

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN SHELTERS AND SETTLEMENTS

Showcasing IOM's Safe Shelters Project



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



IOM
UN MIGRATION



ENGAGE DIASPORA.
EMPOWER COMMUNITIES.

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN SHELTERS AND SETTLEMENTS

Showcasing IOM's Safe Shelters Project



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



IOM
UN MIGRATION



ENGAGE DIASPORA.
EMPOWER COMMUNITIES.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the publication do not imply expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the authors concerning legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication was made possible through support provided by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, under the project, "Optimizing the engagement of diaspora for alternative approaches to safer shelters and settlements in disaster preparedness, response and risk reduction - Phase IV." The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

Authors: Rowena Symss, Silviu Kondan, Abigail Maristela, Ljubica Salamic, Daphne Henning

Publisher: International Organization for Migration
1752 N Street, N.W.
Suite 600
Washington, D.C.
United States
Tel. +1 202 862 1826
Email: diasporaforhumanity@iom.int
Website: www.iom.int

This publication was issued without formal editing by IOM.

This publication was issued without IOM Research Unit (RES) endorsement.

Required citation: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Diaspora Engagement in Safer Shelters and Settlements: Showcasing IOM's Safer Shelters Project*. IOM, Washington, D.C.

Cover photo: Young women affected by natural disasters in the Philippines share their stories with International Organization for Migration (IOM) Philippines staff in the field. © IOM 2022

© IOM 2023



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 IGO License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode) (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO).*

For further specifications please see the [Copyright and Terms of Use](#).

This publication should not be used, published or redistributed for purposes primarily intended for or directed towards commercial advantage or monetary compensation, with the exception of educational purposes, e.g. to be included in textbooks.

Permissions: Requests for commercial use or further rights and licensing should be submitted to publications@iom.int.

* <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode>

CONTENTS

Publishing Information	ii
Background	4-7
The Role of Diasporas in Shelter and Settlement	4-5
Diaspora Transnational Impact	6
Diaspora Local Impact as a Conduit of Localization	6
Benefits of Coordination	7
<i>Country Case Studies</i>	8-21
Philippines	9-15
Engaging Philippine Diaspora Networks on Safer Shelters	10
Knowledge Acquisition and Awareness Raising	10
Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Lessons Learned	10-11
Study with Meta’s Data for Good Program	11-12
Hope Reframed	12
Bahay Matibay Project	13-14
<i>Piloting a Sustainable and Replicable Model for Retrofitting</i>	13-14
Stronger Knowledge on Building Back Safer in Affected Communities	14
Demonstrated Coordination Between Diaspora and International Humanitarian Actors	15
Bangladesh	16-19
Engaging Bangladeshi Diaspora Networks on Safer Shelters	17
Awareness-Raising and Mobilizing Capital to Support Disaster Risk Reduction	17-19
IOM’s Partnerships in Haiti	20-21
Digicel SMS Campaign	21
Conclusion	22-23
Annex 1: Acknowledgements	24
Annex 2: Webliography	25

BACKGROUND

With support from the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has concluded the implementation of the fourth and final phase of the project titled "Optimizing the engagement of diaspora for alternative approaches to safer shelters and settlements in disaster preparedness, response and risk reduction" (hereafter, the Safer Shelters project). The overall objective of the Safer Shelters project was to increase affected communities' access to safer shelters knowledge and solutions, with a disaster risk reduction (DRR) approach, by optimizing diasporas' specific contributions. To do so, IOM Washington's Diaspora Engagement Unit (DEU) partnered with select U.S.-based diaspora organizations, alongside academic institutions, private sector entities and other local actors.

While the role of diaspora in humanitarian assistance is gaining recognition, particularly in the shelters and settlements sector, this report analyses the ways in which diaspora contribute to the sector and the impact of dedicated diaspora engagement initiatives.

More specifically, the project aimed to:

- Increase knowledge and access to safer shelters by enabling channels of communication between diaspora organizations and other humanitarian actors (incl. streamlining awareness raising and capacity building initiatives).
- Establish multi-stakeholder partnership models that leverage diasporas' social and financial contributions to better support shelter-related interventions.

This compendium highlights key examples where diaspora members have directly engaged in DRR interventions, under the Safer Shelters project. It includes activities implemented in partnership between IOM and U.S.-based diaspora organizations to support communities in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Haiti.

These diaspora organizations were selected due to their extensive networks, motivation to support vulnerable communities in their countries of origin, their commitment to supporting Build Back Safer in contexts of humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery, and to facilitating the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

THE ROLE OF DIASPORAS IN SHELTER AND SETTLEMENT

Humanitarian actors recognize that there are more frequent and increasingly severe weather patterns and natural disasters affecting millions of people around the globe. This is a consequence of several factors including increased sea temperatures, changes to rainfall patterns and pronounced hurricane activities (OCHA, 2020). In fact, the last 10 years have been considered the hottest years on record, which significantly increase humanitarian needs across the globe (OCHA, 2020). As these crises become increasingly complex, so does the increasing urgency for multi-stakeholder approaches to manage their impacts.

The first ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016 is a recent example of an international endeavor aimed at promoting the institutionalization of diasporas within humanitarian systems and models (DEMAC, 2018). Similarly, the ‘Grand Bargain’ launched at the Summit, encourages the globe’s largest donors and humanitarian actors to close the contemporary humanitarian financing gap, and to mandate multi-stakeholder consultations that include non-institutional actors, which are acknowledged as an often-untapped resource. Since 2016, the importance of proactively engaging diaspora groups to examine common barriers and solutions related to their participation and involvement in humanitarian assistance has been promoted (Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream, 2021). Diasporas’ contributions to increase communities’ resilience is very relevant when it comes to the shelter sector, as the needs for safer shelters for disaster preparedness and recovery remain mostly unmet. For example, in 2019, Shelter Cluster partners were only able to support approximately 57 percent of the population they planned to provide aid due to lack of resources (Global Shelter Cluster, 2021).

