



Harmony in Crisis: Unveiling Lessons of the Humanitarian Partnership Platform in Philippine Disaster Management





IN A NUTSHELL: STRONGER PERFORMANCE

1. Rapid responses with flexible funding: **76% of humanitarian funding in the Philippines goes to local partners**, compared to the wider sector's average of around 1.2% in 2022.
2. Gender at the center: **88% of responses mainstreamed GBV protection**, surpassing the 67% in CARE's global project portfolio.
3. Better coordination, broader reach: By coordinating across diverse actors, including corporations and local governments, **local organizations can help more people faster**.
4. Enhanced Learning and Accountability: **All projects (100%) feature Feedback and Accountability Mechanisms**, exceeding the 79% in CARE's global project portfolio. These mechanisms are vital for rapid learning and ensuring accountability to the communities served.
5. All projects **met or exceeded reach and impact targets**, based on a rapid analysis of available project reports.

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The Philippines is highly vulnerable to natural disasters due to its geographical location. A significant portion of the country's total land area, encompassing nearly three-fourths of the Filipino population, is susceptible to multiple hazards, including typhoons, earthquakes, floods, storm surges, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and landslides. The Philippines is ranked first among all the countries with the highest disaster risk worldwide according to [the World Risk Index 2023](#). The index takes into account the interplay of crises, the likelihood of natural disasters, and the conditions and structures in place to respond to or reduce disaster risk.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Philippines are at the forefront of mitigating the effects of these natural hazards. They lead efforts to reduce disaster risk by delivering humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, building disaster resilience, and strengthening disaster preparedness. However, there are [limited collaborations](#) among civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and the government. Different actors often focus on separate aspects of the disaster cycle and target distinct groups, leading to uncoordinated efforts. As such, it is imperative for donors and international humanitarian organizations to establish equitable partnerships with local partners in the Philippines. Creating a platform for coordinated action and knowledge exchange, and devising effective strategies to enhance the capacity of local partners can create a more prompt and efficient large-scale response to crises. This, in turn, will ensure better outcomes for those impacted by disasters.



Case Study of the Philippines' Humanitarian Partnership Platform



CARE launched the [Philippines Humanitarian Partnership Platform \(HPP\)](#) in 2016, which serves as an avenue to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of CARE and its partners' humanitarian and development plans and work. This initiative focuses on strengthening coordination, decision-making, and collective action. Comprising 14 active member organizations including CARE and with a presence in all regions of the Philippines, the HPP has adeptly assessed and responded to 32 disasters since its inception. In FY 2022, coinciding with the devastation caused by Super Typhoon Rai—the second costliest typhoon in Philippine history after Typhoon Haiyan—the HPP supported 2,201,920 participants, both directly and indirectly. In FY 2023, it supported nearly 400,000 people in crises. Fifty percent of those directly assisted in the last 2 years are women and girls.

The HPP model has now spread to several other countries where CARE operates. The HPP in the Philippines, the most mature of CARE's localization model, remains a reference for learning as it continues to evolve. In its seven years, the HPP brought transformative changes in the capacity, connectedness, visibility, speed, scale, and quality of humanitarian response for its members.

Working with partners in a networked model allowed the people most proximate to the challenges to own and lead the work. It also made it possible to expand beyond geographies where CARE is present, reaching last-mile communities by working with local, community-led, and women-led organizations. This helped CARE to share its gender expertise broadly, inspiring and equipping partners at all levels to adopt a gender-equal lens in their work.

This brief serves as a **rapid assessment, focusing on the most significant changes from the perspective of local actors**. We utilized participatory evaluation techniques for both data collection and analysis, employing individual written reflections on the most significant change and oral storytelling during the General Assembly with HPP leaders and key members. Facilitating collective sensemaking, local actors identified emergent themes and factors influencing these changes. We supported these perspectives with data and trends from the last 2 years to triangulate and contextualize members' perspectives with outcomes on the ground. Its purpose is to extract lessons and identify factors that could be applicable and applied in different contexts. To ensure a balanced approach between data availability and assessing the most recent progress and evolution of the HPP, we opted to concentrate on 2021-2023. Throughout, we reference the latest available data.

Top 4 significant changes from the perspective of local actors

1. Rapid, locally-led humanitarian responses, made possible through flexible funding

By channeling most of the humanitarian funding to local actors and making it easily accessible, the HPP has established a more equitable partnership, enabling local actors to respond to crises more rapidly.

