

## **Statement of Ms. Monica Piquero Tan**

**Monica Piquero Tan**, 46 years old, Research and Planning Officer at the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Office of the Municipality of San Francisco, Camotes Island, Cebu.

*(The Statement of Ms. Monica Piquero Tan was taken through phone call on 21 November 2018 by Atty. Hasminah D. Paudac, together with Ms. Desiree Llanos Dee and Mr. Mohamad Rayyan Domado, inside the office of Greenpeace Southeast Asia – Philippines, located at JGS Building, 30 Scout Tuazon Street, Brgy. Laging Handa, Quezon City.)*

**Q1: Can you please give us a brief information about yourself?**

A1: I am Monica Piquero Tan, a solo parent of two (2) kids. My eldest is fourteen (14) years old and the other one is eleven (11) years old. I have been separated from my husband for the last five (5) years, or since 2013. I am presently connected with the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Office of the Municipality of San Francisco, Camotes Island, Cebu. I have been there for almost eight (8) years already.

**Q2: As a Research and Planning Officer of the City's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, what are your duties or responsibilities?**

A2: I generally do coordination work with the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Committee. It is more on planning. Considering that our office is relatively new, we are guided by the principles of Republic Act No. 10121<sup>1</sup> or the DRRM Law. Almost everyone of us working in this office has no proper orientation about risk reduction and management, but we did not look at it as a hindrance because we researched about it and studied our scope of work. Personally, I have experiences on risk reduction and management when we had project with Plan International as LGU-partner where we have worked and coordinated with the DRRM offices and other civil society organizations.

Aside from it, I am also a support staff for MENRO<sup>2</sup> and MPDC<sup>3</sup> in the formulation of the Forest Land Use Plan, Solid Waste Management Plan, and Comprehensive Land Use Plan and to the Mayor's office in accessing the People Survival Fund (PSF). I consider myself a multi-tasking employee.

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<sup>1</sup>Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010

<sup>2</sup> Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office

<sup>3</sup> Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator

**Q3: Have you personally experienced calamities or super typhoons?**

A3: When I was 12 years old and in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I experienced Typhoon Nitang<sup>4</sup>. I remembered it was during the month of September. What I recall was that we have a two-storey house which was damaged. We were not able to recover any thing from our house. At that time, they told us that it was tidal wave, not tsunami or storm surge. That is only a small knowledge from the community when we were not yet familiar with storm surge.

Our community was severely hit— we did not have electricity and water at that time. We were located in a coastal area and I recall that the wives of fishermen were waiting beside the coastal shores. There was one fishing vessel, composed of fifteen (15) fishermen, which overturned. They were hoping that their husbands would survive, but only one (1) turned out alive. There were no formal responders during that time. Only their fisher folks were looking for them for rescue. After four (4) days of rescue operation, dead bodies were retrieved.

**Q4: At such a young age you experienced such event. What did you feel at that time?**

A4: It was a horrifying experience. I was afraid seeing our neighbors crying when they confirmed that the retrieved body was their father or brother. For such a young age, I had trauma from a typhoon for recalling myself homeless, no electricity, no enough supply of food, no kitchen utensils to be used for cooking. I remembered that we hollow out our clothes and some other appliances in the mud that were thrown out fifty (50) meters away from our house.

**Q5: Other than Typhoon Nitang (internationally known as Typhoon Ike), were you able to experience any disastrous typhoon of late?**

A5: Yes, I experienced super typhoon Yolanda or Haiyan in November 2013.

**Q6: Can you please share your experience when super typhoon Yolanda or Haiyan hit your place?**

A6: Yes. I was actually nervous at that time because of the trauma I experienced back in 1984 with Typhoon Nitang. I did not want to undergo the same experience, especially because I have kids now and I do not want them to experience the same horror. As a mother, I want to protect them so that they would not feel fear. I also have an obligation towards the community because they rely on the information from the DRRM Council or what our office gives. People were calling me at that time to cater to their needs. When electricity was cut off, what I did was to reach out through text messages to people I know in Albay in order to get an update on the direction and intensity of super typhoon Yolanda.