Diaspora members, through the Safer Shelters project have demonstrated their commitment to acquire relevant knowledge and capacities on safer shelters; to date, hundreds of diaspora members have attended webinars, trainings, and events on promoting safer shelters principles and practices. They have also committed to transferring resources, knowledge and skills to affected communities in their countries of origin by leading communication campaigns and co-organizing community events, fundraising campaigns and sustainable financing models. If given the opportunity to collaborate with institutional humanitarian actors, the role of diasporas can be successfully leveraged and optimized to address the needs of the shelters and settlements sector. Some notable examples of diasporas’ engagement from the final phase of the project include:

- The Spreeha Foundation, a Bangladeshi diaspora organization, led multiple Build Back Safer (BBS) campaign efforts during this phase, resulting in **over 5,600 diaspora members** reached through social media. They also organized an in-person event with over 200 diaspora members present, which focused on disseminating safer shelter learnings.
- UDiON and Spreeha have provided ongoing updates related to the aftermath of the 2022 floods in Bangladesh, including updates on their campaigns and interventions to mobilize, fundraise, and share information. They also provided direct inputs, based on their experiences working in humanitarian assistance, on the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials developed.
- **345 diaspora members** have completed the Shelter and Settlement Assistance training developed in coordination with IOM and the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC).
- **124,353 SMS messages** were sent to leverage Haitian diasporas’ networks and mobile money infrastructure to raise communities’ awareness on safe shelters for disaster risk reduction (DRR)
- Diaspora partners PUSO and PSRC led shelter retrofitting and rebuilding BBS efforts in the Philippines through their respective “Hope Reframed” and “Bahay Matibay” projects. In both cases diaspora worked with local organizations or their own local focal points to provide BBS training and access to materials supporting **more than 50 families** in securing safer shelter in the Philippines.
- **15 retrofitting microfinance loans** were provided in Cavite and an additional 29 allocated in Bohol.
- **6 liaising focal points** between diaspora and on-the-ground actors were established in the Philippines, including representatives from Holy Name University of Bohol and University of the Philippines. These focal points will contribute to enhanced coordination between diaspora and local actors to enhance DRR related to shelter needs.

DIASPORA TRANSNATIONAL IMPACT

Unlike other actors providing humanitarian assistance, diaspora groups carry out transnational activities across a variety of sectors and during all phases of humanitarian assistance into the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN). These range from immediate response efforts, raising awareness of Build Back Safe principles and standards, shelter construction and/or retrofitting, providing food and non-food items (e.g. shelter kits and health provisions), to longer-term interventions focused on preparedness and response to socioeconomic development and systems strengthening such as transitional housing (DEMAC, 2016a).

Diaspora groups and members have also supported capacity building and response efforts through human and social capital contributions. For example, diasporas have mobilized their networks to better secure donations and volunteers, facilitate professional skills transfer, provide in-person humanitarian relief to affected communities, and to disseminate relevant information through awareness-raising campaigns. These humanitarian and development efforts are often led in conjunction with ongoing initiatives to provide integration support and cultural programming for their fellow diaspora members in their countries of residence.

DIASPORA LOCAL IMPACT AS A CONDUIT OF LOCALIZATION

Diaspora communities have acted as invaluable and unparalleled humanitarian response actors, addressing the complex on-the-ground needs of populations affected by man-made and natural disasters. On a longer-term basis, diasporas have also supported local communities in building capacity and resilience to mitigate risks and respond directly to these disasters.

At the individual and household units, financial capital inflows from diasporas (e.g. remittances) have typically acted as a source of immediate relief to recipients affected by humanitarian crises. This has provided affected communities with a means to purchase food, access medical services and supplies, and to rebuild damaged property. This has also led and facilitated community self-reliance through the sharing of critical information and the offering of capacity building support. Philanthropic in-kind donations, coordinated through diaspora networks, have served as a source of financial aid for charities, nonprofits and community members.

As a key finding from this project, on-the-ground beneficiaries are less often aware of the degree to which diasporas support humanitarian activities. Instead of being seen as a weakness or gap in diaspora contributions, this in fact highlights the role diaspora play as localization actors in complement to local actors and communities. For example, beneficiaries typically interact with local organizations or organizational chapters, rather than with diaspora organizations or individual members of the diaspora. However, in many cases, diaspora members and diaspora organizations have coordinated and collaborated directly with local NGOs or civil society groups, often aiding these groups with project coordination, targeted awareness-raising campaigns, financial disbursement and skill-building. A “Focal Point” system or network can address this gap in knowledge by sharing information and promoting diaspora engagement with local communities and actors. This can often involve a dedicated individual or entity who creates practical linkages among government, academia, hometown/diaspora associations, and private sector actors.

BENEFITS OF COORDINATION

Diaspora organizations engaged in the Safer Shelters Project have expressed interest in learning and working toward fulfilling the humanitarian principles and institutional requirements. Doing so allows these organizations to access new networks, resources and to formalize and improve their approaches to on-the-ground interventions. Diaspora groups may particularly benefit from systemic and regular opportunities that enable them to engage in a more sustainable and formal manner, such as through opportunities for joint coordination, capacity building and access to funding.

To support this process, IOM has led more targeted initiatives that provide opportunities for improved coordination (e.g., more streamlined information sharing, the Standard Operating Procedures for Diaspora Engagement in Shelter Assistance) between diaspora groups and institutional humanitarian actors. This is particularly pertinent as there is a shared lack of awareness between these actors on their roles and contributions to humanitarian response. Moreover, IOM has developed and promoted a number of trainings on BBS and DRR. For example, a joint training package was developed in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity (HFHI) and review from the Global Shelter Cluster. Similarly, a 25-minute online training module “Developing Community Resilience: Shelter and Settlement Assistance Training for Diaspora Communities” is now freely available on the *DisasterReady* platform. At the time of publishing, there are 650 people currently enrolled in the course and 345 people that have completed it. Today, there are also over 1,800 individuals registered with the iDiaspora platform. The Build Back Safer initiative page on iDiaspora provides all diaspora communities with general information on current efforts, trainings as well as resources for volunteering, information sharing, and a newsletter sign-up form.

Institutional humanitarian actors, including IOM, are well positioned to provide clear models for further inclusion of diasporas in humanitarian response, define partnership expectations and to streamline coordination. Institutional humanitarian actors are also compelled to consider new and innovative ways to meet the growing needs of populations impacted by complex and protracted crises. Collaborating with diaspora in this regard would allow for mutual benefit for all relevant stakeholders across different contexts.

