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Voices from communities relocated to Tacloban North after Typhoon Yolanda

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Abstract. Super Typhoon Yolanda caused destruction across the Philippines and devastated communities in Tacloban City on November 8, 2013. Recovery programs in Tacloban City focused on relocating people away from heavily damaged coastal areas to new housing in resettlement sites in Tacloban North. Using an asset-based approach to consider residents' perceptions and evaluations of their living environments and children's schooling in these resettlement sites, and with a hypothesis that schools might function as a community asset, this research explored connections between residents' housing sites and the roles of schools in communities five years after Yolanda. Carried out in February 2019, this research combined interviews with individual households and Focus Group Discussions with residents from four resettlement sites in Tacloban North. Preliminary findings confirmed the existence of various active connections between schools and local communities in resettlement sites, and that residents perceive schools as a community asset. As housing relocation and children's schooling are connected and have mutual impacts within the lives of families in post-disaster resettlement, findings support the importance of post-disaster coordination of housing and education, especially in cases of relocation and displacement.

1. Introduction

Causing devastation across the Philippines, on Nov. 8, 2013, Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name Haiyan) destroyed lives and communities in Tacloban City and severely damaged informal settlements in low-lying coastal areas near the city center. Tacloban City's recovery plan focused on the provision of new houses in resettlement areas in the northern part of the municipality for 14,433 households from these coastal areas [1]. In the ongoing process of relocation, residents experienced multiple stages of temporary and permanent housing, and changing conditions in the resettlement areas in Tacloban North.

In the first years after Yolanda, survivors who had lost their homes moved to various emergency and temporary housing situations, including wooden bunkhouses near the city center and lightweight bamboo houses built by non-governmental organizations near future permanent relocation sites in Tacloban North [2]. Many others stayed with family or friends or rebuilt in their former communities. Coordinated by the Tacloban City Office of Housing and Community Development, new permanent housing units were built in multiple resettlement sites through various combinations of support from national and local government, private donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [3]. The majority of new housing units were constructed using the program of the National Housing Authority (NHA). NGOs built houses on other sites owned by Tacloban City and in some cases on land they purchased themselves. Relocation processes were not necessarily linear; many people moved multiple times or stayed or moved back to former neighborhoods [4]. Facing challenges in the resettlement sites,



including a lack of water, and distance from former homes and livelihood opportunities compounded by time and cost needed to travel back to former communities, entire households or some family members split their time between former and new communities. Along with livelihood, choices of where children attended school also influenced families' decisions about relocation.

As part of the development of Tacloban North, Tacloban City planned for the provision and construction of services and facilities including markets, clinics, a police station, and city office branch, as well as phased plans for the creation of new schools and additional classrooms. As families began moving to temporary or permanent housing in Tacloban North, an increasing number of children began to attend schools near new housing sites. Following the Philippine national system for providing and funding school operations, Tacloban City Department of Education (DepEd) provided support for additional classrooms, teachers, and schools in Tacloban North, but various challenges related to accommodating the sudden and ongoing influx of students continued for several years.

2. Research objective and methodology

2.1 Context of communities in relocation

By 2018, more than 5,600 households had moved into 18 different resettlement sites in Tacloban North [5]. Depending on the site, some households lived in the same sites as family members and/or neighbors from the same coastal Barangays (the smallest municipal sub-district, with its own elected governance structure and officials) as before Yolanda. However, many resettlement sites gathered new residents from different places, who were all in the process of adapting to new household and livelihood situations, and changes in living environments and social networks.

According to information gathered through site visits and interviews with community stakeholders over the last several years, there were differing degrees of organization or activities in new communities in resettlement sites. For example, although establishing Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) is a requirement of relocation programs and seen as an important tool to organize communities, the existence and activeness of HOAs varied. Other types of community activities with varying levels of participation in different sites included membership in block groups, community cleaning activities, and community savings groups. In this predominantly Christian area, both the local government and NGOs promoted "values formation" activities, such as classes to encourage self-improvement and behavior following religious values.

In contrast to needs-based assessments of communities that focus on deficits, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach that focuses instead on leveraging the potential already within communities [6,7]. With the aim to empower residents, this approach to community development starts from the activity of mapping assets that already exist in the community, known as "appreciative inquiry" [7]. Our research in Tacloban follows this approach and starts with a focus on existing assets in the community. Household members in new communities in resettlement sites are also students and parents in school communities. As parents share the goal to support their children's education, this research started with the hypothesis that schools may play a significant role as an asset in resettled communities, not only in terms of educational functions but also as physical locations and places where children and parents may meet and participate together in school-related or community activities. Grounded in a community asset-based approach, the objective of the research described in this paper was to understand how schools might function and be perceived as a community asset, and the connections between residents' housing and school communities in resettlement areas in Tacloban North.

