

"HINABANGAY" STRENGTHENED THROUGH THE SCLR APPROACH:

A COMMUNITY-LED MODEL FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE IN POST-ODETTE SOCORRO

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The Sea Ambulance proposed by SECOFICO was officially launched in Barangay N. Sering, Socorro, and marks a significant step in improving emergency healthcare access for the island community.

OVERVIEW OF THE CRISIS

In December 2021, [Typhoon Odette \(Rai\)](#) struck the Visayas and Mindanao regions, displacing millions and [leaving 2.4 million Filipinos vulnerable](#). Socorro, in [Bucas Grande Islands](#) in Surigao del Norte, was among the [hardest-hit areas](#). The typhoon destroyed homes, livelihoods, and infrastructure, leaving the community in dire need of support.

In 2023, the devastation caused by Typhoon Odette in Socorro was compounded by a human-induced crisis involving the Socorro Bayanihan Services Incorporated (SBSI), which faced [serious allegations of abuse and exploitation](#). Regarded by some outsiders as "cult", the well-established SBSI reportedly attracted members to isolate themselves in the mountains following a series of 'end-time' signs including major earthquake in 2017, threat of Tsunami, the COVID-19 pandemic and then the Super Typhoon Odette (Rai).

Amid these challenges, Socorro demonstrated resilience rooted in its cultural tradition of "[hinabangay](#)" (helping each other). This deeply ingrained practice, enhanced by ECOWEB's Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) approach, became the foundation for a community-driven recovery and resilience model.

"HINABANGAY": THE CORNERSTONE OF RECOVERY

[Hinabangay](#) is a localized, intimate form of the Filipino value of "bayanihan," emphasizing collective action, free labor, and resource pooling to aid community members in need. It represents a deeply rooted cultural practice in Socorro, celebrated annually, where residents dedicate time to help each other rebuild homes, public facilities, livelihoods and community resources. The practice of *Hinabangay* has emerged as an essential community-led response, proving to be a life-saving initiative that empowers affected community members to swiftly recover from the impacts of devastating disasters. This tradition, deeply rooted in the resilience of this [geographically-vulnerable](#) communities to tropical storms in the southern Philippines, demonstrates their collective strength and solidarity in the face of recurring challenges.

After Typhoon Odette (Rai), *hinabangay* became the heart of the recovery effort. The traditional practice has proven to be the cornerstone of resilience of Socorro:

“**Paghuman sa Odette, nag hinabangay gyud mi tanan para makabarog mig balik. (After Odette, we all helped each other to stand again.)**
–Kapihan SHG Member

- **Shelter and Community Facilities Reconstruction:** Free labor and locally sourced materials were mobilized to repair and rebuild homes and community infrastructure. This tradition not only facilitates the immediate reconstruction of damaged houses and critical facilities after a disaster but also supports the continuous improvement of these structures through the community's regular month-long planned annual Hinabangay practice. Moreover, this collective effort sustains skill development, as skilled individuals pass on construction techniques to apprentices within each small group formed during every Hinabangay, fostering a culture of shared learning and community empowerment.
- **Livelihood Rehabilitation:** Collaborative efforts restored critical livelihoods, such as fishing, farming, and small enterprises, demonstrating the cyclical impact of such initiatives in sustaining community resilience. During Hinabangay, fisherfolk and farmers play a vital role by contributing food supplies to support those providing free labor for shelter reconstruction, livelihood restoration, and rehabilitation of community resources. This tradition extends to their regular month-long mutual aid activities conducted annually, further reinforcing the community's collective strength and resilience.
- **Life-Saving Support:** Immediate needs, such as access to clean water and emergency transportation, were prioritized through collective action. In time of disaster, the community of Socorro demonstrated remarkable solidarity by not only providing free labor to support their "indigent" members but also willingly contributing resources to assist the most vulnerable individuals and families who required additional help. This collective spirit underscores their commitment to ensuring no one is left behind during crises.