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<sup>4</sup>Internationally known as Typhoon Ike which hit the Philippines in 1984

**Q7: Can you walk us through the day that super typhoon hit your place? How was it like?**

A7: One (1) week before Typhoon Haiyan came, we were already informed by Commissioner Yeb Saño<sup>5</sup> to keep safe because Camotes will be potentially hit based on the different typhoon tracker or model projection. We did an emergency MDRRMC meeting for all members to ensure all preparedness actions will be taken and LGU's capacities will be assessed. We did *Recorida* (public announcement) to all fifteen (15) barangays aside from our written advisory.

The day before the typhoon passed in our town, we, the DRRM front liners, were already exhausted from answering the needs in the evacuation areas where we already evacuated thousands of vulnerable families living in the danger zone. In our office, before the electricity was cut off around past 12:00 midnight, we had already a sort of confirmation that for all the models and paths stated that we were surely be hit, but we were thinking that it would arrive late as expected. Before I left the Emergency Operation Center (EOC), my friend from Albay told me that, based on their typhoon tracker, Haiyan will landfall as early as expected. I came to a realization that I have never safeguarded all my important belongings in the house and our preparedness is not yet enough. We do not have any man in the house who can do all the carpentry works, such as putting additional wood cover in the window and main door to prevent the entry of the rain.

The whole night I could not sleep since we were monitoring the situation in our town. Past 7:00 in the morning, we transferred to the rooms where we felt that my kids and I will be safe. Afterwards, I heard people knocking on our doors. Some of my neighbors evacuated to our house. They already occupied our two rooms, our living room, and kitchen. Some arrived wet and do not have any milk for their two (2) months old child. They immediately transferred to our house during the height of strong winds and rains. Earlier, I got news that Tacloban was badly hit due to storm surge after Yolanda's landfall in the city. After hearing this news, I called our team leader in the Camotes Islands Emergency Response Team (CiERT) to monitor families living in the coastal shores, which San Francisco has eleven (11) coastal barangays.

I recalled that time, when the CiERT team dropped by in my house and asked permission if they can do rescue operation for some families of co-responders whose houses were already damaged. I insisted for them not to go because it was no longer safe, as the winds became stronger. But I could not stop them from their brave intention to save families that are in need of help, especially that family of one of our responders whose wife and children were involved.

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<sup>5</sup> Then Commissioner of the Climate Change Commission

The pressured of being a SASAKAWA awardee also added burden on our jobs to aim zero casualty during those times. We felt that the entire world was excited to see us during that time. Are we worthy as recipient of that global prestigious award? Our responders did not mind about their lives (“*buwis-buhay*”) just to make sure every family living in our municipality was safe in exchange of their own safety. The principle of safety first did not apply during that time.

Fortunately, we did a great job and were successful in achieving ZERO casualty at that time, but we had lots of realization and “what ifs” when it came to our responders’ safety.

**Q8: Immediately after the super typhoon hit your place, what happened, if any?**

A8: Our house was partly damaged. Our kitchen was destroyed. We lost electricity and water. The cable connection for our internet was also damaged, making communication harder. Lots of debris; good thing that our van was not hit by a coconut tree when it fell down.

There were many houses damaged and uninhabitable, the roads were no longer passable, and electrical posts and fruit trees were toppled down. The municipal hall became useless because there was no power to run the computers and it was too hot since several trees were uprooted. Two days after was better— a generator was set up and the first group of rescuers from Cebu City helped to do clearing operations on the main roads.

**Q9: How long did you lose electricity and water provisions?**

A9: In our place in Poblacion, there was no electricity for almost two (2) months. We were even fortunate because in other *barangays*, it went on for three (3) to four (4) months. We were prioritized because the hospital and public agency were located in our *barangay*, so they really have to do everything to reactivate electricity and water in our *barangay*.

**Q10: How were you able to survive without electricity and water for almost two (2) months?**

A10: We went back to basics, like using gas and candle to have light. As to water, there was no access only for a week; so, it was still manageable. But in other *barangays*, it was really a struggle because they get water from a pump, which is operated only by power. Fortunately, someone lent a generator to them so they can use the pump.

