is at the center of understanding motivations for humanitarian activities participation among the three CBOs engaged in this study. Emphatic concern is one aspect to understand humanitarian motivations, considering the complexities and diversity. It can also be influenced by personal reasons and motivations that are rooted from socio-cultural experiences and identity. There are several Filipino concepts that were highlighted by the participants: "Bayanihan" (spirit of cooperative effort in the community), "Pagkakaisa" (unity) and "Malasakit" (deep sense of care) which were observed in the narratives of the local leaders in this study. This notion of organic solidarity in responding to the threats of COVID-19 was also observed in other countries in Southeast Asia (Ho, 2022; Sayuti, Taquiuddin, Evendi, Hidayati, & Muttaqin, 2023).

Data show that local leaders intend to participate in humanitarian activities mainly because of these cultural lenses which emphasize the importance of relationships between the self and community. When asked about her motivation in participating in their organization's

feeding program, an interviewee's response highlights the drive for cooperative effort: "The feeding programs are for the kids and are to help their parents, our neighbors, who are in need due to losing their jobs during COVID-19." This orientation was also seen in the response of another interviewee regarding sharing food supplies to other members of the community, "Whenever we receive blessings, we assist our neighbors, house-to-house, to give them the help that we received." Helping and supporting others to promote a better quality of life was seen as a priority in making decisions related to humanitarian activities. Community local leaders developed initiatives and implemented programs based on the assessment of the immediate needs of the community for their daily survival. Through the community-based organizations, motivations translated to collective action.

Pivoting to the operational landscape of these community-based organizations (CBOs), while motivations laid the groundwork for their commitment, a context distinguishes the approaches these organizations took during the pre-pandemic and pandemic period—funding. Pre-pandemic programs were primarily driven by the availability of funding. Although the organizations had missions that governed their activities, it was ultimately the programmatic goals of the funding agency that defined most of their engagements. The availability of funding increased their capacities to fully implement externally designed programs including those related to disaster preparedness and humanitarian action. All three community organizations operated through the support of donors and sponsors, while one (KANDILA) also relied on community contributions. The level of their engagement was often limited to providing essential information about the community which the funding agency processed to generate potential programs for implementation. This process neglected their capacities to be frontline responders and planners, especially during disaster and crisis events. This is a pervading issue on the concept and practice of localization in the development and humanitarian landscape (Roepstorff, 2020).

This top-down approach was challenged by the onset of the pandemic which introduced a new layer of complexity to the operational strategies of these community-based organizations. The challenges posed by the pandemic not only tested the resilience of existing frameworks but also prompted a reevaluation of the roles and capacities of these organizations in the face of unprecedented crises. It was at this stage that the Filipino virtues of *bayanihan*, *pagkakaisa* and *malasakit* overtook funding limitations derived from donor policies against grantee mission drift. Driven by the need to provide care for vulnerable members of their community, CBOs developed programs that could mitigate the impacts of the pandemic which included food security and education access. They have also secured funding through nonconventional methods such as collecting donations via social media platforms as was the experience of SNKB which implemented a 162-day feeding program (Cruzada, Mercado-Asis, Li-Yu, & Panaligan, 2022).

Shifting to local-led humanitarian action

Humanitarian actions are often developed to respond to the crisis being experienced by humans. There is no single definition that can perfectly describe humanitarian action due to its complexities across different humanitarian organizations. Conventional definitions emphasize that it is centered on "the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1999). The core of humanitarian activities revolves around responding immediately to every crisis that will occur, but such highly depends on the capacities of the humanitarian actors in responding to the different degree and level of crises. This is where humanitarian coordination and collaboration are deemed crucial.

Due to the pandemic challenges related to the delivery of services, humanitarian actors and their field staff often tap community-based local actors for support to pursue the humanitarian activities on the ground. There is a current global call among humanitarian actors to promote better localization of humanitarian activities through an increased and improved partnership with local organizations, especially community-based organizations. Localization is not a new concept in the humanitarian sphere, but because of the current global circumstances, it has been pushed to the forefront. Strengthening local organizations on the frontline enables a better humanitarian response. Engaging community organizations and community leaders who have local knowledge about their respective communities may lead to more success in the realm of humanitarian responses and activities. Local humanitarian actors can swiftly reach areas affected by disaster, and with their familiarity of the local languages, cultures, geography and political context, needs of the communities are easily identified and appropriate solutions are quickly formulated.