The SCLR approach did not replace this tradition but instead strengthened it by providing catalytic resources that enabled the community to enhance its community-led recovery efforts.

THE SCLR APPROACH: EMPOWERING LOCAL CAPACITIES



The Sitio Telen Farmers and Fisherfolks Organization (SITEFAFO)'s water system restoration program has significantly benefited not only its members but also nearby barangays and fisherfolk in Socorro, demonstrating the profound impact of "hinabangay" and community-driven initiatives.

The **Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR)** approach places communities at the center of disaster recovery, respecting and strengthening existing local practices. In Socorro, SCLR acted as a catalyst to enhance *hinabangay*:

- 1. Building on Local Capacities:** Micro-grants were tailored to support the principles of *hinabangay*, enabling community-led initiatives to address immediate and long-term needs. The 31 diverse actions undertaken by the 14 community groups in Socorro supported through the SCLR approach, exemplify how this strategy has reinforced the tradition of *hinabangay* in enhancing community resilience. These varied and complementary initiatives have not only directly benefited the groups' members but also positively impacted the wider community. Additionally, multi-cycle grants provided to several groups have further strengthened their capacity, enabling them to successfully implement one initiative after another, fostering sustained growth and resilience.
- 2. Promoting Sustainability:** While the initial micro-grants were designed to address the immediate needs of disaster-affected communities, the experience in Socorro has demonstrated that a community-led approach naturally prioritizes recovery and rebuilding efforts. Many recipient groups of the micro-cash grants quickly initiated livelihood recovery and projects to restore access to essential goods and services, going beyond addressing immediate needs such as shelter. Initiatives like group-managed mini-groceries, mini-hardware stores, water systems, and fishing and farming livelihood recovery exemplify how nexus actions are realized through a community-led approach. More sustainable actions are enabled thru the subsequent micro-grants have further enabled more sustainable actions, such as environmental restoration, and the development of vital community service facilities, such as the sea ambulance, showcasing the transformative potential of community-driven resilience and recovery efforts.
- 3. Fostering Collaboration:** Community groups, both existing and newly formed after Typhoon Odette, have gone beyond their members' priority needs by initiating actions that benefit the wider community. This approach naturally fostered horizontal connection between and among groups, particularly those with shared concerns and complementary capacities. Their collective actions brought significant benefits to the broader community and strengthened their relationships with the government other external stakeholders. The micro-grants and the empowerment process have further built the confidence of community groups, enabling them to leverage their resources more effectively and enhance their capacities in collaboration with the government as demonstrated by the support provided by the Barangay Local Government and to the commitments expressed by other government agencies to help support the sustainable operation of the sea ambulance.

Microgrant projects in Socorro, Bucas Grande Island.

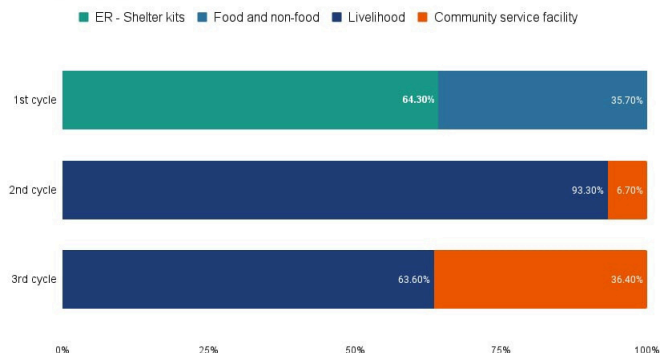


Fig 1. Summary of Types of Projects initiated using Micro-Grants thru sclr approach in Bucas Grande (2022-2024).

