

# Resiliency or Complacency, Unearthing the Underlying Reasons on Peoples' Decisiveness to Stay at High-Risk Area: A Case of Botlog Island Communities

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**Abstract:** The Filipino capability on disaster response and human and resource management were tested by super typhoon 'Yolanda' (International name, Haiyan). The magnitude of damage was enormous which even claimed thousands of lives. The survivors had the most horrible memories and lessons are learned hardest way. Even reports of the coming of new typhoons caused people to panic especially in most vulnerable communities. However, despite the terrifying experience, 'Yolanda' survivors in Botlog Island, Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines chose to stay and restore their livelihood in the very place where they witnessed and suffered the devastation of the monstrous typhoon. Within a year, government rehabilitation programs were implemented. Relocation areas were identified and prepared for their presumed safety. Yet, people are reluctant to leave their homes although they are highly aware of the danger that another typhoon might bring. This qualitative study investigates deeply the underlying reasons why people in Botlog Island prefer to stay and restore their means of living in a location identified to be highly dangerous. In-depth interview to 25 households and 30-day immersion in the communities were done. There are overlapping evidences on whether people exhibit resiliency or complacency on reasons why they chose to rebuild their way of life in disaster-risk communities. The reasons could be summed up into socio-economic factors. Despite the economic and topographic concerns, people had established disaster response and resource management capability through pattern of experiences though, challenged by the extremely catastrophic event. The environment taught them to be adaptive and develop mechanisms to adjust to the changing conditions only to find out their incapability to withstand and recover from tragedy. Their attachment to the place with its rich natural resources and the belief on their capacity to withstand the onslaught of storm gave them inner strength and self-satisfaction only to figure out that these cannot guarantee them safety.

**Keywords:** Resiliency, Complacency, High-Risk, Case Study.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The death of over 6,000 people and nearly 90 billion pesos of damage on properties (Locsin, J., 2014, April 17) brought by the Super Typhoon Yolanda, wrote a tremendous lessons and fears for the Filipino people. Over a year after the catastrophe, affected communities could barely recover from the tragedy and trauma of the super typhoon. The sluggish recovery program of the government- dawdling reestablishment of shelter and livelihood put the Filipino people into a hopeless reliance in the government.

Despite the aggravation on already poor condition of the Filipino people caused by the monstrous storm, hope and heroism supplant fears and struggles in the will of the people to survive. Exposure to disasters trigger people to develop traumatic stress reactions (Paton, et al., 2000), learn and make sense from their experiences (Kuhlicke, 2010) and develop

defensive reactions to allow them to survive (Cyrulnik, 2011). Under difficult circumstances, people were able to develop a considerable capacity to adapt to a quickly and radically changing environment, a capacity that one might describe as resiliency (Kuhlicke, 2010).

However, the ability of people to recover from disaster or tragedy as a function of resiliency (Leykin, et al., 2008) is not left unquestioned. On a different perspective, the Filipino people and the government might have shown complacency. With much familiarity with a circumstance, people showed complacency under repeated emergency threat warnings (Wang, et al., 2008; Zavatsky, 2012).

This paper presents an argument on why people would choose to stay in highly dangerous communities in spite of the relocation program of the government. Is this decision attributed to peoples' mechanism to withstand and recover from tragedy-resiliency (Cyrulnik, 2011) or their false positive reactions in performing their routine screening responsibilities in dealing with rare hazards-complacency (Zavatsky, 2012)? Sorting out of reasons is obscure however; if the meanings were figured out and given sense, this would serve as baseline information to dramatically connect the government rehabilitation program to the real needs of the socially and economically deprived and marginalized communities.

On the other hand, the scope of the study is limited to the concept and analysis of the underlying reasons why people would choose to stay in high-risk areas; as to resiliency or complacency. However, this will shed light to the concepts and disparity between resiliency and complacency.