Of the 35 community leaders who participated in this study, only 6 had formal training on management of projects. These six leaders received trainings on developing projects for community development from the University of Santo Tomas, a local private higher education institution in Manila. Although development work is different from humanitarian action especially in terms of timeline of response and prioritization of resources, these leaders mentioned that key lessons on fund management and progress tracking became useful when they were managing their humanitarian action. One leader mentioned, “the training on budgeting resources was helpful in managing our finances” while another participant discussed how communication skills training allowed her to engage with external donors to support the feeding program. For the other participants of this study some of the key challenges that they face in the delivery of humanitarian action included identifying primary needs of the members of the community and matching these with appropriate programs.

To address these challenges, these community leaders relied on preexisting networks of care which previously served members in periods of flooding and typhoon. In most instances, these networks were led by women as majority of the households in these areas we characterized as female-centric given that men are often in prolonged absence due to their participation in contracted labor economy (i.e. construction, fishing, retail). [Alburo-Cañete \(2022\)](#) argued that the prevalence of a gendered post-disaster local responses in the Global South, which she labelled as *feminization of responsibility in community recovery*, is an indicator of women’s active role in development work.

Of the three organizations included in this study, two are female led. When asked about the engagement of males in their organization, representatives have noted that due to the latter’s participation in the paid labor force, the women were often the ones left behind to manage the households even during periods of disasters. This situation prompts a reconsideration of the conventional notion in international rights discourse regarding the identity of “duty-bearers” responsible for ensuring or protecting those rights ([Hilhorst & Jansen, 2012](#)). Upholding these responsibilities requires collaborative efforts from both men and women. While women are not inherently peaceful, they have served as peace educators within families and societies, proving instrumental in building bridges rather than walls ([Henty & Eggleston, 2018](#)). In the realm of humanitarian actions, it is crucial to dispel gender assumptions and expectations. Recognizing that everyone in the community can contribute significantly to negotiations, collaborations and linkages. Acknowledging the value of shared responsibilities within the community, an opportunity to foster inclusive and sustainable approach to humanitarian action is through targeted training and development activities. By investing in programs that could equip all stakeholders, regardless of gender, with skills in disaster management and humanitarian coordination, community leadership can mitigate the disproportionate burden on women during crises.

Apart from providing sufficient training for humanitarian action to community leaders, another aspect that could be strengthened to promote a sustainable local-led humanitarian activity is through the transfer of funds within the scope of anticipatory action. Access to more direct and flexible funding enable greater institutional support to local responders. Narratives from the leaders of the CBOs highlight that the aid that they received from other organizations were largely on relief goods such as food, which is an immediate need especially in times of a pandemic. However, there are other societal needs that require attention and immediate humanitarian actions but are most often neglected due to lack of funding. For instance, the lack of financial support may hinder communities' access to vital resources such as the internet for online classes, thereby impeding educational opportunities, particularly during crises. Successfully adopting this approach requires changes in the way humanitarian sectors perceive humanitarian coordination. With complex disasters arising, delivery of humanitarian responses becomes ever more challenging. Dismantling top-down approaches for a more community-centric approach can decentralize decision-making and empower local leaders. This, in turn, empowers communities to better navigate hazards, thereby fostering resilience in the face of evolving and intricate disaster scenarios (Mulder, 2023).

Implications to theory and practice

Local leaders play a vital role in the realm of humanitarian coordination and response. They can be key agents, both as primary humanitarian responders and actors of their own experiences. Local leaders may provide actual risks and priorities needed by the community. However, gaps in capacity building programs for local leaders to be active contributors to plan, develop and provide more efficient and sustainable form of humanitarian efforts remain. Figure 4 presents a framework for Everyday Humanitarianism, emphasizing the inclusivity and relevance of routine, small-scale acts of care provided by non-professional humanitarian actors. These acts, driven by affective and social moral contexts, highlight the