The IOM DEU continues to demonstrate the potential and notable contributions of diaspora actors, as well as innovative models to address financial and resource gaps. This compendium showcases how a number of United States-based (U.S.) diaspora organizations have mobilized their strengths and worked in collaboration with the IOM DEU under the Safer Shelters Project to promote resilience in shelter-specific response efforts, in the Philippines and Bangladesh.

Photo 1 (preceding page): A 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck south of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on 12 Jan 2010 destroying buildings and causing widespread damage and panic. © IOM 2010

Photo 2 (preceding page): Many families had their homes and livelihoods destroyed as Super Typhoon Rolly and three other typhoons pounded the region within a span of three weeks in 2020. The Philippines, while contributing the least to climate change, is the second most affected by it globally as extreme weather events like super typhoons are expected to become more frequent and more intense in the coming years. Through the support of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (UNCERF), these families received shelter repair kits, multi-purpose cash assistance, and shelter repair training to help them recover and rebuild their lives. © IOM 2021/Andrea EMPAMANO

Photo 3 (preceding page): IOM volunteers work to construct Isolation and Treatment Centers in Cox's Bazar. © IOM 2020/ Abdullah AL MASHRIF

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES



PHILIPPINES



Photo 4: A house under construction in Bohol, constructed in partnership with the Pilipino Senior Resource Center (PSRC).
© IOM 2022

The Filipino diaspora has remained extensively connected to their country of origin and continues to collectively and significantly contribute through humanitarian and emergency response interventions.

Today, approximately 5% (5,377,337) of the Philippine population reside abroad either on a permanent or temporary duration, with the largest communities residing in the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Canada, the United Arab Emirates and Australia (EUDiF, 2020). This ranks the Filipino diaspora as one of the top ten diaspora groups by population size across the globe. As a medium-income country, it relies heavily on its agricultural, industrial, and service sectors as well as diaspora remittances.

The Philippines is highly susceptible to natural disasters that affect the lives of local communities and subsequently, their global diaspora. Recent decades have seen how the impacts of climate has led to intensified monsoon winds, sea level rise, land subsidence, precipitation, droughts, etc. The Philippines' vulnerability to natural disasters is a result of its geographic location, requiring the country to invest significant monitoring and response efforts to mitigate the impact of these disasters (UN OCHA 2018; World Bank, 2020).

Some of the country's deadliest natural disasters occurred in the last decade, such as the 2013 Bohol Earthquake, and in the same year, Typhoon Haiyan (also known as Super Typhoon Yolanda locally). In 2020, Super Typhoon Goni (also known locally as Typhoon Rolly) devastated Catanduanes with 220 km/hr winds and heavy rain

causing more than a billion dollars in damages. Most recently, Typhoon Rai (or Super Typhoon Odette) landed in the Philippines in 2021, affecting over ten million people across eleven regions.

Disasters have a direct impact on local populations' access to services, the destruction of their assets and livelihoods, as well as their overall well-being (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 85% of the country's sources of production are susceptible to damage due to natural disasters (UNDRR, 2019). Consequently, the costs of certain natural disasters and recovery activities are estimated to account for approximately 4% of the country's yearly GDP (UNDRR, 2019). Filipino diaspora investments in terms of housing and commercial properties, businesses, public and religious infrastructure, etc. are also severely impacted, also prompting their concern.

“We have seen numerous benefits and impacts through our engagement in shelter activities. At first, the main benefit was knowledge acquisition, especially of our team and diaspora members who attend our events. However, after Super Typhoon Odette, IOM's support and information-sharing gave us the resources and knowledge we needed to respond to the natural disaster with a more sustainable, shelter-focused lens.”

- Diaspora Organization Representative

ENGAGING PHILIPPINE DIASPORA NETWORKS ON SAFER SHELTERS

Philippine diaspora members have long sent money and materials for shelter repair and reconstruction after disasters. To support such efforts and ensure

diaspora contributions are efficient, effective, and sustainable, the IOM DEU has collaborated with U.S.-based Filipino diaspora members and organizations over a number of years on knowledge acquisition through trainings and awareness raising on DRR and BBS. Equipped with this knowledge, diaspora partners sought ways to put implement their training to provide safe shelters in the Philippines. The following section outlines the various ways in which multi-stakeholder coordination has led to increased access to safe shelters in the Philippines through communication campaigns, micro-finance initiatives, and building safer shelters in communities affected by Typhoon Odette/Rai.

KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND AWARENESS RAISING

In promoting and streamlining existing efforts, the IOM DEU team coordinated with U.S.-based Philippines shelter agencies and Filipino diaspora groups in the United States to share safer shelter designs, techniques, and rebuilding tools that were based on international and national standards. They reviewed, enhanced, and shared these designs with their own networks. For better inclusion and diversity, local language versions and oral outreach strategies were developed.

INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION (IEC) LESSONS LEARNED

Across the different phases of the shelter project, dozens of IEC materials were reviewed, tested and produced in close coordination with diaspora partners, including Spreeha, UDiON Foundation, PSRC, the PUSO Foundation, and Haiti Renewal Alliance.

In Phase III, a series of virtual trainings were held to both instruct participants on safer shelter and DRR knowledge, and to conduct a participatory test of how key IEC materials were (or were not) relevant to affected communities.

Across each of these virtual groups and additional testing in Phase IV with Filipino youth, there were common threads that demonstrate both the efficacy of how some materials are presented and some areas for improvement. One of the main comments involved considerations for different vulnerable groups, including women and girls, and those with literacy challenges.

“We are excited about the prospects of future partnership in the areas of build back safer, this has gotten our membership excited about sharing their new-found knowledge with their relatives back home.”

- Representative from a partnering Diaspora Organization

STUDY WITH META’S DATA FOR GOOD PROGRAM

In 2021, the IOM DEU team began talks with Meta to develop a campaign to test the efficacy of digital outreach to diaspora groups in the United States through Meta’s Data for Good program. After lengthy discussions on potential topics and researching cross-cutting issues and gaps in safe shelter messaging, it was decided that the campaign would address the impact of safe shelter on women and girls in the Philippines. The Philippines was selected as the target country because of the DEU’s strong relationships with various diaspora groups of different demographics (e.g. ages and locations), as well as the Philippines’ status as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world.

