

FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Newsletter

Hi Everyone! Hope all is well. Here is my first Newsletter from the Philippines! I'm hoping to share one every month or so with summaries of my assignment and fun adventures ☺

Miss you all very much!

P.S. I've been reading about the devastating fires, sending positive wishes to California!

- P



From The Philippines: October Newsletter

By: Patricia



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HAPPY HALLOWEEN!



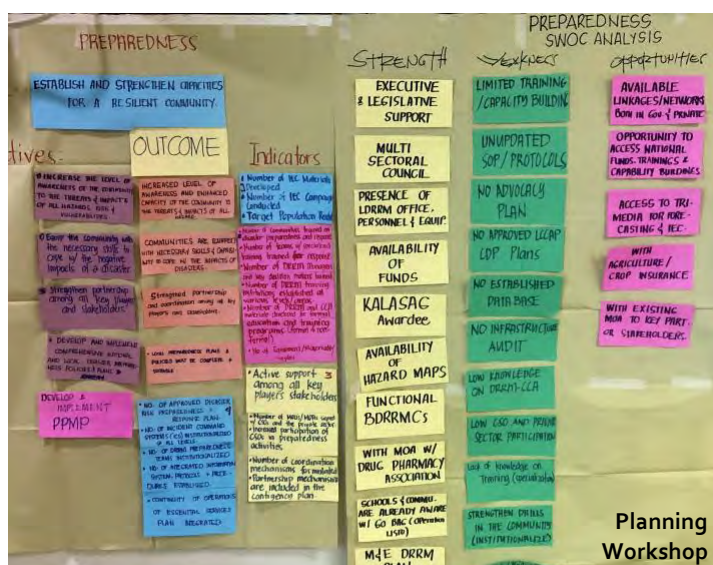
From the Philippines: November Newsletter



Water Safety Training



Operation Listo



Planning Workshop

Hello everyone! As I write this, I'm secretly craving all of the Thanksgiving leftovers I missed this year- especially mixed berry pies and sweet potatoes with marshmallows, yummy! Although I did not celebrate Thanksgiving this year, I did take time to be thankful for family, friends, my Planning community, my Filipino community, and all of the amazing adventures life has to offer.

November was a busy month here in the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office. Our days were packed with workshops, trainings... and occasional serendipitous travel.

November Activities



Water Safety Training

Part of our responsibilities include teaching the basics of swimming and rescue techniques to different “barangays” (neighborhoods) in the municipality of La Trinidad. Since the municipality is located in the mountains, many residents do not know how to swim. We provide swimming lessons that may prove useful in flood disaster situations or beach holidays.

Children Preparedness Bootcamp

Around 100 children from different schools in La Trinidad attended our “Preparedness Bootcamp” to learn about natural disasters, nutrition, safety, and other preparedness and health topics. My presentation focused on the basics of disaster risk reduction.



Operation Listo for Teachers

Operation Listo prepares teachers to educate their students on disaster preparedness. The workshop includes presentations and games that can be incorporated in the classroom. My portion, called “May Alam” (Things You Should Know) focuses on the causes and warning signs of natural disasters. We also played a game called “Disaster Awareness Jeopardy.”

Planning Workshop

Similar to a Planning Charrette, representatives from different departments across the municipality met to discuss updates to the 2020-2025 Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Plan. The group came up with goals, objectives, and recommendations for the next 6 years in disaster management. My task was to lead the Response workgroup.



For Fun!

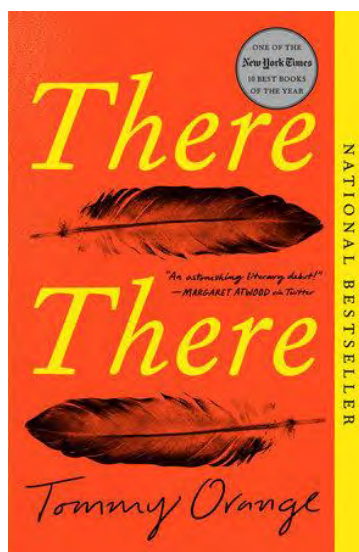


Chasing Waterfalls

One of the perks of living in the mountains is the abundance of waterfalls. After running a 5k, a group of us hiked to find several waterfalls not yet touched by tourism. It was a wonderful and exhausting day.