“ Everything was entrusted to us [the entire implementation process], and we felt empowered by it. Because of this trust, we were able to prove ourselves and show incredible progress. ”
 –Dorotheo Galavia, Operational Manager, ARCACO



Initially, the AFCOWA SHG received a cash grant for emergency relief (1st cycle) as a group, to which they planned and decided to distribute evenly among their group members. Having excess funds from it, they pooled those remaining funds to put up as counterparts for their 2nd proposal, a hog-raising initiative. Due to the previous threat of African Swine Fever (ASF), their hog-raising was not sustained. However, AFCOWA still had to return from the setbacks and continue their livelihood project by amending their proposal to a rice trading project. Incredibly, the AFCOWA SHG was able to implement their livelihood initiative successfully, they were able to complement their initiative with other humanitarian aid aside from ECOWEB (e.g. SIKAT and DOLE). Their income was shared among members and the broader community by conducting coastal clean-ups, tree planting, and feeding programs in Socorro. Aside from this, they also allocate a separate fund for emergencies through monthly contributions (5 pesos per month) and 10% of their income. All of the budget, income, and funding received by the group were noted and tabulated in their log-book records, wherein they keep all of their funds into a safe box responsible managed by the group, and their secretary or treasurer keeps records of it and conducts monthly meetings to discuss their financial status to maintain transparency.



The Sitio Telen Farmers and Fisherfolks Organization (SITEFAFO) focused on improving access to essential resources such as water systems while fostering sustainable livelihoods. Initially, the group proposed hog-raising as a livelihood project. However, the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) caused significant losses, forcing them to pivot. The remaining funds from the microgrant were repurposed to establish a sari-sari store, demonstrating the group's adaptability and resilience. This shift not only preserved their livelihood efforts but also fostered a sense of dignity among members, as one participant expressed: "We now have our own resources and no longer rely solely on government aid."

The project also brought substantial improvements to community well-being, including enhanced access to water through bamboo planting to secure a stable water source. Beyond tangible benefits, SITEFAFO strengthened relationships within the group and the broader community, emphasizing the importance of *hinabangay*—the spirit of mutual aid and cooperation. Open communication, mutual understanding (*sinabtanay*), and *bayanihan* (communal unity) became foundational values for the group, driving their collective success.

Through ECOWEB's sclr approach, the group gained skills in gardening, financing, crop production, organic farming, bookkeeping, and operational management systems. CoMSCA (community savings and credit association) further supported their sustainability. The SCLR approach empowered SITEFAFO to take ownership of their projects, making processes straightforward and inclusive, with minimal bureaucratic barriers.

Despite challenges such as credit risks that could threaten the sari-sari store, SITEFAFO continues to thrive, benefiting over 80 individuals, including 16 families directly and 20 others indirectly. The project's success highlights the transformative impact of SCLR, which not only provides immediate relief but fosters sustainable solutions, community cohesion, and long-term independence.

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 –Dorotheo Galavia, Operational Manager, ARCACO



The synergy of hinabangay and ECOWEB's Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) approach empowered community groups like SECOFICO in Socorro to not only rebuild after Typhoon Odette but also sustain innovative projects like the sea ambulance.

SUCCESSSES

The combination of hinabangay and the SCLR approach resulted in significant outcomes:

- Operational and Sustaining Community Groups:** Of the 14 community groups assisted in their hinabangay for recovery from Typhoon Odette, 85.7% remain active and have successfully advanced through multiple grant cycles. Apart from sustaining organizational and project operations, groups have also started to extend community service out from the income of their income generating projects. One example is the Atoyay Farmers Community Workers Association (AFCOWA) that already conducted children feeding program and coastal clean-up activities utilizing a portion of their income. They also allocated 10% of their income as reserve for disaster response. Monetary benefits extended to members and community from their income even exceeded already the total micro-grants received initially from ECOWEB.
- Reconstructed Lives:** Among the inspiring stories is of the ARCACO group that spearheaded the rebuilding of homes while undertaking environmental initiatives, such as mangrove planting, and constructing sanitation and water system facilities. These efforts not only benefited the organization's 400+ members but also provided critical support to nearby communities during the seven-month drought that impacted the island in 2024. Leveraging their leadership and resourcefulness, the group utilized savings from the labor costs of a government-funded reforestation project, along with funds from an ECOWEB micro-grant for their water project, to build a much-needed Farmers' Training Center. These initiatives reflect ARCACO's unwavering commitment to sustain able development and fostering community resilience.
- Innovative Solutions:** SCLR encourages innovation. SECOFICO addressed the healthcare needs of their remote community by prioritizing the construction of a sea ambulance for their third cycle grant, ensuring timely medical access for residents. Simultaneously, they expanded their mini-hardware store to provide more affordable access to shelter and boat-building materials. This initiative significantly reduced the reliance on costly boat transportation to procure these essential supplies from the town center, enhancing the overall resilience and self-sufficiency of their island community.
- Stronger Social Cohesion and Collaboration:** Groups like SAFWA and AFCOA extended their support beyond members, organizing feeding programs, tree planting, and other community-focused initiatives. Initiatives such as sea ambulance also fostered collaboration with local and national government agencies ushering sustainable operation of the community-led initiatives. The encouragement of horizontal linkaging as a principle of SCLR resulted to the formation of a federation of groups strengthened thru sclr approach in Socorro.



The Sering Community Fishermen Cooperative (SECOFICO) in Socorro, Surigao del Norte, stands as a testament to the power of collective action and resilience. Established in the aftermath of Typhoon Odette, SECOFICO began its journey when its initial 16 members received cash assistance worth ₱35,200 through ECOWEB's Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) approach. Rather than using the funds individually, they pooled their resources to establish a mini hardware store, which quickly grew, drawing more members and expanding its services to nearby barangays and passing boats.

With a second microgrant from ECOWEB, SECOFICO increased its store's capital, further solidifying its role in the community. By the time they received a third microgrant, the cooperative envisioned a project with an even greater impact: a sea ambulance to address the island's critical healthcare challenges. Launched in November 2024, this initiative exemplifies hinabangay, the community's deeply rooted tradition of mutual aid and shared responsibility.

SECOFICO's journey reflects how inclusive approaches like SCLR empower communities to lead their recovery and development, turning challenges into opportunities for growth and solidarity. Today, SECOFICO continues to thrive, driven by its commitment to serving both its members and the larger community.

“ We have some excess from the grant. We realized that we needed livelihood to sustain ourselves, so we put those funds into livelihood projects. ”
-Fretchelen Bato, SAFORLA SHG Member

“ Hinabangay truly embodies what it means to be united. Through this, we not only rebuild but create opportunities to uplift the entire community. ”
- Shanie Guma, AFCOA Member

CHALLENGES

Despite the successes, the recovery process faced several challenges:

- Limited Technical Skills:** A lack of expertise in managing complex and technical projects, combined with limited resources, posed significant challenges in the implementation of initiatives such as the sea ambulance and fish cage project.
- Environmental Risks:** Weather disruptions and livestock mortality posed ongoing threats to project success.
- Organizational Constraints:** Some groups faced challenges in financial management and resource allocation.
- Compounding crisis:** Alleged abuse of members of multi-decades old SBSI that gained national news coverage, resulted to displacement of more families in 2023 from their encampment including relatives and friends of members of the community groups assisted by ECOWEB, prompting some recipient groups to extend support. SBSI has been known as a group that strongly established the "hinabangay system".