2.2. Research design and methodology

As centering the voices and experiences of local residents was fundamental to our approach, this research focused on how residents themselves evaluated schools, housing sites, and various aspects of their lives after relocation. To understand connections between schools, housing sites, and communities, we wanted to understand how residents perceive the role of schools within their communities and confirm the degree of involvement of teachers and principals in community activities, and parents in

school activities. The use of school buildings and grounds for community activities was considered as an indicator of the mutual interactions between schools and community members (**Figure 1**).

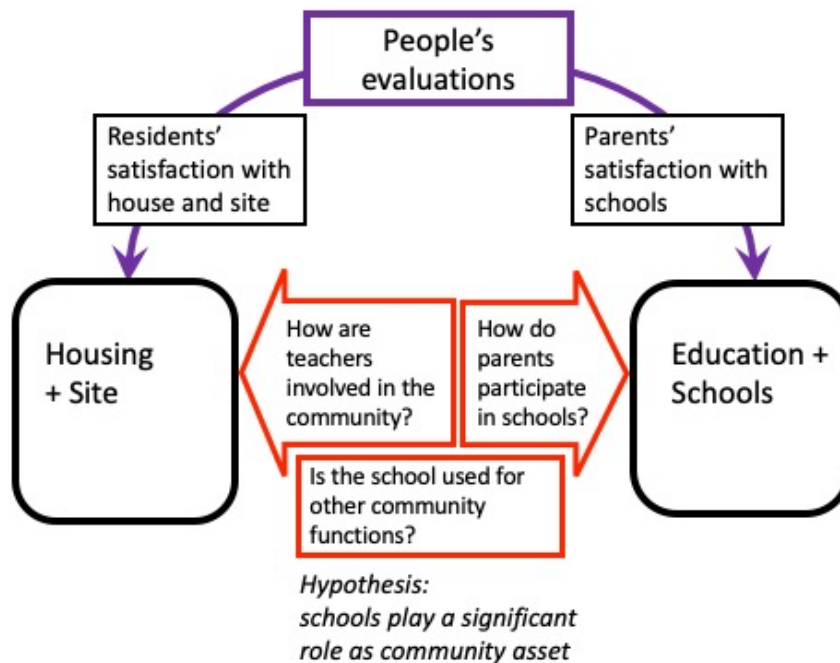


Figure 1. Diagram of research design related to housing and schools

This research combined interviews with residents and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interviews asked about changes in housing, schools, livelihoods, and communities after Yolanda, and about residents' satisfaction with various aspects of their lives in resettlement sites. Organized with the support of Tacloban DepEd and school principals, school-based FGDs included teachers and principals, parent members/officers of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and focused on situations in the community and schools. Facilitated by one of the co-authors, a community development expert, community-based FGDs included local residents and focused on listening to residents' experiences of life in resettlement communities and children's schools and education.

2.3 Data triangulation for internal validity

Information gathered from these data sources was triangulated to develop a holistic understanding of life, housing, and schooling in resettlement areas. Considering that respondents might feel more comfortable or empowered to share information during either one-on-one interviews or focus groups, combining both data sources increased the internal validity of the responses. Information from school-based FGDs was also triangulated with that gathered in community-based FGDs and individual interviews to compensate for potential pressure to respond positively in front of school or DepEd officials. Knowledge gained from previous interviews, official documentation and background information gathered during previous site visits between 2015-2018 also contributed to the understanding of information gathered through interviews and discussions. Part of an ongoing research project considering various aspects important to rebuilding community in relocation through a community asset-based approach, this paper focuses on connections between schools and communities in relocation according to residents' own voices.

2.4 Selection and relationship of survey sites

The survey focused on households in four different housing resettlement sites and the three nearby elementary schools that children attended. Within the limitations of this pilot study, relocation sites were selected to include different housing providers and relationships to new schools within resettlement sites or nearby pre-Yolanda schools. In February 2019, semi-structured interview surveys were carried out with 15 residents from four housing sites; school-based FGDs were held in each of the three schools, and community-based FGDs were held in the two housing sites without schools. Housing in Sites S, D, and R was built by NHA; Site C was built by an NGO group on land they acquired. All four sites have been inhabited since 2016. The new School R in Site R was established in 2016, using prefabricated Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) for school buildings, with permanent school buildings under construction. The new School S in Site S was established in 2018, using temporary lightweight construction for classroom buildings. There are no schools within Site D and Site C; most children living in these sites attend School LV, the closest elementary school, which existed before Yolanda. The relationships of the surveyed resettlement sites, schools attended, and locations of FGDs, are shown in Figure 2 and Table 1.