**Q11: How about food? Was there any shortage?**

A11: Yes, but aid was received. There were food packs given to us. Relief goods came two (2) days after Yolanda. Also, I was able to stock some food in our house so it was not too hard for us, especially the kids. Before Yolanda, we were already educating our constituents, through purok (zoning) system approach, the seventy-two (72)-hour kit.

**Q12: What happened to the prices of basic commodities right after the super typhoon hit your community?**

A12: Prices went up. Like rice, from PhP30.00 per kilo, the price of a kilo of rice reached PhP40.00. The prices of basic commodities rose because of shortage. The items being sold at our grocery stores in Camotes Island were obtained from mainland Cebu. The prices were affected because, at that time, no one travelled to Cebu to get supplies or items.

**Q13: How were your two (2) kids at that time?**

A13: It was harder for my kids because their memories of the earthquake which happened a month (October) before Yolanda were still fresh. Two big calamities hit our place one after the other. It was doubly hard for them because they needed to adjust when the electricity was cut off and there was no access to water.

In terms of their education, there was an interruption for a week to clean up and restore damaged school properties. While they were able to go back to school two weeks after, the struggle to study and do their assignments were present due to lack of electricity. It was really hard for them.

**Q14: You mentioned that you were a single parent for the last five (5) years, which coincidentally was in 2013 when Yolanda hit, right?**

A14: Yes.

**Q15: How was it like to be a single parent in times of calamities?**

A15: It was hard because I was the only one who looked after my kids and made sure to provide for their needs. I cannot show them fear and weakness since I was their source of strength. It was painfully hard, but I have to soldier on. Calamities like this even make those already vulnerable more vulnerable.

**Q16: As someone who responds to calamities, how do you feel?**

A16: At first, it was hard for me given that I am a solo parent. But whenever I see that I was able to help and inspire many people to act, change their attitude, and increase their capacity through my work, I felt that this is a calling from God. I feel the importance of my work, especially in ensuring the safety of the community and giving them hope to carry on with their lives.

**Q17: Do you think you have fully recovered from the trauma and other effects super typhoon Haiyan brought to you and your family?**

A17: I cannot say that my family and I fully recovered because it was not an easy experience. It took me four (4) to five (5) years to move on, but it does not really mean full recovery.

**Q18: You mentioned you are working at the DRRM office of your municipality. What did you do, if any, immediately after the super typhoon hit your place?**

A18: Around 12:00 in the afternoon of the same day, it was relatively okay to walk outside. At that time, my initial response was I had to go to the operation center for me to see and assess the whole scenario of what happened before I could go to the actual operation. I have to check if all the responders were there.

To be honest, we were also struggling at that time especially on what to do. Our immersion provided by the Climate Change Commission through the Climate Change Action Plan quite helped us. The experience gave us added knowledge on vulnerability and assessment.

What was odd was that the creation of our office went first before the creation of the Provincial DRRM in Cebu. It was hard at that time since the communities were not yet empowered to take action and they did not know what to do. The science-based learning on climate change was not easily grasped. Good thing the climate projection really helped the community to quite prepare because we used the worst case scenario on climate risks and the vulnerability assessment in barangays. The people were, at least, given warning.

Also, at that time, I had the impression that member of MDRRMC are not fully-oriented on their respective duties. The importance of disaster risk reduction and management were only appreciated right after super typhoon Haiyan hit the country. In fact, some municipal councils did not understand the importance of DRRM offices.

**Q19: Do you have data or statistics with you that would show specific impacts of super typhoon Haiyan, like number of casualties, injuries sustained, extent of damage to infrastructures and public and private properties, loss of livelihood, etcetera? If yes, could you please walk us through those data?**

A19: As far as San Francisco, we estimated the total damage amounted to PhP163,750,390.00 (*source: San Francisco Rehabilitation Plan*). This comprises social sector, infrastructure, livelihood, and tourism. We had 6,760 families affected, which is equivalent to 27,772 individuals. On Damage Assessment Result for Infrastructures, the cost was PhP28,495,000.00, which includes schools and day care centers. agricultural damage amounting to PhP14,164,390, fisheries at PhP2,320,000.00, livestock at PhP151,500.00, tourism at PhP1,800,000.00. There were 875 totally damaged and 6,540 partially damaged houses in the entire municipality as assessed by San Francisco Yolanda Special Task Force.