Besides raising awareness of the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on women and girls, the

campaign had two other goals: (1) to engage a key demographic in the United States – the Filipino American diaspora, and (2) to raise awareness of IOM’s Build Back Safer initiative and other ways for Filipino Americans to get involved in recovery efforts.

The campaign ran in two concurrent parts, each testing a different messaging strategy: content based on facts and statistics (2 ads total), and content based on emotion and testimonials (3 ads total). The IOM DEU coordinated with the IOM Philippines office to source the testimonials and refine some of the messaging. Their team went into the field to record testimonials from several women who had been impacted by natural disasters in recent years.

Meta donated ad credits to the campaign to be used in its implementation and ensure that the content would appear across available Facebook and Instagram spaces (e.g. posts, stories, etc.).

The PUSO Foundation provided comments and suggestions on the targeting metrics for the campaign, or how the audiences across the social platforms would be identified and shown the campaign ads.

Over the two-week life of the campaign, the ads reached more than 10.7 million people on Facebook and Instagram and resulted in more than 21,200 clicks to IOM’s resource page on the iDiaspora platform about Build Back Safer. The subsequent brand lift survey indicated that the testimonial content was highly effective in highlighting the impact of natural disasters on women, and in encouraging Filipino Americans to help communities recover from natural disasters in the Philippines. Overall, the results demonstrate well the efficacy of digital outreach for engaging communities in disaster recovery efforts and transferring knowledge of safe shelter messaging.



Photo 5: An image from one of the joint campaign ads.
© IOM 2022

HOPE REFRAMED

PUSO approached IOM after Typhoon Odette/Rai to support shelter sector response efforts, due to their understanding of the importance of BBS methodology and safe shelters following such disasters, gained from different trainings in previous phases of the project. This work led to the launch of a new house rebuilding initiative, “Hope Reframed”, under the Safer Shelters Project.

PUSO, alongside IOM Philippines and the DEU team, sought to re-construct/ retrofit the houses of families affected by the typhoon in Siargao, in a cost-effective and sustainable manner (i.e., through the use of lightweight, durable materials that are easily accessible in affected areas). Ten households were identified through the selection process, which were all successfully rebuilt.

The construction projects followed technical guidance on shelter blueprints, based on the recommendations for immediate shelter programs from the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the Philippines.

Following their selection and guided by a vulnerability index created in tandem with IOM Philippines, the beneficiaries were also invited to attend a Build Back Safer orientation led by IOM on September 8, 2022, to better guide their construction efforts prior to initiation. This orientation was held in conjunction with a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support session, which proved beneficial to the holistic wellbeing of beneficiaries and rebuilding of lives via shelter rebuilding.

PUSO volunteers and IOM staff regularly conducted monitoring visits during the construction/retrofitting process as well, which were often supported by masons and carpenters. Following the completion of the project, PUSO continues to conduct site visits to ensure that the households are sustained, to maintain relationships with the beneficiaries and to continue promoting BBS standards among vulnerable communities in the Philippines.

“We are very thankful that this [project] came to us. At least now our house is stronger. Even if there is a typhoon, we can be safer.”

- Loan Program Beneficiary



Photo 6: IOM volunteers work to construct Isolation and Treatment Centers in Cox’s Bazar. © IOM 2022/PUSO

BAHAY MATIBAY PROJECT

Since 2019, IOM Washington's DEU team also undertook a collaborative financing model with a local microfinance institution, LifeBank Foundation, to support retrofitting, repair and reconstruction in the Philippines. This financing model was designed to use diaspora remittances as a guarantor for the microfinance loans. The IOM DEU and IOM Philippines, alongside the Pilipino Senior Resource Center (PSRC), provided their expertise, networks, and support for the piloting of this financing model. The pilot initiative targeted families at barangays (villages) in two disaster prone provinces: Cavite and Bohol.

The pilot targeted families who were identified as being the most vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters, balanced against their eligibility to participate in the loan program. For example, the project prioritized female-led households, the elderly and persons with disabilities, recognizing their particular vulnerabilities in humanitarian disasters.

Collectively, the IOM teams, diaspora organizations and LifeBank were able to select and enroll 44 families in the Philippines. Implementing teams supported the selected families throughout the application and orientation process, construction planning and activities, and repayment period. The teams also closely monitored the program to optimize its benefits.

“After the loan was approved, we went straight to the hardware store to purchase materials. It took three days to bring the materials over, everyone in the family helped out. The carpenter followed the safer shelter manual and instructions that were shared. Everything was completed successfully.”

- Loan Program Beneficiary

“My previous home was made from scrap material, and it didn't have cement. The flood water would enter our house, so we couldn't sleep. With the new material, our house doesn't flood anymore.”

- Loan Program Beneficiary

PILOTING A SUSTAINABLE AND REPLICABLE FINANCING MODEL FOR RETROFITTING

Throughout the implementation of the loan program pilot, the IOM Philippines Shelter and Settlements team provided monitoring and technical assistance, in close cooperation with the IOM DEU. Under the joint supervision of these two teams, the pilot activity included the following components:

- An orientation for beneficiaries (co-led by LifeBank) on Build Back Safer and safer shelter practices. In Bohol, the same orientation was also given to LifeBank staff.
- Beneficiary House Inspections (conducted by IOM Philippines shelter experts and engineers).
- Finalization of shelter materials and kits for beneficiaries to guide the retrofitting and construction activities, provided by the IOM DEU and partners.
- Release of shelter loan amounts to beneficiaries by LifeBank.
- Assisted purchase of house repair materials
- Retrofitting and construction by selected masons or carpenters.
- Monitoring of ongoing repair works by IOM Philippines.

To better understand the experiences of the participating families, IOM also coordinated multiple field visits to gather their inputs and monitor construction activities.

Consultants from two academic institutions, the University of Colorado Boulder and Golden Gate University, attended some of these field visits, gathering promising data on the connections between the diaspora networks, retrofitting work to safer building standards, and the perceived value of the program among participating families.

During the field visits, families reported high levels of satisfaction with the loan program. They often cited notable improvements in their living conditions resulting from the retrofitting work they completed. Thirteen of the 15 families in the Cavite province have also been consistent in their repayment (the two exceptions were delayed due to extenuating circumstances), with all families remaining consistent in Bohol.