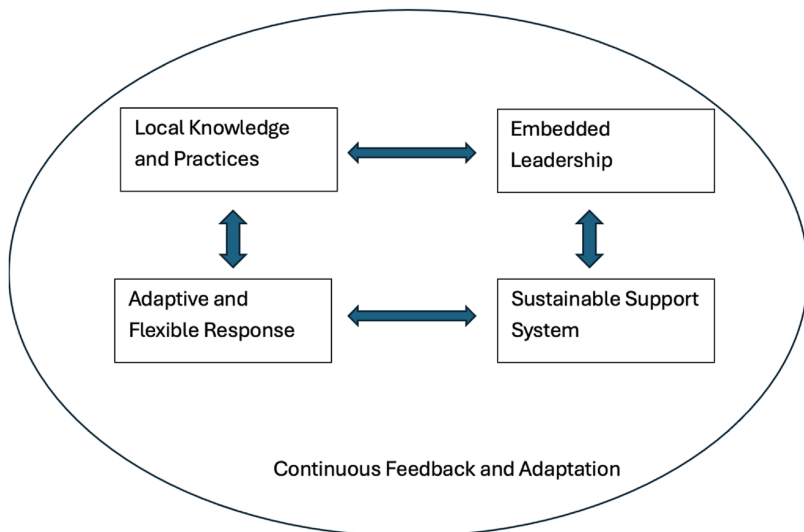


Figure 4.
Everyday
humanitarianism
framework

Source(s): Figure by authors

significant impact of community-based efforts in supporting individuals affected by crises (Olliff, 2018). The process starts with identifying Local Knowledge and Practices (LKP) to emphasize the contextual understanding of hazards and vulnerabilities drawn from the lived experiences of the affected community. As such, designing humanitarian interventions in urban informal settlements, like those featured in this study, ought to recognize their highly differentiated LKP compared to other urban communities whose residential status are recognized by the State. This also addresses the differentiated impact of crises and disaster events on the different members of the community.

The LKP of an affected community contributes to the legitimacy of Embedded Leadership (EL) as community leaders who perform daily acts of aid gain the confidence of community members to coordinate with and for them during periods of larger crises. It is within this approach that a more gendered understanding and implementation of humanitarian action could be promoted.

The continuous feedback between LKP and EL informs the development of Adaptive and Reflexive Response (ARR) towards hazards and crises. Formal humanitarian actors and institutions could benefit from (re)configuring modes of aid delivery through close coordination with community leaders who are operating based on LKP and EL. Both ARR and EL could inform the development of Sustainable Support System (SSS) which could include training community leaders towards humanitarian coordination and anticipatory action. In areas where protracted and cascading disasters occur, establishing SSS through community-based and gender-responsive approaches can contribute to addressing the root causes of these crises (Rose & Chmutina, 2021). This framework promotes a holistic approach to humanitarian crisis to meet the needs of vulnerable communities.

There are several programs that could be considered to further enhance the local leaders' capacities. In this context, capacity building focuses on the activities that increase the abilities of local leaders to develop more inclusive and sustainable humanitarian initiatives (Merino & Carmenido, 2012). Aside from funding acquisition and management skills, local leaders must be equipped with strategies on how to build more partnership and collaboration within the humanitarian network. In a partnership, defining clear roles and responsibilities is significant in planning and developing humanitarian efforts. Mosselmans (2017) argued for "local partners taking a greater lead role and share of the resources" which directly addresses the call for decolonizing humanitarian aid. In urban informal settlements like the ones featured in this study, ownership and accountability of humanitarian action was stifled by gaps in the community leaders' familiarization in project planning and development cycle.

Another practical recommendation of this paper is improving the civil–military relations during crises and response. In this pandemic, the relationships between civil–military actors have created gaps during the implementation of various responses in the community. Although local leaders identified experiences of partnership and collaboration with military actors in their aid delivery, there were also significant reports on the stifling presence of military actors especially in highly securitized environments and where communities have been subjected to protracted State surveillance due to their residential status. Training for engaging with each other during crises is important in ensuring a Sustainable Support System built on mutual trust. Caution is given to capacity building initiatives that promote local leaders' dependency on formal humanitarian actors and the blurry delineation of roles between them and military actors. Such awareness in program development will arrest the disempowering impression that military actors are indispensable in the management of the pandemic crisis due to their highly "critical role" in managing the crisis and response (Kalkman, 2020). In this context, decolonizing humanitarian action will require that recognition of the crucial function and ability of the local leaders in responding to the crisis happening in their own locality.

Conclusion

With COVID-19 came the exacerbation of existing urban global crises, which are continuously progressing, increasing more vulnerabilities and affecting more communities globally. These require more coordinated efforts among humanitarian actors to ensure immediate response to the negative impact of crisis worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has been very challenging even to those humanitarian actors with high response capacities. Therefore, the humanitarian network calls for an improved localization of the humanitarian responses through the increased participation of community-based local humanitarian actors.