Under the Sea

My friend and I took one weekend to go scuba diving in Anilao (2 hours south of Manila). We went diving in a beautiful and colorful coral bed, filled with hundreds of tropical fish, eels, nudibranchs, mantis shrimp, and sea snakes! It was very difficult to get out of the water. I wish I had an underwater camera to capture the moment!



Book Recommendation

I have challenged myself to read more books this year, and my favorite so far has been "There There" by Tommy Orange. Through fictional narratives, the book tells the story of several Native Americans living in modern-day Oakland. The characters go through hardships and attempt to understand their native identity while living in the city. I thought it was a very powerful and honest novel. It is considered one of the best books of the year and a New York Times bestseller. If you're looking for a book to read this holiday season, I recommend this one!

That's all for now, until next time! Happy Holidays!

From the Philippines

December Newsletter

Hello again! Hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and happy new year! Much like in the U.S., December was a month filled with food, festivities, and travel! The office held a few workshops, and I continued making progress on the flood study. For the holidays, other volunteers and I took time to explore much of the natural beauty the Philippines has to offer.

Rescue Olympics

The Municipality of Bokod invited our office to serve as “judges” in their annual Rescue Olympics. During the year, various community volunteer teams receive training on first aid and life support, meant to empower community members to take action during emergencies before help arrives. The purpose of the Rescue Olympics is for the different volunteer teams to compete and showcase their skills in emergency response.



Bye 2019

Floodplain Site Visit

As part of the flood study, I organized a site visit with the engineer in our office to learn more about flood flows in the community.



River tributaries along the community are constrained, as seen in the above picture of Bolo Creek, which overtops its banks after heavy rains. Sediment washes down from the mountains and builds up along the channel. Aside from natural constraints, residences on the left and agricultural fields on the right further constrain the channel. My office plans on dredging this tributary, but is waiting on funding.

As seen below, a few landowners have taken advantage of the excess sediment along the banks to maximize crop production...



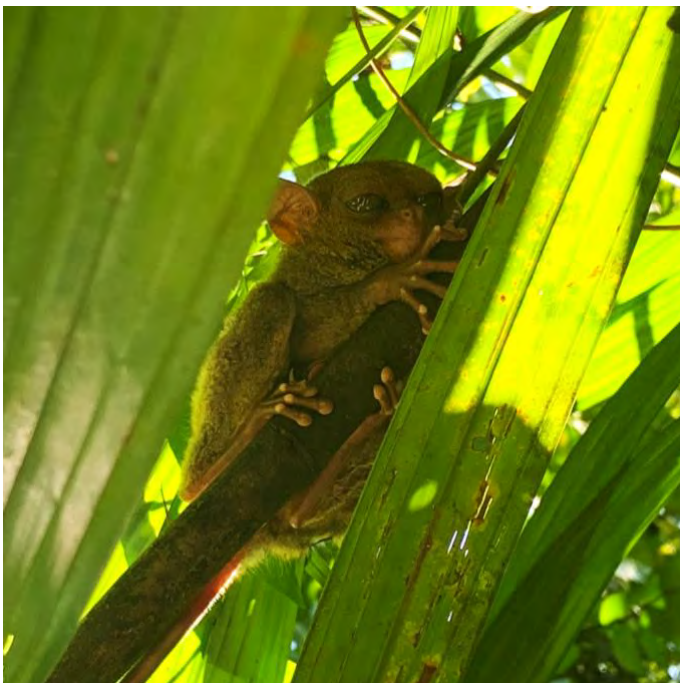
Hello 2020

Holiday Travels

To celebrate Christmas and New Years, a few other Peace Corps volunteers and I visited the islands of Siquijor and Bohol. It was a beautiful getaway

with scuba diving, waterfalls, and hiking. This time around, we made sure to pack an underwater camera!