CARE, along with all signatories of the Charter for Change committed to passing 25% of their humanitarian funding directly to local and national NGOs. In reality, the latest data from 2022 shows only [1.2% is being channeled directly to local actors](#) despite the spotlight on localization within the sector. In stark contrast, in the Philippines, CARE has made significant strides by **allocating 76% of its total humanitarian expenditure to local partners**. This is a substantial increase from the **63%** observed in a 5-year financial analysis following the HPP's inception in 2016. The platform continues to push the boundaries and prove that it is entirely possible to channel funds to local actors. HPP Philippines channeling 76% directly to partners is a catalytic model and a learning platform for the rest of CARE.

More importantly, partners are pre-authorized to conduct rapid assessments and distributions with their own funds and can trust that CARE will refund their expenses. As a result, bureaucracy and paperwork are kept to an absolute minimum when disaster strikes. Glenda Plaza, Deputy Administrator from the Agri-Aqua Development Coalition-Mindanao (AADC) commented, “For very small local organizations like ours, even if there’s a desire for a rapid assessment, it’s impossible without funds. With these funds made available without highly complex paperwork and application process, we can promptly reach the affected areas.”

This particular feature of the HPP seems to be the cornerstone of the sense of partnership rather than a sense of grantor-grantee/ “prime”/ “subprime” relationship underlying typical partnership agreements between INGOs and local actors.

There are several reasons why the HPP has been successful in directing more funds and flexible resources to local organizations:

- Locally-led response has been inherent in the CARE Philippines’ **operational model and strategy** since Typhoon Haiyan. CARE Philippines maintains lean humanitarian staffing, structuring finance and operations to support emergency response through local organizations.
- CARE Philippines and local actors have been working for a decade and have **developed trust and a good understanding of ways of working**. Mutual objectives guide their work, ensuring that each member organization’s needs are considered, leading to mutually beneficial agreements and transactions.
- HPP members have **established emergency protocols based on long-term partnerships**, including pre-existing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), Terms of References, and completed due diligence processes. This proactive and long-term approach to partnership ensures that paperwork and administrative transactions are swiftly executed when

emergencies occur, enabling CARE to channel funds quickly, and for local actors to take the lead in response efforts.

2. Centering gender in locally-led response

Upon further review of the kind and quality of emergency response from HPP members, the ubiquitous inclusion of gender stands out as one of its defining differentiators.

Emergency responses through the HPP often advocate for the inclusion of a Rapid Gender Assessment that aims to understand the differentiated impact of the disaster on women, girls, men, and boys who are affected. This approach, and the strong focus, investments, and training on gender in emergencies, has yielded responses that demonstrated gender awareness and sensitivity, and, on occasion, gender transformative approaches even amid the most challenging crisis. For example, several partners highlighted that they now include feminine hygiene products in an emergency response, acknowledging this as part of basic needs, and remembering a time when this was not the norm. According to Raizsa Anatayin, Executive Director of the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGOs (MINCODE), they used to provide emergency assistance to anyone within reach. However, with HPP's emphasis on incorporating a gender lens in humanitarian response, MINCODE shifted its focus to women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by natural disasters.

In the realm of transformational change, **88% of responses mainstreamed gender-based violence (GBV) protection** – surpassing the average of 67% observed across all CARE projects. This trend holds particular significance because the prevalence and risks of GBV tend to escalate during crises, amplifying existing gender inequalities, especially when support systems are disrupted or dismantled amidst the chaos.

3. More effective coordination and partnership across diverse local actors

The Philippines has over 7,000 islands and an average of 20 typhoons enter the country annually, making effective coordination and quick response crucial in saving lives. Members reflected individually and collectively that the HPP has strengthened partnerships not just between its members, but **also with the private sector and other CSOs**. By leveraging individual resources, connections, and expertise through these partnerships, HPP members attested to their ability to cover broader areas and assist more people during emergencies. They cited numerous examples of interconnected and expanded networks, as many members are also part of additional networks or take leadership roles in smaller, local groups and volunteer organizations in their regions.

For instance, amid Tropical Storm Megi, impacting approximately 75,000 people with 173 casualties and causing an estimated 90 million US dollars in damages, LCDE partnered with a new group of youth volunteers. Their innovative approach significantly expedited the overall response, resulting in a broader outreach. Additionally, HPP members highlighted the significance of establishing MOUs among themselves to aid each other when the scale of the emergency reaches a particular size.