The success of this pilot drew attention from national to local government stakeholders, who have expressed interest in supporting a scaled-up version of the loan program. Partnering diaspora organizations have also been effective in leading activities to support the launch and implementation of the pilot and to share key learnings.

These stakeholders, following the end of the Safer Shelters Project and involvement from the IOM DEU, are now well positioned to lead a similar program based on the pilot's design. Provided that remittances are used as a guarantee for loans, the initiative would not rely on donors or international organizations for its continuation, and as such would be sustainable over time with ongoing engagement and leadership from the diaspora.

STRONGER KNOWLEDGE ON BUILDING BACK SAFER IN AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Alongside financial support offered through the microfinance initiative, participants accessed IEC material developed under the Safer Shelters Project as well as ongoing consultative support from construction experts. The IEC material covers step-by-step instructions on how to better construct shelters, based on international standards, with prevention and resilience in mind. This includes information on the purchasing of appropriate and vetted material. Moreover, IOM Philippines engineers and technical experts have provided oversight to review and improve building designs and to support PSRC's and PUSO's on-the-ground orientations to community members.

Safer Shelter project activities also included the development of knowledge products with input from experts and diaspora organizations. These included shelter training modules, a Global Shelter Cluster microfinancing case study, alongside video campaigns and resources offered through social media, newsletters and the IOM iDiaspora platform.

“We went to one of the training seminars which discussed what needs to be done to be more prepared and safer from strong winds, and what material to use to reinforce the shelter. Despite the training lasting just one day, it was very helpful to me!”

- Loan Program Beneficiary

“I am participating in this for my kids so that they don’t have to experience the same thing my husband and I experienced.”

- Loan Program Beneficiary

DEMONSTRATED COORDINATION BETWEEN DIASPORA AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Project planning and implementation prioritized a participatory approach, whereby IOM and diaspora partners continuously engaged beneficiaries and partners to ensure that learnings were incorporated in all activities. The project’s collaboration between IOM, diaspora organizations, private sector actors and academic institutions has been commended for its innovative approach to transnational action, with the possibility to scale up to longer-term, strategic and more stable forms of collaboration.

The IOM DEU team, PUSO and PSRC developed messaging to highlight the direct outcomes and learnings of the project to members of the Filipino diaspora. In response, members of the diaspora leveraged their reach, network, and contributions to shelter-specific interventions carried out by IOM and partners.

Ensuring that construction regulations were understood and followed by all partners, IOM and partners engaged the local government throughout the project. Local government authorities shared climate and disaster risk assessment reports to provincial and national agencies, highlighting project results, and more broadly, the role of diasporas in leading and sustaining local humanitarian interventions from prevention to response.

To further sustain and scale-up project outcomes, the IOM DEU also built partnerships with local universities where resources, technical shelter retrofitting trainings and materials developed through the Safer Shelters Project could be disseminated locally, particularly for urban development studies students, faculty, and practitioners.

Lastly, the IOM DEU has developed and shared Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for diasporas and shelter actors’ reciprocal engagement. These SOPs are used as a tool for coordination, proposing a step-by-step procedure for a more streamlined and effective engagement of diasporas in shelter & settlement response. These SOPs provide a recommended framework for interagency coordination, communication and cooperation between diasporas and shelter actors both at the global and country level, with the Global Shelter Cluster being the main reference platform.

“They showed us how to build a strong house. They told us about how if one can’t afford concrete yet, they can use steel bars as part of the base. Even if you just install them on the corners, the more important thing is to ensure that the bars are strong; so that even if the roof/ceiling is made of wood, at least the base of the house is secure. This also helps prevent the roof from flying away. They taught us that however we build, we must consider reinforcement.”

- Loan Program Beneficiary

BANGLADESH

“The knowledge that we gained from this project, including the resources developed and trainings, have allowed us to lead flood response efforts in Bangladesh, alongside other organizations from our networks across the United States, to better fundraise and provide technical support.”

- Representative from partnering diaspora organization



Photo 7: A presentation as part of the Diaspora Engagement in Disaster Preparedness training and certification in Bangladesh, with IOM and Bangladeshi diaspora partner UDION. © IOM 2019

It is estimated that approximately 4.7% (7,835,152) of the Bangladeshi population reside abroad. While there are challenges in determining the exact flow and stock of Bangladeshi diasporas, the largest number of diasporas are said to reside in India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Kuwait (EUDI, 2020; UN DESA, 2019).

In the United States, the diaspora participates in a number of organizations and associations, although these are typically fragmented and concentrated in California and New York (International Development Group LLC, 2015). Altogether remittances from the diaspora account for a significant amount of Bangladesh's GDP (6.6% share of GDP), with those living in the U.S. and the United Kingdom contributing a significant proportion of the total remittance flows (EUDI 2020; IOM 2022).

Diaspora members based in the U.S. often use remittances to support philanthropic endeavors, including natural disaster preparedness and response efforts. Bangladesh, due to its geographic location and landscape, is highly susceptible to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change (INFORM sub-national risk index, 2022). The northern and eastern regions are most prone to earthquakes, while the northwestern area experiences droughts and fires due to lower rainfall. In regions with higher rainfall and riverbank erosion, floods are an annual issue and present the most significant and frequent impact to the population. Lastly, being located in a prominent monsoon area of the world leads to cyclones along the coast of Bangladesh (World Bank, 2021). In 2022 alone, the country experienced repeated flash floods and was hit by Cyclone Sirang, affecting several million residents (INFORM sub-national risk index, 2022).

ENGAGING BANGLADESHI DIASPORA NETWORKS ON SAFER SHELTERS

“In many news outlets recently, you may have heard about the flooding in the western side of Bangladesh that borders India. This includes my hometown which was devastated. For this particular flood we started fundraising to re-build houses in the affected areas. We followed IOM’s approach to safe houses, in regard to safety and reliability, for temporary shelters. We’ve completed three of those houses and funded emergency needs, like medications for children and water access”

- Diaspora Organization Representative

The IOM DEU team, through multiple phases of the Safer Shelters project, partnered with U.S.-based Bangladeshi diaspora organizations, in particular the UDiON Foundation and Spreeha, to support safer shelter practices in Bangladesh and to better engage diaspora in these DRR initiatives. Their partnerships led to the coordination of in-person and virtual trainings held across the U.S. and Bangladesh for diaspora members and community members. These trainings focused on technical aspects of shelter retrofitting and construction. In addition, the teams also co-led consistent communication campaigns and the development of tools and resources to enhance diaspora-led coordination during natural disaster relief.