We saw crystal blue waters at the Cambugahay Falls in Siquijor, and tarsiers at a sanctuary in Bohol. **Tarsiers are the world's smallest primates, an adult is the size of a fist.** Through a volunteer, we met **the mayor of a municipality in Bohol, and had lunch with his family... his specialty** is delicious home-made coconut wine. We spent a few days scuba diving in Balicasag and saw beautiful coral walls and **marine life...** I obtained my certification to become an Advanced Open Water Diver!



Happy New Year 2020! Until next time!

FROM THE PHILIPPINES: *January Newsletter*



Mines View Park, Baguio City

The entire world may collectively agree January 2020 was a mess. In the Philippines, between volcano eruptions and the outbreak of coronavirus, it was no different. Is it too late to request a 2020 refund? I heard a lady say it best during our monthly municipal meeting, “Let’s hope February brings better days.”

For me personally, it wasn’t all bad. I am more than halfway done with my assignment, which means projects are heating up! January was mostly spent working hard and hiding out in the mountains whenever I found time.

Peace Corps Grant Awarded!

The Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office has been awarded a grant to print 6,000 copies of SPK's very own "I Am Ready Flood Preparedness Activity Book." The book will be distributed across elementary schools in La Trinidad, to students from kindergarten to the third grade.

As part of the grant project, trainings are being held for teachers with a focus on communicating flood preparedness education to children, as seen in the photo to the right.



Flood Study Gets Media Coverage

The Philippine Information Agency, a government agency with a mission in public communication, visited our offices for a series of interviews. I was interviewed (on the spot!) about the flood study, which resulted in an article... mostly accurate, not too terribly quoted.

www.pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1032673



Joined an outdoor climbing community!



Outdoor climbing is a popular activity in the mountainous region where I'm located. This month I faced my fears and gave it a shot! It has been a challenging and fun sport, within an encouraging climbing community.

Climb on!




Stay calm and
don't panic


Coronavirus
is in the air

Happy February! Until next time!

From the Philippines

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER

 [I Am Ready Flood Activity Book is Here](#)

 [Communicating Disaster Preparedness Through Game Simulation](#)

 [Hiking the Highest Peak in Luzon](#)

Happy Leap Year! February is the coldest month in the Philippines, and La Trinidad earned the title of coldest place in the entire country this season, recording a chilly 43°F!

Aside from spending the entire month unexpectedly underdressed, life in the mountains was well spent!

Workshops and trainings were in full swing. Flood preparedness communication trainings for teachers, which began last month, continued and were finalized. We also attended a few seminars on the benefits of using gaming to communicate disaster preparedness.



LOCAL ARTIST FOCUSES ON MATERNAL EXPRESSION

Highlight of the month. A few other volunteers and I were invited through a mutual friend to visit the art gallery of local artist, Ergo. His paintings focus on depicting indigenous mothers, specifically their facial expressions. The picture above shows a portion of his current work-in-progress, a 3ft by 20ft painting, which he calls his “2020 masterpiece.” Ergo’s gallery also happened to be the perfect spot to enjoy the sunset with a hot cup of coffee.

I Am Ready Flood Preparedness Activity Book

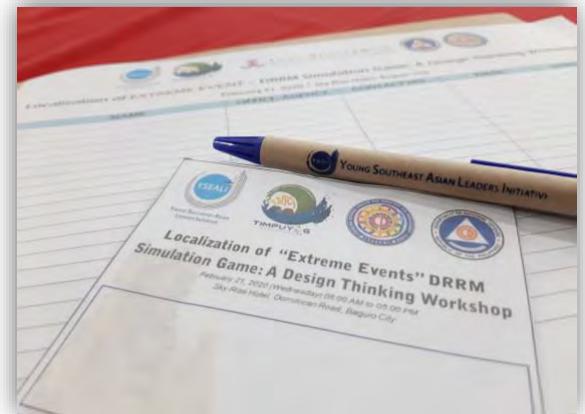


SPK's Flood Preparedness Activity Book is ready to be distributed across elementary schools in La Trinidad! In February, 3,000 copies were delivered to the office, with 3,000 more copies expected in March. Book deliveries will be combined with a presentation on Disaster Preparedness for kids. The mayor of La Trinidad was shown the activity book and he is delighted with the project.