Another distinctive aspect we discovered is that, in every action, there's a strong partnership—going beyond coordination—with local government agencies. Proposals and reports revealed joint training, planning, participant selection processes, and concerted actions alongside the local governments of the affected communities. Strengthening the capacities of local governments in the country certainly contributes to local resilience and makes these efforts sustainable. This strategy also affords HPP members improved access to the areas in need.

“We cannot address all areas during emergencies. Corporate partners assist with logistics, delivery, and more. All they need is coordination with the LGUs on our behalf, which streamlines the process and saves the time and effort.” --- LCDE ED

Beyond emergency response, partners consistently note that the HPP fosters policy changes and advances advocacy through collaborative efforts among members and active engagement with government agencies. There’s a strong sense of working together towards sustainable and more effective disaster response and risk reduction. According to Paz Silva, Executive Director of the Cebu-Bohol Relief and Rehabilitation Center, Inc. (CRRC), “We partnered with subnational formations and national government agencies. This is especially beneficial for influencing agendas at the national level, which then cascade down to actions at the local level.”

While specific policy or practice changes were not explicitly mentioned in the discussions, there’s an indication that, as a platform, the HPP has a greater capacity to engage at the national level and has the potential to be more influential in this arena compared to exerting influence on their respective local governments as individual organizations.

When considered as a whole, members perceive partnership, and coordination among members, along with collaboration across their broader networks, to have enhanced the speed and effectiveness of their response. Additionally, this fosters a better ability to reach the most vulnerable groups.

Reflecting on how the HPP achieved highly effective collaboration and partnership across diverse local actors, members identified two key factors:

- **Deliberate representation of local partners in every aspect of the work** – in proposal development, meetings with donors, public and government engagement opportunities, HPP governance, and capacity strengthening.
- The HPP **facilitates and promotes numerous face-to-face interactions among its members**. Briefly disrupted during the height of the pandemic, the HPP is now back to quarterly general assemblies and joint activities where the agenda and objectives are jointly decided and developed. These general assemblies, which usually include a capacity-strengthening activity decided by its members, are consistently well attended, and all members are highly engaged because the topics align with their individual and collective interests. This ongoing practice contributes to building trust over time.

4. Knowledge sharing strengthens everyone’s capacities

According to local actors, the HPP offers local CSOs the chance to share lessons and best practices in humanitarian work through workshops and knowledge-sharing sessions. All capacity-strengthening

“Emergency Preparedness Plan was never a term in AADC’s lexicon before. But through HPP, our organization crafted our own EPP. That has been a significant takeaway for me from participating in HPP.” ---Agnes (AADC)

plans are collaboratively developed based on the needs of every member, and the group makes decisions together regarding what, how, who, and when capacity-strengthening activities are carried out. Partners specifically mentioned technical support, such as introducing data management software, which enhanced their operational efficiency. HPP also facilitates training to improve awareness and boost capacity in crafting local emergency preparedness plans (EPP). Other trainings cover topics such as WASH, shelter, gender and diversity, gender in emergencies, safety and security, media and communications, and procurement and logistics. According to local partners, these initiatives have significantly enhanced their capacity and, in turn, improved emergency response through the HPP.

To ensure that capacity strengthening aligns with the needs and perspectives of the communities it serves, the HPP employs feedback and accountability mechanisms (FAMs) across all projects. After HPP's inception, **all projects (100%) implemented FAMs** in the last 2 years. They created individual feedback channels, such as face-to-face drop-in hours, information desks, emails, suggestion boxes, SMS, social media, and post-distribution monitoring. This adoption rate surpasses the average of 76% (in FY 2022) and 79% (FY 2023) seen across all CARE projects. The FAMs focus on action and adapting programming to community needs. **82%** of the projects in FY 2023 made enhancements based on feedback. For instance, upon noticing reluctance from barangay (village) officials in Suba Basbas, Lapu-Lapu City, due to the limited availability of food packs, CRRC enhanced the beneficiary selection process.

In FY 2022 when we had available data, **62% of the feedback received was from women and girls**—this signals something extremely important as women and girls know best what support they require and what their biggest challenges are, and this statistic signals that the HPP's gender focus is converted into women and girls' voices being heard.

In summary, HPP brings about transformative changes for its members, including CARE. The most notable shifts arise from the ability to mobilize funding, particularly flexible and readily accessible funds; a strong focus on gender; robust collaboration among members and their network of networks; and a shared commitment to capacity strengthening and sharing. The Philippines case aligns with broader partners' consultations, affirming [the key changes CARE should make to become a better partners](#) and validating CARE's desired direction to [become better partners](#). This underscores that high flexibility and simple agreements do not only make INGOs better partners, it also enables enhanced operations during emergencies. Consequently, humanitarian aid is directed "where and when it is needed the most," as aptly quoted by ACCORD.