**Q20: I have learned that after your super typhoon Haiyan experience, your community has zero casualty. How were you able to achieve this?**

A20: Yes, after super typhoon Haiyan, we have zero casualty. There were three (3) strong typhoons that hit Camotes Island before, but the casualties then were fishermen. After super typhoon Haiyan, there was no casualty. Only three (3) individuals got minor injuries, but they were rescued and brought to the hospital.

I think the vulnerability and capacity assessment we conducted before where we have identified and classified houses and did community mapping and climate projections helped to achieve zero casualty.

**Q21: What do you think is the most significant learning you gained from the devastating calamities you were able to survive on?**

A21: It is really important to prepare people, both at the family level and community or local government level. Everyone in the community should be educated about climate change and disaster risk reduction and management because they are the ones who would first respond to the situation. The government and other people and organizations who will give aid will come after, not during the typhoon. This is crucial in saving lives and reducing casualties and damages. It is useless if the knowledge is not shared or downloaded properly to the grassroots level because if the information, advice, or warning was already given, they would not understand and this would hinder or limit their capacity to act timely and correctly.

For example, my experience in Palo, Leyte, when I was hired as resource person in helping the municipality in crafting a DRRM plan in the most devastated *barangay*. During our three (3)-day training, one of the *barangay* captains narrated that we informed them about the storm surge, but people did not take it seriously because big waves are just ordinary occurrence for them. They did not evacuate because they did not fully understand what storm surge was or its context. If the warning that was relayed to them was tsunami, then they surely made safety precautions. This is in comparison with my experience in my place in Camotes Island wherein when we notified the people for force evacuation, they followed.

In any calamity or disaster, there is no exact formula. All you have to do is to teach or educate them. Community empowerment and preparedness through community-based intervention is effective to avoid or reduce risks.

**Q22: Since you have extensively worked on the ground and experienced first hand super typhoon Haiyan and other calamities, what do you think are the gaps needed to be addressed?**

A22: First, the implementation of the Pre-emptive Evacuation for all families living in hazardous areas such as slope, besides the creeks, river, lake, and coastal shores should be taken seriously. Barangay/Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council needs to strengthen their force by tapping partners and widening their networks. Response

Phase after disaster should be improved like proper tasking or the application of the Incident Command System (ICS). The presence of grassroots representative in Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan formulation is needed. Political interventions during the response phase should be minimized. Giving of relief and other immediate help should be transparent and quick.

Disaster Preparedness through *purok* (zoning) system approach is very useful and very crucial in the preparation stage. The ratio of manpower in B/MDRRMC versus the entire municipal population is not enough to address all the preparations needed. Family preparedness should be taken into consideration. The more prepared families there are in facing different hazards, the less hassle for the government side.

**Q23: I know you are knowledgeable about climate change due to trainings you have attended and because of your work. Do you think corporations, specifically coal, oil, gas, and cement companies (“Carbon Majors”) which were said to have fuelled climate change, have a role to play? If yes, what role should they play?**

A23: Yes, they should be responsible on the amount of damage they contributed to the environment. There will be a balance in all things. We understand that we are all entitled to live peacefully and progressively in an abundant environment that God has given us. We should also take consideration on the limitation of uses on our natural resources because we are all stewards. Sustainable development will only happen if we are all accountable for every action we make to our planet earth. We will not live sustainably if we have a dying planet, which no longer sustain our needs. The issue of climate change will not only distract our future, but the next generations to come. We should take seriously the problems brought by climate change.

**Q24: Based on your experience on the ground, how do they think these Carbon Majors could meaningfully help the government and the people?**

A24: Peaceably, they need to reach out and be a partner of the government in the implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation options to counter the damaging effect for every climate hazards in the Philippines.

**Q25: Are you ready and willing to swear this Statement under oath before the Commission on Human Rights if required to do so?**

A25: Yes.



**Monica Piquero Tan**

03 December 2018