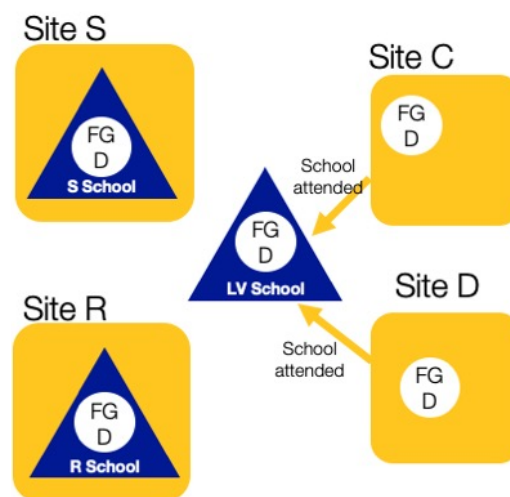


Figure 2. Diagram of the relationship of the four surveyed housing sites, three schools, and location of school-based and community-based FGDs.

Table 1. Relationship of housing resettlement sites and main primary schools attended

Housing Site	Type of Housing Provider	Relationship to School	School Situation
Site R	NHA	New school R School (K-10)	Classes held in Temporary Learning Spaces (prefabricated); permanent school buildings under construction.
Site S	NHA	Initially, the closest school was the nearby existing E.S.; now the newly established S School (K-6) is in the site.	Est. 2018, new S School with temporary lightweight construction.
Site D	NHA	No school in the site. The closest school is the nearby existing LV School (K-6).	Preexisting school, permanent building, some additional classrooms have been added.
Site C	NGO/donor, land purchased by/donor		

3. Survey findings

3.1 Household demographics

Before Yolanda, 12 of the 15 households were made up of parents and children; three had been 3-generation households. At the time of the survey, there were 10 households with parents and children, four 3-generation households, and 1 household with grandparents and grandchildren. Before Yolanda, 8 out of the 15 households included children in elementary school. At the time of the survey, 13 households included children in elementary school; children in one household had graduated, and in another had stopped attending school. Except for one child still attending their former elementary school in the coastal area, the rest of the children attended elementary schools in or near their housing sites, as shown in **Figure 2** and **Table 1**.

3.2 Connections within school and community activities

In addition to classes and instruction, school-related activities involving parents were often held at the schools, as were other community events. Many parents with young children (especially those in kindergarten or Grade 1) go to school daily, others go regularly for events, or to talk to the teachers as requested or needed. For families who are part of poverty-assistance programs (which also existed before Yolanda), children's attendance is required, and parents must also attend regular meetings at schools. Throughout the year, parents attend many regular events, including portfolio days and recognition days (highlighting children's achievements), thematic monthly activities (nutrition, etc.), parties (Christmas, etc.), and ceremonies related to the selection and induction of parent PTA officers. Parents regularly join in school cleanup *pintakasi* (literally meaning "community spirit" or mutual assistance) activities [8]; they also participate in the annual *Brigada Eskwela* (school brigade), when community members join in efforts to improve schools and facilities in preparation for the start of the new school year. Established practices of mutual cooperation at the community level, these activities of *pintakasi* and especially *Brigada Eskwela* are understood to have mutual benefits for the children, school, and community [8]. In the case of the newest School S, temporary light-weight school buildings were built as part of the 2018 *Brigada Eskwela*.

In addition to these regularly held activities with parents' participation, schools were also sites for other community activities. As one principal explained, they accommodated activities organized by private organizations or the local government, "as long as they were seen as contributing to the development of children or families," such as health-related outreach campaigns or registration for local elections. School grounds were also used for district-wide sports events, book and chess clubs, and as evacuation centers during typhoons. Schools and communities were also linked through the annual festival or *fiesta*, a community-wide celebration of their patron saint; principals and teachers join in parties and gatherings in communities, and schools also function as the site of *fiesta* events. One principal directly recognized a "need to unite" residents who had moved from different places, bringing with them the "culture from different barangays." He met regularly with the block (sub-groups within the resettlement site) leaders to discuss the needs of the school, as he recognized the value of working together with these community leaders, and their knowledge as residents who "know the kids from the original barangay and know the culture of the kids."

3.3 Perception and evaluation of schools

Although as active PTA officers, participants in school-based FGDs were predisposed to be more active in the school community, a positive overall evaluation of schools was shared across interviews and both school- and community-based FGDs. In general, residents said they trusted teachers. Overall, parents expressed their appreciation for several aspects of their children's education experience, emphasizing teachers' 1) care and compassion, 2) formative impact on children, and 3) dedication. The perceived caring nature of the teachers was mentioned in comments such as they are "supportive, understanding, collaborative, great;" several respondents mentioned that teachers care about, or show compassion, for their children, and are friendly, approachable, or easy to talk to. Several residents mentioned this closeness by describing the school/teachers as: "like home/like family;" school is like "a secondary home; or "they have a big role like a second family to us."