Specifically, this in-depth investigation is conducted in Botlog Island in Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines with disaster vulnerable communities and among the badly hit areas by the horrible typhoon. In reality, some of the residents are reluctant to leave while the remaining majority decided to stay in the island notwithstanding the hazards and the risk of disasters.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### **In-depth Case-Study Approach:**

This study followed an in-depth case-study approach and proceeded inductively by following the procedure as proposed by Grounded Theory, (Kuhlicke, 2010). Research questions are designed to be explorative and open-ended. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with 25 families in Botlog Island, Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines. The interviews were done within 30-day immersion between October to December 2014. The interviewees had first-hand experience of the devastation of Super typhoon Yolanda. They witnessed the intensity of the wind, the torrential rain that zeros the visibility and for the first time witnessed the storm surge that wiped out their houses, so horrible and traumatizing.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with "problem-centered interview" (Kuhlicke, 2010 citing Witzel, 2000). Open-ended questions were asked allowing the narrators to develop their subjective view on the happenings relating to the super typhoon and more specific questions focusing on issues on the interest of the study were asked. The responses of the interview partners were transcribed verbatim. The socio-economic background of the families is presented in the attached appendix.

The questions centered on the following aspects:

- What made people decide to remain in their homes despite the known hazards and their experience of the extremely destructive typhoon?
- With government relocation plan, what made them hesitant to transfer?
- What are the peoples' insights and lessons learned from the calamities and the conditions of the communities they lived in?

### **Immersion:**

To best understand the culture, setting, and a way of life of the people, community immersion was done. The researchers immersed in the community for 30 days observing and studying their way of life after the catastrophic event. Through this, a deeper meaning of the stories, experiences and feelings disclosed by the interviewees were concretized, (Crossman, <http://sociology.about.com/>).

**Appendix A: Socio-demographic background of the Interview Partners:**

Interview Partners	Occupation/Source of Income		Education		Cumulative Income (average monthly: estimate) Php	Household Size
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife		
1	Fisherman	housewife	Elem. level	Elem. level	7,000.00	7
2	Fisherman	Daycare teacher	Elem. Level	College Graduate	9,000.00	3
3	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	6,000.00	4
4	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School Level	5,000.00	5
5	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Graduate	High School Level	5,000.00	5
6	Fisherman	Brgy. Treasurer	Elem. Level	College Graduate	6,000.00	5
7	Fisherman	Barangay Kagawad	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	5,000.00	7
8	Diseased	Housewife	-	Elem. Level	3,000.00	5
9	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	7,000.00	4
10	Barangay Kagawad/Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	8,000.00	6
11	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	5,000.00	6
12	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	6,000.00	4
13	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Graduate	Elem. Level	5,000.00	7
14	Fisherman	Brgy. Health Worker	Elem. Graduate	Elem. Level	7,000.00	6
15	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	5,000.00	5
16	Sales rep	Housewife	High School level	High School level	6,000.00	5
17	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	6,000.00	4
18	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	5,000.00	5
19	Brgy. Kag/Fisherman	Housewife	High School level	High School Grad	10,000.00	4
20	Fisherman	Brgy. Health Worker	High School level	Elem. Level	9,000.00	3
21	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	7,000.00	6
22	Brgy. Kag/Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	8,000.00	7
23	Fisherman	Brgy. Health Worker	Elem. Level	High School level	9,000.00	5
24	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	High School level	6,000.00	4
25	Fisherman	Housewife	Elem. Level	Elem. Level	6,000.00	6

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****The Communities:**

The northern part of Panay Island is among the badly hit areas in the Western Visayas region. Part of this area in central Philippines is the small island of Botlog in the town of Conception, Iloilo, Philippines. Although there were no casualties, the people deadly experience is similar to those in fatally destructed areas across the Visayas.

There are two communities in the island of Botlog constituting a total of 450 residents and 92 households. The people are mostly fishermen and majority of the wives are restrained in doing the household chores and rearing of kids. The public school in the island is until grade three while most of the school children have to live in the central part of the town or in

nearby islands, apart from their parents in order to continue their education. Life style is quite untypical, aside from fishes and shells that residents gather from the sea or shores for them to sell or consumption, basic commodities are bought in the mainland market. Electricity provided by generator runs for only 3 hours from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. As an alternative, people have to buy substandard solar powered lamps to provide lights at night. The supply of potable water is very limited, only from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. every day through a water source from the adjacent island. The water system was only established three years ago only through the initiative of the community without any assistance from the government.

### **The Monster Storm:**

On Friday morning, November 8, 2013, the Super Typhoon Yolanda, one of the strongest storms every recorded, smashed the Philippines. On the CNN report by Mullen (2013, November 8) during the devastation, “the storm brought tremendously powerful winds roaring ashore as it made first landfall in the provinces of the Visayas, disrupting communication and transportation. With sustained winds of 315 kph and gusts as strong as 380 kph, Yolanda was probably the strongest tropical cyclone to hit land anywhere in the world in recorded history. Yolanda’s wind strength makes it equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane, able to destroy concrete houses, lift roofs and ceilings and uproot trees.”