Top 3 outcomes on the ground

We reviewed existing post-distribution monitoring (PDM) reports, donor reports, and evaluation studies to probe deeper and get an indication of whether transformations among local actors, as described by local actor members of the HPP, have translated into impact on the ground and (more) effective emergency response.

There are clear patterns that emerged from the HPP Philippines desk review:

- **Effectiveness:** Thus far, because of strong ethical considerations preventing randomization, the ability to meet (ambitious) targets is our best measure of effectiveness. An analysis of the sampled reports indicates that **all reach and impact targets are met or exceeded**. These

goals vary in complexity, ranging from the number of women and men directly assisted by the response or program to the participants' satisfaction and stated appropriateness or timeliness of the support they received. They extend to outcomes such as increased food security measured by food consumption scores up to 4 weeks after a disaster, sustained access to food through livelihood recovery activities, and provision of adequate and safe housing in accordance with international standards (SPHERE). Across different scales of emergencies, various types of interventions, lead organizations, external partners, and funding agencies, reported figures consistently surpass the set targets. This pattern suggests a highly effective response, underlining the competence of local actors leading these efforts.

- *High-quality outcomes and sustainability:* HPP members who are also part of the ACCESS consortium often have multi-dimensional interventions and strong sustainability components. Take for instance the Typhoon Rai Response (locally known as Odette) implemented by the ACCESS consortium and funded by ECHO. This project not only reached a high number of people and reported high satisfaction rates, but also reported resilient livelihood coping strategies of participants by the end of the project. They also measured outcomes such as food security and balanced nutrition, integrating them as target outcomes from cash and in-kind food assistance and livelihood support. Furthermore, several projects include referral pathways for mental health and psychological services. These instances underscore a multi-dimensional response and intervention approach, resulting in higher-quality program outcomes that surpass the minimum standard of satisfaction perceptions among those who received emergency assistance.
- *High Accountability to People Affected by Emergencies:* Large responses such as multiple projects and interventions after Typhoon Rai have sophisticated community involvement, feedback, and accountability mechanisms. One report detailed that choosing participants who would benefit from the project involved a selection criterion reviewed, explained, and discussed with the affected communities. There were cases where community members collectively identified households that needed to be removed or considered in the lists through succeeding validation activities (on-site, house-to-house). Upon reaching a consensus and agreement among community members, final beneficiary lists are then posted. The final list predominantly comprised farmers, fishers, and households led by the elderly, persons with disabilities, and single parents – deemed by all stakeholders to be the most vulnerable. During implementation, there were multiple channels for feedback and accountability and PDMS showed that community members are highly aware of these channels.

Limitations: Not all projects and emergency responses have information or robust data, potentially skewing results. Projects with high-quality, multi-dimensional outcomes, highly effective, and demonstrated high accountability may correlate with those having well-established data management and reporting systems. Therefore, it is crucial to note that these results are conclusive only if this pattern holds for all the projects and that the projects reviewed are representative of all HPP projects. While this is not an issue unique to the HPP in the Philippines, one significant gap we identified with the HPP in the Philippines is the restricted availability and accessibility of all reports, evaluations, and assessments. For instance, we cannot provide links to the reports cited above because they are not made publicly available at the time of this publication. We also attempted to find a “control” by comparing trends from a neighboring country with a comparable disaster risk profile to the Philippines but with very limited publicly available data points, making a robust comparison is not feasible. We endeavored to address these limitations by triangulating information directly provided by local actors, data retrieved from existing reports, and trends from CARE’s comprehensive global project and program information and impact reporting system (PIIRS) consisting of over 1,500 projects in over 100 countries across time, allowing us to benchmark the HPP’s achievements.

2 Lessons to Apply in Other Contexts

- **Start implementing direct and flexible funds** using straightforward, long-term, and mutually beneficial agreements (MoUs) and shift the prevailing notion in international development that deems this operationally infeasible or associated with very high reputational risk.
- **Clearly articulate and measure goals beyond partnership commitments**, such as enhancing the capacities of local actors, and shifting the focus towards the quality and impact of humanitarian assistance to people affected by crises due to localization. For example, adopt objectives like, “Provide humanitarian support and protection in line with global standards to at least 10% of people affected by the crisis”, and incorporate ways to track this in every response.