During Phase IV of the Safer Shelters Project, the primary focus of the partnerships was the development and dissemination of multimedia communications campaigns, in a manner that was inclusive of gender considerations and were also contextually sensitive. These campaigns targeted members of the diaspora and communities in Bangladesh to raise awareness and enhance knowledge among these actors on safe shelters and settlements.

RAISING AWARENESS AND MOBILIZING CAPITAL TO SUPPORT DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

“We used all social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Website, and email) in addition to the distribution of flyers at community events and word of mouth. We also targeted community leaders and organizations to share resources and critical information pertaining to safer shelters.”

- Diaspora Organization Representative

The Safer Shelters project directly sought to address the transnational communication gap that is common during humanitarian crises. Communication campaigns were created to inform diaspora members on shelter vulnerabilities in Bangladesh and to increase their awareness on the importance of DRR principles. Moreover, by sharing critical information with the diaspora, and subsequently encouraging their participation in disseminating educational resources, U.S.-based Bangladeshi diaspora directly participated in the mitigation of vulnerabilities experienced by those most affected by natural disasters.

UDiON, for example, shared communication campaigns and training opportunities across their diaspora database, containing over 14,000 community members. Due to their pre-existing interest and activities related to building shelters after disasters in Bangladesh, UDiON's engagement with the IOM DEU allowed them to expand their membership's knowledge and technical capacity on the logistics of shelter construction and retrofitting. To address needs as a result of the recent floods in Bangladesh, UDiON members have fundraised and re-built homes in the affected areas, utilizing Safer Shelters and BBS standards.

Spreeha's continued engagement in the Safer Shelters Project stems from their lead role in promoting SMS messaging campaigns from previous phases, targeting disaster prone communities in Bangladesh. These messages emphasized the importance of building safer shelters and included links to relevant IEC materials. These campaigns have resulted in thousands of individuals interacting or accessing with materials produced through this project, including throughout Phase IV, whereby 7,900 individuals were reached vis-à-vis UDiON's social media platforms and over 5,600 across Spreeha's platforms.

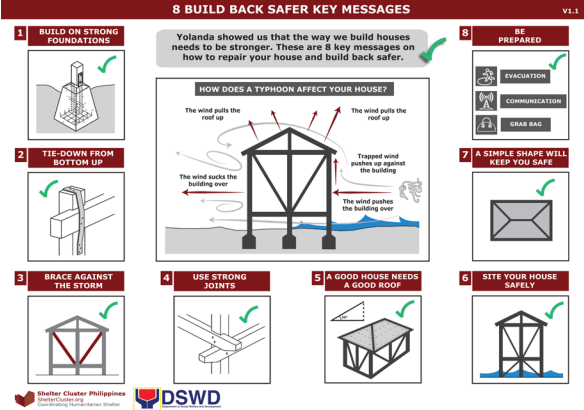


Photo 8: An example of one of the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials used by IOM to test messaging and methods for dissemination with diaspora partners like UDiON and Spreeha. This IEC flyer is used to illustrate eight basic Build Back Safer key principles, and includes both simplified graphics and text descriptions, and was sourced from the Global Shelter Cluster IEC Compendium: an extensive library of hundreds of IEC materials, searchable by country of relevance, language, type of disaster, format, and more. © IOM 2022



Photo 9: A post from one of UDiON's social media campaigns promoting disaster risk reduction (DRR) and safer shelters messaging to their constituents. The post included a link to the Global Shelter Cluster website for additional resources and information, and highlighted some of the other types of materials that would be shared as part of the campaign. © IOM 2022



Photo 10: A graphic promoting the Shelter and Settlements Training for Diasporas, hosted on the DisasterReady platform. The graphic was shared by the project's diaspora partners to facilitate engagement and capacity building with their constituents. © IOM 2022

During the most recent phase, Spreeha, similar to UDiON, leveraged their social media channels, which have high engagement from both diaspora members and individuals in Bangladesh. As a result of their targeted campaigns, over 5,000 community members accessed key information during this project phase. The Spreeha team also shared information during their annual fundraising gala, attended by approximately 200 participants. Evidenced by these efforts, the Bangladeshi diaspora continue to see the value of reaching out to their fellow community members who have direct ties with natural disaster-prone communities in Bangladesh, often through their families and friends living there.

“Many diaspora members, including myself, have benefited from the training and materials developed through this project. Not only have we learned a lot, we also created a community of like-minded diaspora members who share the same values and interests as we do when it comes to safer shelter work.”

- Diaspora Organization Representative

“Throughout this engagement we are learning how to organize diasporas, to motivate them, to improve collective efforts on topics related to the reliability and safety of homes.”

- Diaspora Organization Representative

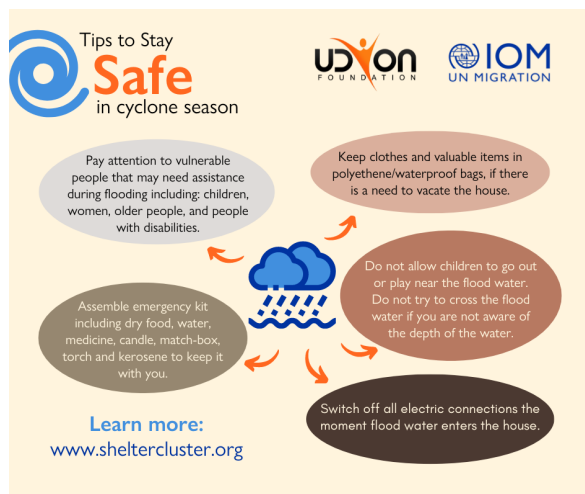


Photo 11: An image developed from an IEC material, used by UDiON and Spreeha as part of their respective DRR campaigns on social media in Phase IV of the Safer Shelters Project. © IOM 2022