On April 2014, reported casualty surmounted to 6,300 deaths, 1,061 people missing and 28,689 injured and damage on property amounted to Php 89,598,068.88 (Locsin, 2014).

### **The Deadly Revelation:**

The Filipino people are used to storms or typhoons. On the data presented in the article “Serving the Information” ([www.preventionweb.net](http://www.preventionweb.net)), of the 7 types of disasters in the Philippines, the storm contributes 73.7% of reported people killed and an estimated cost of damage to nearly 6 million US dollar on properties.

The storm is a natural phenomenon in the Philippine archipelago. This is about twenty (20) storms that hit the Philippine area of responsibility thus, the Filipino people are well aware of the danger of this catastrophic event.

After wiping out the urban and rural villages in eastern part of the Visayas, the super storm traverses ‘west north west’ thereby hitting the northern parts of the islands of Cebu, Negros and Panay.

In the northern part of Panay, at past 10 o’clock in the morning of November 8, 2013, the sky painted a dark gloomy hue signaling the coming of the never been perceived super typhoon. After a while, the wind started to build up and moved easterly bringing torrential rain that darkened the visibility. For the very first time, as never imagined, the people had experienced such fierce wind and rain that easily uprooted the trees and twisted their branches.

In the small island of Botlog, the people panic as they find shelter in the nearby health center and primary school buildings located in the elevated portion of the island.

As narrators expressed...

*“We are extremely afraid; we thought that that will be our end.”*

*“If the storm happened at night, for sure, many will die. We would never expect such terrifying wind and rain and the storm surge. If we stayed in our houses where we used to from past typhoon experiences, we were washed out together with our houses by the storm surge.”*

While the women, elderly and children were sheltered on the safer place, a huge tree adjacent to the health center fell and smashed the corner of the shoddy building. This caused another panic to the people inside and those watching from the opposite school building.

The men on the other hand, kept watch of the surroundings while others were assisting more evacuees coming. In their state of shock, panic and fears, they keenly observed the surroundings as the wind whistles as if bringing more threat and fear to the people ready to devour all standing objects on its path. In an unexpected moment, those observing the coast were shocked of the sudden gushing of water from the ocean wiping all standing manmade structures on the shore. The storm surge! Only those in the shore were able see the incident. Those remain standing in the 40-m danger zone are skeletons of concrete houses.

Fortunately, no one is dead!

### **The Aftermath and the Coming of Help:**

In the afternoon, at around 4:00 p.m., after the swift destruction of houses and trees, the monster slowed down. People were in great shock and distress! Everything is wet! All houses were either wiped out or destroyed. They didn't have dry clothes, even those they wore are wet. No electricity. No food. People were left helpless.

The already poor condition of the people- indecent houses, no permanent jobs, meager income, was even aggravated by the unimaginable catastrophe.

Few hours after the sudden and swift devastation, what revealed to the people were the debris and scattered belongings on the shore while some were brought to the sea.

The first provision to come for the people are food, clothing and temporary shelter, but help did not come quickly.

Hungry and distressed, relief goods came after 3 days. Food, clothing, water, kitchen materials, mattresses and other immediate needs were brought to the community. Day after day, weeks after weeks, relief goods came. Months after, bank houses were installed but only to selected few and months later, motor boats were distributed.

Rehabilitation programs, recovery process were done. The government conducted recovery trainings, disaster risk management, debriefing, community consultation for relocation.

But, houses were never reconstructed and no plans for livelihood were ever discussed.

### **The Government Plan of Relocation vs Peoples' Decisiveness to Stay in Botlog Island:**

Immediately after the super typhoon "Yolanda" incident, the government initiated a strategic plan on recovery program for the victims. On the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) official gazette (2013, December 18), the government developed the Reconstruction Assistance on Yolanda (RAY) Plan. This is to guide the recovery and reconstruction of the economy, lives and livelihoods in the affected areas. As Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said, the design of RAY and its estimated investment requirements are based on the results of the damage, loss and needs assessment using data from national government agency-lead sector teams. Upward adjustment were made to fully reflect the costs of integrating disaster-resilient standards into the reconstruction needs for some sectors, as well as to address estimated income losses in agriculture enterprises, and to provide adequate social protection.