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Cherry Mae Piaodgingding, an SHG member of Bucas Grande Aquamarine Producers Cooperative (BUGAPCO) in Barangay N. Sering, Socorro shares her insights during a learning session after Typhoon Odette's devastation. During Typhoon Odette's aftermath, *hinabangay* played a crucial role in helping the community rebuild their lives. Initially a small group of 11 members (now 81), the cooperative used cash assistance from ECOWEB and other agencies to establish a snack house/bakery and later pivoted to building a pump boat, benefiting not only members but the entire community. The cooperative's initiatives extended beyond its members, benefiting the wider community—a reflection of the *hinabangay* ethos. Through ECOWEB's Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) approach, the cooperative experienced a fast, inclusive process that empowered them to lead their recovery. "The assistance was given directly to us—fast and uncomplicated," Cherry Mae shared, appreciating how ECOWEB's support aligned with their needs. BUGAPCO's initiatives now include using an established water system to maintain their equipment and adding functionalities like fire prevention. The cooperative also shares resources with grants from DOLE, reinforcing their commitment to inclusivity and community growth. Looking ahead, BUGAPCO dreams of transforming their area into a tourist destination, showcasing their collective achievements.

“ In some cases, we struggled with how to manage resources efficiently. But with guidance and the spirit of *hinabangay*, we found ways to continue. ”
 - Cherry Mae Piaodgingding, BUGAPCO SHG Member

LESSONS LEARNED

- Leverage Local Capacities:** *Hinabangay* as a traditional practice of mutual aid demonstrated its strength as a foundation for recovery, proving that existing community practices can be enhanced with flexible grants and empowering support.
- Flexible and Empowering Assistance:** The adaptability of SCLR process and flexibility of micro-grants that allow community groups to address both immediate and long-term needs fosters community-led nexus actions ushering community resilience building even after a disaster.
- Encourage Multi-Level Collaboration:** Supporting horizontal linkage between and among community groups across barangays and vertically with government and other stakeholders maximize SCLR impact and ensure sustainability of initiatives.
- Focus on Capacity Strengthening:** Flexible SCLR support that builds on existing *capacities* and not only on needs is essential for sustainable recovery and ensuring dignity of people are respected in crises-response, as demonstrated by [the sea ambulance project initiated by SECOFICO](#).



Ralina Flores, treasurer of the Sta. Cruz Women's Mabungahon Association, stands inside their thriving rice trading store—a project born from their collective resilience and vision. After Typhoon Odette, the association used their first microgrant to provide shelter kits, helping members rebuild their homes. Their second microgrant laid the foundation for this rice trading store, which now serves both members and the wider community by providing accessible, affordable rice. Beyond their livelihood efforts, the association organizes community clean-ups and feeding programs for children, exemplifying *hinabangay*.

“ *Hinabangay* is more than helping each other—it's about building a future together. ”
 Lenie Degamon, SAFORLA Member



Teacher Jasmine Reese Humadas, a volunteer teacher and member of SAFWA's "Aral Hub" (Learning Hub), teaching one of their students to read. SAFWA extended vital services to displaced families from the SBSI enclave through its Aral Hub and shelter project. Recognizing the educational challenges faced by displaced children, SAFWA's Aral Hub initiative provided learning sessions, access to educational materials, and essential school supplies, ensuring that young students in Socorro could continue their education despite difficult circumstances. Additionally, SAFWA facilitated a shelter project to address the immediate housing needs of these families, showcasing their commitment to uplifting vulnerable communities and fostering resilience among their members.

CONCLUSION

Socorro's recovery after Typhoon Odette showcases the power of combining local traditions like *hinabangay* with flexible and empowering external support through the SCLR approach. By building on existing capacities and fostering community-driven solutions, Socorro transformed a devastating crisis into an opportunity for empowerment and resilience. Their story serves as a testament to the strength of collective action and offers a model for disaster recovery that recognizes cultural identity, strengthens local leadership, and upholds the dignity, rights and capacity of people even in crisis situation..



Two members of the Sta. Cruz Farmers and Fisherfolks Association prepares their nets as they set out to sea. They used their microgrants to purchase fishing gear as well as set up a hog-raising livelihood project.

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The **Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits (ECOWEB), Inc.** has been applying the survivor and community led crisis response (sclr) approach since 2017 and has worked with around a thousand community self-help groups over the 7-year period.

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