This paper has presented the role of urban community leaders in humanitarian coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. Using their lived experiences, this paper identified the challenges and opportunities for local humanitarian actors in coordination and response during periods of disaster. Conventionally, humanitarian coordination was limited to those who have the capacities such as international and national humanitarian actors. Learning from the challenges in humanitarian action generated by pandemic management which resulted to restricted mobilization of assistance and resources, future emergencies and disasters could be sustainably and inclusively approach by recognizing the importance of community participation and engagement in delivering aid. Basic and advanced community organizing ought to be integrated within all aspects and phases of humanitarian and anticipatory action recognizing the critical role of local knowledge and practices in informing the behavior of affected communities towards hazards.

There is a need to fill in the gaps within the relationship of local, national and international humanitarian actors. Defining equal roles and setting boundaries can facilitate good coordination and successful efforts in providing humanitarian response. Leveraging the resources and structures of local governance, such as development councils and disaster management bodies, can facilitate the mobilization of resources and support for humanitarian programs. The available resources of these local structures can facilitate the mobilization of resources and funding that can support humanitarian and development programs.

Ultimately, embracing a holistic and decolonized approach to humanitarian action, as advocated by the Everyday Humanitarianism framework, can significantly enhance the understanding and collaboration among actors involved in civilian-military coordination during crises and emergencies. This inclusive approach fosters a deeper appreciation of the roles and contributions of diverse actors, including local community leaders and promotes more equitable and effective responses. By prioritizing local knowledge and practices, it contributes to building resilient urban communities that are better equipped to handle future challenges.

This approach also faces potential challenges which include (1) power struggle within the community as aid come in, (2) over-reliance on the groundwork of communities, (3) difficulty in scalability of operation for replication in other communities. Hence, further participatory action research on the application of everyday humanitarianism is needed to wield the community-based solutions directed towards distributed leadership, effective monitoring and evaluation and scalable solutions with local adaptations.

Notes

1. Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Kababaihan ng Baseco (SNKKB) is an emerging women's organization with 40 members. Baseco Compound is a coastal community bound by Manila Bay and Pasig River. It has a total of 16,000 households.
2. Kababaihang Nagkakaisa sa Diwa at Layunin (KANDILA) is a women's organization with 160 members. It was formed through the facilitation of the Urban Poor Ministry of the Roman Catholic

Diocese of Kalookan. KANDILA is situated in a Navotas coastal area, which has a total of about 1,000 households and is known for being a fish port.

3. The chosen Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) located in an urban poor setting (Caloocan, Diocese of Caloocan). Just like Baseco Compound, this is a coastal community located along the banks of Manila Bay with about 2,000 households.

References:

- Alburo-Cañete, K. Z. (2022). Building back better? Rethinking gender and recovery in the time of COVID-19. *Global Social Policy*, 22(1), 180–183. doi: [10.1177/14680181221079087](https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181221079087).
- Alcayna, T., Bollettino, V., Dy, P., & Vinck, P. (2016). Resilience and disaster trends in the Philippines: Opportunities for national and local capacity building. *PLOS Currents Disasters*, 8. doi: [10.1371/currents.dis.4a0bc960866e53bd6357ac135d740846](https://doi.org/10.1371/currents.dis.4a0bc960866e53bd6357ac135d740846).
- Camara, S., Delamou, A., Millimouno, T. M., Kourouma, K., Ndiaye, B., & Thiam, S. (2020). Community response to the Ebola outbreak: Contribution of community-based organizations and community leaders in four health districts in Guinea. *Global Public Health*, 15(12), 1767–1777. doi: [10.1080/17441692.2020.1789194](https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1789194).
- Canyon, D. V., Ryan, B. J., & Burkle, F. M. (2017). Military provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in non-conflict crises. *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, 14(3), 5. doi: [10.1515/jhsem-2017-0045](https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsem-2017-0045).
- Cruzada, K. N., Mercado-Asis, L. B., Li-Yu, J. T., & Panaligan, R. M. (2022). Safe, nourishing, accessible community kitchen (SNACK): A community kitchen manual for public health emergencies. *Journal of Medicine, University of Santo Tomas*, 6(1), 898–905. doi: [10.35460/2546-1621.2021-0092](https://doi.org/10.35460/2546-1621.2021-0092).
- Earle, L. (2016). Addressing urban crises: Bridging the humanitarian–development divide. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 98(1), 215–224. doi: [10.1017/S1816383116000576](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383116000576).
- Henty, P., & Eggleston, B. (2018). Mothers, mercenaries and mediators: Women providing answers to the questions we forgot to ask. *Security Challenges*, 14(2), 106–123. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26558024>
- Hilhorst, D., & Jansen, B. J. (2012). Constructing rights and wrongs in humanitarian action: Contributions from a sociology of praxis. *Sociology*, 46(5), 891–905. doi: [10.1177/0038038512452357](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512452357).
- Ho, H. M. Y. (2022). Organic solidarity in the national response to COVID-19 in Brunei Darussalam. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 22(1), 23–49. doi: [10.1108/SEAMJ-01-2022-B1003](https://doi.org/10.1108/SEAMJ-01-2022-B1003).
- International Committee of the Red Cross (1999). Protection of victims of armed conflict through respect of international humanitarian law. In *Reference Document – 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent*, Geneva, 31 October to 6 November 1999.
- Ismail, N., Adnan, F. H., & Wahid, R. (2021). Mahathir on COVID-19's impacts and crisis responses in Malaysia. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 21(2), 50–64. doi: [10.1108/SEAMJ-02-2021-B1004](https://doi.org/10.1108/SEAMJ-02-2021-B1004).
- Kalkman, J. P. (2020). Military crisis responses to COVID-19. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 29(1), 99–103. doi: [10.1111/1468-5973.12328](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12328).
- Lau, L. S., Samari, G., Moresky, R. T., Casey, S. E., Kachur, S. P., Roberts, L. F., & Zard, M. (2020). COVID-19 in humanitarian settings and lessons learned from past epidemics. *Nature Medicine*, 26(5), 647–648. doi: [10.1038/s41591-020-0851-2](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0851-2).
- Levine, A. C., Park, A., Adhikari, A., Alejandria, M. C. P., Bradlow, B. H., Lopez-Portillo, M. F., ... Heller, P. (2023). The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the COVID-19 response across the Global South: A multinational, qualitative study. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 3(9), e0002341. doi: [10.1371/journal.pgph.0002341](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002341).