On recovery and reconstruction on shelter and resettlement, estimated total investment amounted to Php183.3 B, (NEDA Official Gazette, 2013, December 18). But, over a year now, no tangible solutions and no shelter or assistance to shelter reconstruction were done. The people are still sleeping in shattered houses while some are using available materials; coconut leaves, bamboos, and other rubble materials just to cover them at night. The Department of Social Welfare and Development carried out the community consultation on the plan for resettlement.

After assessments, meetings and consultations; the majority of the people were decisive never leave their houses, their island, and their way of life while the remainder (10 from among 92 families) is reluctant, only to claim the government housing project and would eventually settle still in the island.

*"We will just accept the housing project but we will still live in the island. The supposed house in the relocation will be used by our children studying in the town. My husband and I will still live here because his work is here. In cases that there is typhoon, with no hesitation, we will vacate to the housing site. At least, we have a house in the town for our school children and here in the island for our livelihood."*

For the majority who decided to stay in Botlog Island, common answers were the following:

*"The government had identified a 40-m danger zone from the shore. We are not allowed to reconstruct a house in the danger zone. We have an elevated space at the back of our house which we can construct a new house. According to the DSWD personnel, if we don't want the resettlement, we can avail of the Php. 30,000.00 housing assistance. At least, that will be used for the reconstruction of our new house."*

*"We will construct a house afar from the shore line. I was really afraid of what happened during typhoon."*

*"The storm does not come every day but we have to work every day to live. You can prepare for the coming storm but not hunger. Because of our experience, we are now closely monitoring the weather for us to be prepared in case there is*

*storm. We know now what to do when typhoon is coming. For instance, during typhoon Ruby (International name, Hagupit), before the storm would come, through updates in the radio, we already evacuated at the identified evacuation sites; the school building and the health center.”*

*“We will live here because our family is here. Our means of living is here. In the relocation, we have no work. There is no job that would fit our skills. How could we be able to send our children to school if we have no income? How would we be able to provide their basic needs?”*

*“Come to think of it, there are those who leave this place to find a job in other places only to find out that living here is much better than in other places. After years of working and living in other places, they would go back here and settle for good.”*

*“What’s good to live here? The fresh air, food, relaxing, white sand beaches, the corals. Even our relatives and visitors coming here seem not to leave this place and they keep coming back.”*

*“With no work, it is very difficult to adjust to the new place. I think we will only die there of hunger.”*

*“We are used of the way of life here. This is the place where I grow; my parents were born here and live here. Our relatives are here. What we will be doing in other places? I think we will still be coming back to this place.”*

*“Here in the island, we just can easily find our food, fishes and shells.” In the town or city, everything has a price.”*

The people had a small shell garden where they grow shells and other edible sea creatures. In the morning, at low tide, children, men and women were gathering or collecting any shells or crustaceans that they may find. At least, they don’t to buy viands for a day or two.

Interviewing and immersing in the community enable the researchers to go deep into the inner feelings of the people. The resources, ecosystem, their attachment to the place, the beauty and unique landscapes of clustered islands gave strong connections to their will to survive.

### **Resiliency or Complacency- An Analysis on Peoples’ Reasons:**

The focus of this study is on the analysis of peoples’ reasons to remain in high disaster-risk areas notwithstanding the known threats and vulnerability of their communities. Hence, the terms resiliency and complacency are thoroughly defined as basis for the analysis. Moreover, the close contact and immersion in the community by the researchers lead to a better understanding and the actual situation and real feelings or sentiments of the people. The stories of the narrators will be analyzed through the meaning and concept of resiliency and complacency.

#### ***Resiliency vs Complacency:***

Various books and researches have been devoted to the understanding the context of resiliency. The following are the meanings and/or views on resiliency: a system’s capacity to adapt to or respond to singular, unique and most often radically surprising events (Kuhlicke, 2010), the mechanism to withstand and recover from tragedy (Cyrułnik, 2011), preparedness to cope with climate and disaster and inversely (Razafindrabe, et al., 2009), potential to function effectively and adapt successfully in the aftermath of disasters (Norris, et al., 2008), the ability to deal with crises or disruptions (Leykin, et al, 2013), protective factors in the development of new treatment and prevention strategies for high risk situations (Wolkow, et al., 2001) and an active process of self-righting, learned resourcefulness and growth- the ability to function psychologically to a level far greater than expected given the individual’s capabilities and previous experiences (Paton, et al., 2000).