IOM'S PARTNERSHIPS IN HAITI



Photo 12: IOM Safe Shelters project staff alongside Haitian diaspora partners at a safe shelters and disaster risk reduction training for diasporas in New York. © IOM 2019

Haiti still faces significant economic and social challenges and a large unmet demand for housing. The ongoing political instability has hindered Haiti's economic and social development; the country remains highly vulnerable to natural hazards, mainly hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, with more than 96% per cent of the population exposed to these natural hazards. Recovery efforts continue more than ten years after the 2010 devastating earthquake, several years after Hurricane Matthew hit the country in 2016, and two years after the August 2021 earthquake that struck the southwest of Haiti followed by the direct hit from Tropical Depression Grace only two days later (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

The United States is home to the largest Haitian migrant population in the world, estimated at 705,000, with significant numbers also residing in the Dominican Republic (496,000), Chile (237,000), Canada (101,000) and France (85,000), according to mid-2020 United Nations estimates (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). In 2022, Haitian remittances reached USD \$3.1 billion, with at least \$8 from every \$10 in remittances coming from the United States (World Bank, 2023). Beyond remittances, Haitian diaspora organizations in the U.S. and elsewhere are highly organized and motivated to support preparedness, response and relief efforts in Haiti to meet the needs of affected communities from non-food items like water and medical supplies to shelter kits and support.

Photo 13 (proceeding page): An image from Trend Media (Digicel) containing two of the SMS messages sent out as part of a communications campaign in Phase IV targeting areas hardest hit by the 2021 earthquake in Haiti. © IOM 2022

IOM continues to promote and enable improved coordination, communication and cooperation between diasporas and institutional humanitarian actors through various initiatives. Most notably, the team partnered with the Haiti Renewal Alliance (HRA) for past phases of the Safe Shelter Project as well as a parallel project called “Consolidating and Operationalizing a Framework for Diaspora’s Engagement in Humanitarian Assistance,” referred to as the Framework Project. HRA’s achievements through this project simultaneously contributed to the Safer Shelters project objectives, in addition to their engagement with previous phases of the Framework project. Their work and outputs included:

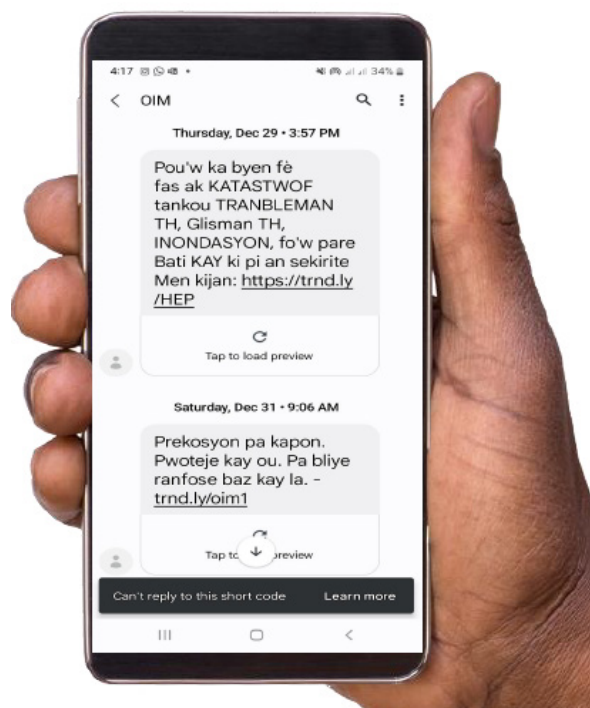
- In-person and virtual building back safer trainings for U.S.-based diaspora
- Events for key stakeholders involved in disaster response to expand networks of relevant actors, in Haiti and globally
- Support for the development of safer shelter tools related to the overarching diaspora coordination Framework (i.e., a standard operating procedure for diaspora coordination to support the retrofitting and construction of safer shelters)
- DRR-focused communication campaigns in Haiti
- Dissemination of IEC materials to diaspora and to communities in Haiti
- Campaigns to promote key online coordination platforms and events
- A draft strategy on diaspora relief and recovery efforts, focused on safer shelters.

A noteworthy and replicable output from the partnerships in Haiti was the establishment of a Shelters Focal Point. This individual acts as a liaison between key stakeholders, such as international humanitarian organizations, diaspora organizations and community members in Haiti, when coordinating relevant DRR initiatives at the national or local level.

DIGICEL SMS CAMPAIGN

Over the past two years, IOM has coordinated with Digicel, a telecommunications company based in Haiti to launch disaster risk reduction campaigns that disseminated key shelter information to specific areas affected by disasters (e.g. neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince and areas of the Grand South). The messages were part of the wider Build Back Safer initiative and promoted preparedness, response and recovery messaging via different types of text messages (SMS, USSD, and loop banners). Depending on the type of message delivered, the safe shelter messaging was accompanied by links to IEC materials, as well as short videos in Kreyol to reach those who might have literacy challenges.

Through the partnership with Digicel over 1.4 million messages were sent out to affected populations in Haiti. The consistent above-average click rate on IEC materials describing Build Back Safer and DRR messaging demonstrated the interest in and need for this type of information to be disseminated to areas historically affected by repeated natural disasters.



CONCLUSION



Photo 14: A Bahay Matibay loan program training as part of the project. © IOM 2022/Redentor ATANACIO

Throughout the Safer Shelters Project, the participating IOM teams and project partners have established new networks and ways of collaborating to enable and channel the capacity of diaspora organizations as effective humanitarian actors. Across the four project phases, diaspora organizations have addressed direct needs of the shelter and settlement sector, incorporating a DRR approach, through investments in education and training, awareness raising, and developing and disseminating resources for building safer shelters pre- and post-disasters. In doing so, the achievements witnessed under the project offer insights into how unique, innovative diaspora-led interventions can produce sustainable results for communities affected by disasters.

