

CHAPTER 1

Community Risk Assessment: General Situation and Scenario

Background and Rationale

1.1 Socio-economic Context

Saint Bernard is one of the six towns dubbed as “Pacific towns” of the northern part of Southern Leyte. St. Bernard, a fourth class municipality, is an agricultural town with 30 barangays. The town was created in 1954 through Executive Order No. 84 of the late President Ramon Magsaysay.

St. Bernard has a land area of 10,020 hectares, 4.36% of which is classified as urban. The rest is rural agricultural.

St. Bernard has a total population of 25,767 individuals or 5,081 households as of March 2005. 51.36% or 12,207 are male while 48.64% or 11,560 are female. 37% of the population are below 18 years old.

Economic activities are farming and fishing. Major crops are palay, coconut and abaca. Some families are engaged in livestock-raising. Surigao Strait is the main fishing ground. For the said economic activities, the average family income is P3,000.00 a month or P100.00 a day. This amount is obviously not enough to buy food, clothes, send children to school, buy medicines or seek medical assistance. Their income is simply not enough to meet the minimum basic requirements of life with dignity.

With the Guinsaugon landslide in 2006, displaced families are earning even less because there are very limited economic opportunities at evacuation centers where they are staying for the last 15 months.

Only 10% of the labor force is employed. Half of the population do not own a parcel of land. A greater part of the tenants' income goes to debt payment and land rent.

For most of the barangays, health and education services are available and accessible. Literacy rate is placed at 83.60%. Malnutrition rate is 11.8%. There are 8 health stations, 20 satellite stations and 1 rural health unit serving the population. Medical supplies are limited though. There are 29 day care centers, 27 elementary and primary schools and 2 public secondary schools and 1 private secondary school.

Water supply is abundant and water service is cheap. A family consuming the minimum level pays P10.00 a month. 99% of the households have access to potable water (Level 3). The rest

relies on rivers and spring.

85% of the population have access to power supply through the local electric cooperative.

Transport cost is prohibitive especially for poor farmers. 20% of the production cost goes to hauling and transporting the produce from farm to market. They have no choice to sell their goods to middlemen who command the price.

Globe and Smart communications service the municipality. Landline phone facility is limited, there is one private calling center.

Trade and business activities are very limited. Fund transfers are done through the local cooperatives. Banking facilities include SIPCCI and Green Bank. The next nearest bank is the Rural Bank of San Juan located in Cabalian, 5 kilometers from St. Bernard town proper.

These socio-economic conditions of St Bernard make it very vulnerable to disasters. Poor and landless families suffer the most during disasters.

The recently-concluded elections marked the beginning of a new, younger leadership in St. Bernard. People are hopeful that this development will lead to more accountable and transparent governance.

Following the Guinsaugon landslide, St Bernard received a host of local and international organizations who are all willing to do their share in rebuilding the affected and preparing the at-risk communities. Community organizations were formed, livelihood and resettlement projects are being undertaken.

While services are made accessible to the affected population, this situation made some families dependent on external assistance.

The people of St. Bernard are warm and accommodating. They are also generous and they will go the extra mile to be of help. This was clearly demonstrated during the Guinsaugon landslide. The first rescuers were fathers and mothers of Guinsaugon and the nearby barangays.

Now that the barangays near Guinsaugon are displaced and awaiting permanent relocation, they are not just waiting for the completion of the relocation project. They take active part in the process by rendering volunteer work. They do not take things sitting down. Facing rumors of demolition to force them to vacate the school premises, the evacuees in Central School are asserting to be heard by higher authorities.

Because of the tragic Guinsaugon experience, families are more vigilant in observing precursors and are more cooperative.

1.2 Hazards and Disasters

Geographically, St. Bernard is vulnerable to disasters.

Southern Leyte lies along the active Philippine Fault Line, very near the Philippine Trench and is located within the so-called “Ring of Fire”. Strongest earthquakes in the province measuring up to Intensity VII were recorded in 1907, 1918, 1984, 1991, 1994 and 1998. The eastern side of the province is highly susceptible for distant tsunami (Pacific Ocean) and local tsunami (Pacific trench) although some areas are behind the islands.

Next to Malitbog, St. Bernard is most prone to landslides, with 24 out of 30 barangays are classified as at-risk to landslides. The worst landslide experience happened in February 2006 when a portion of Mt. Kanabag slid and buried the entire barangay of Guinsaugon. The landslide claimed a thousand and more lives.