- Luz, G. M. (2022). No. 1 in world risk Index 2022. Philippine daily inquirer. Available from: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/158015/no-1-in-world-risk-index-2022#ixzz8OqKISm1T>
- Mbeya, D. M., Kostandova, N., Lechner, A., & Wener, R. (2018). Integrating mental health into primary healthcare in the Central African Republic. *Humanitarian Exchange*, 72.
- Merino, S. S., & Carmenado, I. D. (2012). Capacity building in development projects. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 960–967. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.231.
- Mosselmans, M. (2017). Invest in local capacities: Analytical paper on WHS self-reporting on agenda for. Available from: https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017/Aug/AP_5A_0.pdf (accessed August 2021).
- Mulder, F. (2023). The paradox of externally driven localisation: A case study on how local actors manage the contradictory legitimacy requirements of top-down bottom-up aid. *International Journal of Humanitarian Action*, 8(7), 7. doi: 10.1186/s41018-023-00139-0.
- Nakpil, D. (2020). 5.2 million Filipino families experienced hunger once in past 3 months—SWS. CNN Philippines. Available from: <https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/7/21/SWS-survey-5.2-million-families-hunger.html>
- Olliff, L. (2018). From resettled refugees to humanitarian actors: Refugee diaspora organizations and everyday humanitarianism. *New Political Science*, 40(4), 658–674. doi: 10.1080/07393148.2018.1528059.
- Reliefweb (2021). COVID-19 and humanitarian access: How the pandemic should provoke systemic change in the global humanitarian system. Available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-and-humanitarian-access-how-pandemic-should-provoke-systemic-change-global>
- Roepstorff, K. (2020). A call for critical reflection on the localisation agenda in humanitarian action. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(2), 284–301. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1644160.
- Rose, J., & Chmutina, K. (2021). Developing disaster risk reduction skills among informal construction workers in Nepal. *Disasters*, 45(3), 627–646. doi: 10.1111/disa.12435.
- Sayuti, R. H., Taquiuddin, M., Evendi, A., Hidayati, S. A., & Muttaqin, M. Z. (2023). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the existence of social solidarity: Evidence from rural-urban communities in Lombok Island, Indonesia. *Frontiers in sociology*, 8, 1164837. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2023.1164837.
- Ullah, A. A., Haji-Othman, N. A., & Daud, K. M. (2021). COVID-19 and shifting border policies in Southeast Asia. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 21(2), 1–14. doi: 10.1108/SEAMJ-02-2021-B1001.
- Zreik, M. (2024). Resurgence and transformation: The impact of COVID-19 on Myanmar's tourism industry and future trends. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal. ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print). doi: 10.1108/SEAMJ-12-2023-0085.

Corresponding author

Maria Carinnes Alejandria can be contacted at: carinnes.alejandria@ubd.edu.bn

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com