The role of teachers as “role models/helping with values formation,” was emphasized by several parents who appreciated how the school was encouraging discipline, manners, and values formation for their children. They described the school and teachers as “being a good disciplinarian to our children and having compassion” or “the school has a great discipline scheme.” Similar to ‘values formation’ activities mentioned previously, parents and educators in this predominantly Christian society shared an understanding of the importance of religious principles and values, and moral behavior. Parents’ appreciation of the impact of schools and teachers on their children’s values can be seen from statements such as: “they practice the manner of asking blessings from the teacher and principal,” and that teachers are “the second family of our children; in fact, they are more influential than us, they [children] believe them [teachers] more than us parents.”

Parents recognized the dedication of teachers and principals by their constant presence at schools, including on Saturday, and the fact that teachers do home visits and check on students if they were absent. Parents said that their current schools are “most open to us, teachers are doing home visitation, especially when my kids are having a problem,” and that the “school encourages parents to participate actively in the academic performance of our children.” Several parents reported that since students started school here, “their performance has improved, teachers can teach well with a small number of students in the class,” and that children’s grades and/or academic performance had improved after attending their current school. Although not all participants in the community-based FGDs were as active as PTA officer parents in school-based FGDs, they also reported that schools have good teachers and are conveniently nearby. Although this shows some variety among residents’ degree of connection to schools, in general parents see schools as positively contributing to the community.

Concerns about schools and school environments were also raised by residents in individual interviews and both community-based and school-based FGDs. Concerns mainly focused on the school environment, including needed improvements for buildings, security, and waste disposal, rather than the quality of education or teachers. Within the school-based FGDs, shared concerns raised by parents and teachers/administrators also focused on the school environment, including the lack of electricity, excessive heat, and the need for additional space and facilities. In community-based FGDs, some concerns were raised regarding teachers and school management, including reports of parents being asked for contributions and some perceptions that teachers are not approachable. This reflects the reality that there are different levels of connections between community members and school communities.

4. Key findings and next steps

From listening to the voices of residents of four housing sites in Tacloban North, gathered through individual interviews and Focus Group Discussions in three schools and two communities in February 2019, the role of schools as a community asset in relocation areas could be confirmed. In addition to children’s classes, parents and community members regularly participate in various activities and events held at schools, and principals and teachers are involved with their students’ families and communities. Overall, parents reported high levels of trust in the schools and teachers and valued their dedication, guidance, and compassion in supporting their children’s education. However, there were some parents whose connections to their children’s schools and teachers were not as strong, showing some variety within the community. The main challenges related to the schools mentioned by teachers, principals, and parents, were related to needed improvements in the physical buildings and school environment. As all three schools are in the process of upgrades and improvements to accommodate students, and two of the schools were still operating in temporary structures, it is hoped that most of these concerns will be resolved in the near future after planned physical improvements to the schools are completed.

Triangulating data sources from interviews and FGDs seems to be a successful method to confirm the experiences and opinions of residents. Similarly, combining school-based and community-based focus groups provided multiple and complementary sources of information from the viewpoints of residents and stakeholders in the school community. As a small pilot survey, this research was limited by the small number of individual respondents. While there was an attempt to select sites that represent a variety of relocation timelines and relationships between schools and housing sites, the limited number

of housing sites and schools surveyed could not capture all of the school/site relationships and all the school communities in Tacloban North. This would require scaling up the survey and conducting FGDs across a larger number of communities.

The experiences of residents in relocation sites continue to change, as do the situations of schools in Tacloban North. With the construction of several new schools, students who had been going to school in temporary buildings could attend classes in new permanent classrooms from the start of the new school year in July 2020, and these changes continue in different sites. In addition, the Covid19 pandemic has also impacted schooling in Tacloban, and the long-term impacts for the families in Tacloban North are not yet known. Although this paper focused on the role of schools as a community asset in relocated communities, as part of an ongoing long-term research project, evaluation of the findings in the context of information from other previous surveys and site visits is still ongoing. As well as expanding the questions explored within this paper to a wider number of communities, another future direction would be to consider other potential community assets (such as livelihood, leadership, homeowners association, etc.) within a similar framework and methodology. As housing relocation and children's schooling are connected and mutually impact the lives of families experiencing post-disaster resettlement processes, the findings support the importance of coordination of housing and education recovery after disasters, especially in cases of relocation and displacement.

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