In contrast, as defined, complacency is a feeling of being satisfied with how things are and not wanting to try to make them better ([www.meriam-webster.com](http://www.meriam-webster.com)) or a feeling of quiet pleasure or security, often while unaware of some potential danger, defect, on the life; self-satisfaction or smug satisfaction with an existing situation, condition, etc. ([www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)). Moreover, although limited, there are studies that have been conducted to bring to light the concept of complacency. Complacency arises from too much familiarity with a circumstance (Zavatsky, 2012) or peoples’ tendency to ignore threat warnings (Wang, et al., 2008).

The communities in Botlog Island like the rest of the towns and cities of the country are well aware of typhoon. It constitutes a one island barangay in the town of Concepcion. There are 10 other islands around whose way of life is the

same with the communities in Botlog. Through pattern of events and sense making of circumstances, people developed a mechanism to act or respond to the coming of typhoon. Although not well established or institutionalized, people are able to learn survival and management skills during typhoons. This is an indication of resilient communities. However, if you examine closely, houses were built within 40-m danger zone where sea water sips into the houses during high tide. Their houses were built on light materials since the income of the family cannot meet the daily sustenance of the family and for the education of the children. This implies that financially, they cannot build a stronger-safer decent house, in this sense, people became complacent.

This familiarity of typhoon occurrences and extreme poverty drive the people to develop a smug satisfaction which put their lives at stake during the event of super typhoon Yolanda.

After the super typhoon, recovery and rehabilitation programs were done by the government. The coming of relief goods, the temporary shelter and assistance to livelihood by the Non-Government Organization (NGO), mark a new hope for the people. However, the biggest issue is to relocate the community and totally abandon the island. The majority says NO! Despite their poor condition, the people decisively chose to live in the island although they are now familiar with the hazard or danger and difficulty of rescue and relief operations if the same catastrophic event. This is an indication of complacency. People tend to ignore the known threat of the typhoon.

But their radical decision to stay in the island would mean no vanity. The decision to stay in the island is bounded on the deeper meaning of survival. The threat to life caused by calamities, may be fatal, but natural or environmental which no one could oppose or control. In reality, the people worried in their condition if relocation will be realized. They are afraid of the threat of hunger and severe deeper poverty. In their intuition and sense making of events and circumstances, people developed the ability to deal with crises or disruptions (Leykin, et al, 2013). We should note that the elements of community resilience are both physical and perceptual (Leykin, et al., 2013 citing Ungar 2011). Leykin, et al. (2013) citing several authors emphasized that the elements that are highly tied to community's ability to overcome emergency situation include social capital, social cohesion, collective efficacy, social support, sense of trust, and attachment to place. Leykin, et al. (2013) further pointed out that these community elements are interconnected and together form unique community structure. In this context, people are making sense of resiliency.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The deeper analysis of survivors' experiences, attitude and outlook before and after the super typhoon Yolanda resolved the difference between resiliency and complacency. The basic argument in this paper is that, people had established a system of approach during calamities as they made sense from the situation and learned from the past experiences. But because of their impoverished condition, their system or mechanism to withstand from crisis is insufficient and inefficient. From that rare event, they learned new lessons that they made them realize their incapacity yet, established another ways to be able to survive from disaster and everyday struggles.

Therefore, it is concluded that there is overlapping of evidences between peoples' resiliency and complacency in the known or unknown risk or hazard. The factors to either resiliency or complacency are socio-economic, lifestyle and ecotourism. People continue to learn from their experiences but because of extreme poverty, they were incapacitated to prepare for the calamities which they resort to use whatever available means for survival.

It is very important to examine closely and analyze deeply the peoples' reasons why they choose to stay in vulnerable communities. From the lessons learned from the analysis of the study, it is recommended that the government should seek valid reasons and analyze peoples' deeper emotions towards their conditions for whatever programs or support for the victims. The government should focus on the real conditions of the people as basis of program and project implementation to maximize the benefit for the marginalized people. The programs and projects should not only focus on short term resolution but long term. Livelihood is the primary means to survive. Therefore, it should be given utmost priority. If people have sufficient income, the natural capacity of people to withstand through their learning and making sense of their experiences will naturally come out. Since livelihood relies on the environment or ecosystem, another priority program and project is the protection, rehabilitation and responsible use of resources. This will strongly support the livelihood of the people. On the other vein, the place is potential for ecotourism. This would be another element in the rehabilitation and conservation program as this generates jobs, alleviate poverty, and most of all ensure the sustainable use of the natural resources.

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