Adjacent barangays to Guinsaugon namely Sug-angon, Ayahag, Nueva Esperanza, Magatas, Hinabian, Kauswagan and Tabontabon are classified by the Mines and Geo Sciences Bureau as permanent high-risk areas. Residents of the said barangays are not allowed to go back and tend their farms and do other land-based economic activities. Delivery of social services like education and health was halted. Despite the regulation, families at risk went back to tend their farms especially after provision of food assistance at the evacuation centers stopped last December 2006.

The heavily-silted Lawigan River makes St. Bernard prone to floods. Residents of Tambis 1 and Tambis 2, most flood-prone areas, evacuate at least 10 times a year to protect themselves. Knee-length flood waters are retained in low-lying areas for 3 to 4 days.

PHIVOLCS confirmed that Mt. Cabalian in San Juan, an adjacent municipality of St. Bernard, is classified as potentially active.

In the past, farmers lost their crops to black bug infestation and long drought periods.

1.3 Worst Case Scenario

Considering St. Bernard’s disaster history and socio-economic profile, the MDCC defined the worst case scenario.

The worst that can happen to St. Bernard is to experience heavy rains for 2 to 3 weeks which can trigger landslides and massive flooding. Anticipated impacts are as follows:

- High casualty count (dead, missing, injured)
- Immediate evacuation of 1,500 households from 12 barangays due to flooding (Tambis 1, Tambis 2, Sitio Socorro, Panian, Nueva Esperanza, Lipanto, Hindag-an, Carnaga, Atuyan, Mahayahay, Himbangan, Ma. Asuncion)

- School buildings in high-risk areas will be damaged and will not be able serve as evacuation centers
- Power and water supply will be damaged in 30 barangays
- Cell sites will be damaged and will affect the only communication facility
- National Road from Himayangan to Poblacion will not be passable due to landslides, Brgy Lipanto will be isolated
- Provincial Road from Catmon to Poblacion will not be accessible and will affect Panian, Guinsaugon, Magatas and Tambis 1
- Barangay Road from Sta. Cruz to Catmon will not be passable
- Fuel supply will be inadequate because of temporary isolation
- Rice fields will be damaged and will lead to economic displacement in 20 barangays (Carnaga, Tambis 1, Tambis 2, Mahayahay, Atuyan, Libas, Tabon-tabon, Mayahag, Himbangan, Malibago, Nueva Esperanza, Ayahag, Sug-angon, Magatas, Catmon, Ma. Asuncion, San Isidro, Bolod-bolod, Panian and Himos-onan)
- Coconut, abaca, banana and other crops, as well as livestock and poultry will be affected. Fisheries, corals and other marine life will be damaged. This will also lead to loss of income or economic displacement.

Based on the worst case scenario, needs were anticipated and available resources inventoried. Gaps are defined as follows:

- limited capacity of MDCC in emergency response, specifically in the areas of:
 - disaster analysis and monitoring
 - information management
 - emergency health
 - logistics supplies system
 - project cycle management: design and development, proposal writing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, report-writing
 - emergency health
 - search and rescue
 - evacuation center management
- absence of a centralized and functional information system and database
- limited preparedness and early warning equipment
- lack of temporary shelters and facilities (drainage, water facilities, latrines, etc)
- lack of logistics supplies: transport, communication, goods for food relief, medical supplies

1.4 Risk Reduction Measures

To address the gaps and to reduce risks at the long term, the following measures must be undertaken:

- Strengthening capacities at the MDCC and BDCC levels on specific emergency response

requirements

- Setting up of functional information management system
- Provision of preparedness and emergency equipment
- Building disaster-resistant and resilient school buildings
- Public information on local hazards and safety measures that can be done
- Dredging / rechanneling of Lawigan River to prevent flooding
- Completion of relocation and resettlement projects with necessary facilities
- Expansion of livelihood programs to cover more areas
- Building up of calamity funds
- Completion and implementation of the municipal contingency plan
- Integration of contingency plan to the municipal's regular development planning process
- Planning and implementation of reforestation and other natural resource management programs
- Setting up of a municipal disaster management office to implement a year-round disaster risk reduction program
- Sustained coordination between and among DRM players (GOs and NGOs)