Gaming & Disaster Preparedness



Communicating disaster preparedness can be boring at best, and spread panic at worst. One way to increase productive engagement is to turn concepts and lessons into a game. A local freelancer has been working on developing a board game where players have to survive 13 rounds of disasters, as seen in the picture above (very fun). We also attended an Extreme Event Simulation Game workshop (right). Similar to a table-top exercise, the game encouraged different stakeholders to work together and share resources.





SUNRISE AT MT. PULAG

For the general public, Mt. Pulag is known as the highest peak in Luzon, towering at 9,600 ft. But by locals, it is considered one of the most sacred sites in the region. The Ibalois people believe Mt. Pulag is home to spirits, and it is where souls go once they leave the body.

To ensure the cultural sensitivity of this UNESCO Heritage Centre is acknowledged, all visitors are required to watch an educational video on the history of Mt. Pulag. Additionally, all groups must hike with a local guide. The guide ensures visitors keep the park clean and follow rules, including “keeping quiet.” According to locals, screaming can anger spirits and bring rain.

Mt. Pulag is popular for its sea of clouds, which appears at sunrise. We began our hike at 2am, using headlamps. We made it to the summit by 5:30am, found a sunrise spot, and saw one of the most beautiful sunrises that probably exist. No wonder Mt. Pulag is a national treasure.



That's all for now! Until next month. Remember to wash your hands!!



From The Philippines *March Newsletter*

Covid Edition



“Peace Corps evacuating volunteers worldwide amid outbreak”

“Given 24 hours to pack and leave host countries”

“Heartbreaking to have to say goodbye so quickly”

“Peace Corps Faces Uncertain Future with No Volunteers in Field”

“For the first time in its history, Peace Corps sends home over 7,000 volunteers”

“None of us saw it ending this way”



Wait, What Happened?

Hello everyone! Apologies for the delay in the newsletter. You may have heard... a pandemic is wreaking havoc around the world right now. Crazy. So, what did covid mean for Peace Corps?

On March 13, Peace Corps Philippines made the decision to evacuate its volunteers back to the U.S. Two days later, Peace Corps Headquarters announced they would be evacuating all 7,000 volunteers, in over 60 countries, for the first time in history.

Each volunteer has their own evacuation story. For me, the hardest part was having 24 hours to pack and say goodbye to my community. I became close with coworkers, teachers, my host family, and other volunteers. The sudden news made it impossible to personally say goodbye to everyone. The Philippines highly values interpersonal relations, and Peace Corps encourages us to build strong relationships with our communities. Leaving without a proper “despedida,” or farewell, felt inadequate. Everyone understood, and I was reminded we were only “an iMessage away.”

The good news is that we were able to successfully distribute the “I Am Ready” Flood Preparedness coloring books to all students! We visited the last school only two days before receiving evacuation orders. Over 3,000 coloring books were distributed, and 3,000 additional copies remain at the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office for future use. I volunteered to finish the flood study remotely since all site visits had already been completed.

So, What Now?

I now find myself with family in Puerto Rico, where we are all quarantined together, spending (maybe too much) quality time. I am keeping busy by finalizing the flood study and working on Peace Corps administrative and close-out reports. Although my assignment was cut short, I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to serve. Peace Corps was a wonderful adventure.

Most importantly I am keeping life in perspective. Remaining thankful to have health and stability in a time so uncertain and unstable.

If the world permits, I should be back in Sacramento and at SPK in mid-May. Very excited to catch up with everyone, even if it's virtually.

This is the last newsletter! Thank you for sharing this journey with me. Here are a few pictures of my last weeks in the beautiful Philippines— visiting schools, presenting to the Mayor of La Trinidad, and spending time with friends and family ☺

See you all soon!





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