In light of disasters in selected target countries and the lack of data on the role of diasporas in supporting the shelters sector, the Safer Shelters Project is among the first to demonstrate the invaluable role of diasporas in the sector. Diaspora organizations took leadership in the sharing of relevant and timely information through communication campaigns while also developing innovative partnerships that led to DRR for affected communities. Representatives of DOs enthusiastically participated and contributed to shelter sector initiatives in their communities. Future initiatives to advance diaspora engagement in the shelter and settlements sector should consider the following key takeaways, lessons learned, and recommendations, developed during the implementation of the Safer Shelters Project and through various phase evaluations:

(1) The co-design and joint implementation of project activities provided an important capacity building model that ensured horizontal project ownership. The DOs were heavily involved in the project design, planning and implementation, in many cases as co-leads for activities. This also gave DOs with less experience in the shelter and settlements sector exposure to the technical aspect of operations and logistics involved in related response and preparedness efforts. In conclusion of the four project phases, it is evident that these efforts and direct community benefits were better streamlined and promoted through formalized partnerships (e.g., MOUs & Focal Point activities), scaling-up or creating an enabling environment for diaspora's innovative interventions (e.g., micro-finance loans, communication campaigns, learning models and resources), and capacity building supports (e.g., training opportunities, monitoring and evaluation resources, exit strategies and the development of shared knowledge products).

(2) Through the MFI activity and the high degree of engagement amongst the diaspora focal points, new and non-conventional partnerships were established, which have resulted in innovative approaches to transnational engagement. This has also demonstrated the importance of localization and diaspora collaboration with local actors, particularly in academia and the private sector, who can provide critical expertise or financial services to help individuals. Moreover, given the positive results of the MFI activity, there continues to be a demand for the exploration of the use of diasporas as loan guarantors. Follow-up and future pilots would support efforts to continue exploring various methodologies for effectively implementing this model.

(3) Actors, partners, and beneficiaries of the online Shelter and Settlements Training for Diasporas have shared overwhelmingly positive feedback on the quality and utility of the training, with the training module receiving the highest feedback rating on *DisasterReady*. According to one-the-ground partners, there is a resounding lack of education on safer shelter practices among populations vulnerable to natural disasters. Individuals are making major, long-term investments when they construct homes, and they are doing so without an understanding of the risks they face due to local terrain and effects of natural disasters. When these families lose their homes – which is preventable – they lose their investments and sometimes their livelihoods, and therefore may be further affected by socioeconomic instability. Initiatives like those described in this document and beyond that aim to address these knowledge gaps can enable stronger community resilience.

(4) Workshops and joint engagement opportunities held with DOs and relevant national actors were crucial to determine engagement pathways for diasporas as well as how to ensure that interventions aligned to relevant technical guidelines and standards. Indeed, when selecting target countries, it is important to identify how shelter focused activities could work in alignment with national policies, guidelines and existing interventions in the applicable countries. This may open additional opportunities to build rapport and connection with relevant government entities and representatives across CoOs for project partners continuing to move activities forward.

(5) Lastly, as was captured through the on-the-ground relief work in Siargao and Bohol, Philippines, community members benefit well beyond the direct BBS assistance, when equipped with a network of diaspora, local, and international actors to support them. Through such programs beneficiaries became a part of a community that can support and learn from one another, express themselves and share experiences, and discuss and demonstrate how having access to safe shelters improves their overall mental health, physical wellbeing, and livelihoods.

ANNEX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Photo 15: IOM project staff and partners from DEMAC, Haiti Renewal Alliance, PUSO Foundation, New Ways and Hand in Hand for Development present at a session of the 2020 Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW). © IOM 2020



Photo 16: Still from a panel discussion as part of a diapora engagement in disaster preparedness training in Bangladesh, with partner UDiON Foundation. © IOM 2019

Partner Agencies

The Safe Shelters Project in all its phases is a project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. The project would not have been possible without the coordination and collaboration with IOM country and regional offices including IOM Haiti, the IOM Regional Office in San José, Costa Rica, IOM Philippines, IOM Bangladesh, IOM Liberia, and others. Equally as vital to the successes of the project were the partnering diaspora organizations at various phases of the project:

- Haiti Renewal Alliance
- National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA)
- Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF)
- Pilipino Senior Resource Center (PSRC)
- Purposeful Unconditional Service to Others Foundation (PUSO)
- Spreeha Foundation
- UDiON Foundation
- University of Colorado Boulder (Matt Koschmann, PhD)

Project Team

- Partnership coordination & project management: Roberta Romano (IOM), Chelsea Cooper (IOM), Abigail Maristela (IOM), Dr. Jay Gonzalez (PSRC), Xavier Génot
- Project support: Federico Rodriguez, Daphne Henning
- Monitoring and evaluation: Rowena Symss and Silviu Kondan

ANNEX 2: WEBLIOGRAPHY

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Annual Report 2020. OCHA. 2020. Available here: <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/2020%20OCHA%20annual%20report.pdf>
2. Update on 2017 Progress. Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DEMAC). 2017. Available here: https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2018/Jun/2018%20Initiatives%20Updates_DEMAC_final_22%20June.pdf
3. Diaspora Humanitarianism - Transnational Ways of Working. DEMAC. 2016. Available here: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/diaspora-humanitarianism-transnational-ways-working>
4. Diaspora engagement mapping: Philippines. European Union Diaspora Facility (EUDIF). 2020. Available here: <https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/library/philippines/>
5. Philippines: Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 6. OCHA. 2018. Available here: <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/philippines-humanitarian-bulletin-issue-6-july-2018>
6. Building A Resilient Recovery: Philippines Economic Update. World Bank. 2020. Available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/32c4198c-5961-5dc1-a296-e94ba2a3c3c8/content>
7. Disaster risk reduction in the Philippines. Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Regional Office for Asia and Pacific. 2019. Available here: <https://www.undrr.org/publication/disaster-risk-reduction-philippines>
8. Bangladesh Diaspora Assessment Final Report. USAID. 2015. Available here: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KM7B.pdf
9. Diaspora engagement mapping: Bangladesh. European Union Diaspora Facility (EUDIF). 2020. Available here: https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF_Bangladesh-v.8.pdf
10. Bangladesh INFORM Sub-National Risk Index 2022. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. 2022. Available here: <https://www.undrr.org/publication/bangladesh-inform-sub-national-risk-index-2022>
11. Bangladesh. Climate Change Knowledge Portal. 2021. Available here: <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/bangladesh/vulnerability>
12. Haitian Migration through the Americas: A Decade in the Making. 2021. Migration Policy Institute. Available here: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/haitian-migration-through-americas>
13. Haiti: Country Overview. 2023. World Bank. Available here: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>

