



**DISASTERS IN ASIA**



HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
**ASIA CENTER**

# Harvard University Asia Center Disasters in Asia

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The Asia Center has for many years been deeply committed to and supported research and academic activities focused on responses to natural disasters. Beginning with supporting academic activities such as seminars and conferences, we have in more recent years become involved in a broader range of efforts, both in Cambridge and overseas. We have also developed new collaborations with colleagues from across Harvard representing a greater breadth of disciplines and expertise.



Photo from *High Ground: Disaster Risk and Resilience in the Philippines* exhibit in 2017 by photographer Aubrey P. Graham, co-sponsored by the Harvard University Asia Center and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.

# DISASTERS IN ASIA INTERDISCIPLINARY WORKING GROUP

The Asia Center has convened faculty members and researchers from across the University to address disasters in different regions of Asia. Coming from Harvard's professional schools as well as the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the group offers a range of disciplinary expertise and experience. Participants represent the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health; the Department of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design; the Program on Crisis Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government; the Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute (a University-wide interfaculty initiative); the Harvard China Fund (a University-wide interfaculty initiative); and the Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies and the Korea Institute, both in the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The team is developing a two-year plan to create strategies that interconnect immediate disaster response with later socio-economic and structural development of affected sites.

In fall 2018 the Asia Center will host an international conference on “**Disasters: The Transition from Humanitarian Response to Resilience and Recovery.**” Participants will include not only Harvard faculty members and researchers but also overseas scholars, practitioners, and other stakeholders, particularly representatives from affected populations. Building on the momentum of the conference, the Asia Center will offer grants to faculty members and students to research the feasibility and the challenges of the strategies discussed. The following year, grant recipients will present their findings with the working group for feedback and discussion of next steps.

A second conference will again bring together key actors and stakeholders from across Asia with academics. Participants will review the collective research findings, including best practices and challenges, and will discuss strategies for specific sites. As a result, working together with colleagues from across Harvard, the Asia Center will create transnational networks and facilitate co-learning, new collaborations, and strategies for disaster response and preparedness across Asia.



## TROPICAL CYCLONE INFO

MUNICIPALITY	
TROPICAL NAME	
WIND SPEED (kph)	TOTAL
RADIUS	LOCAL NO.
ARRIVAL	SPECIAL MEASURES
DIRECTION (degrees)	

The *High Ground: Disaster, Risk, and Resilience in the Philippines* exhibition captured the resilience practices undertaken by the two uniquely distinct communities of Sitio Kislap and Gawad Kalinga. Photo Credit: Aubrey P. Graham

# DISASTER RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 2015, the Asia Center initiated an interdisciplinary project with faculty members and researchers from across the University to address disaster response, risk, and resilience in the Philippines. Colleagues from the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health (HCSPH) and the Resilience concentration in the Department of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (HGSD) worked with the Asia Center to develop a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary project that integrates on-site research with academic activities.

The project is structured around three primary components: **research** on disaster response and preparedness across a variety of key organizations on the ground; **professional trainings** for disaster management practitioners; and **academic activities** such as international conferences and design studios for graduate students. The overarching goals of the project are to work with local partners to strengthen the significant disaster response activities already established in the Philippines and to provide new educational opportunities for students and professionals.

The Philippines is already recognized for effective local disaster response initiatives, and one province has repeatedly received international awards for its work. However, response across governmental organizations, NGOs, and local communities is not coordinated consistently, and national provinces across the Philippines offer greatly varying levels of assistance. Further **research** is necessary to understand current dynamics.

The **trainings** for disaster response practitioners are an extension of the modules HHI already uses through the Harvard Humanitarian Academy. HHI is working with local partners on the ground to develop certificate-granting trainings that will contribute to the professionalization of practitioners in the field.

The graduate-level **design studios** expand on the GSD's existing models, which bring small groups of students to a site to conduct hands-on research and work together to develop innovative solutions. Pre-departure seminars on culture, history, and disaster risk and resilience help students prepare for travel to the site and allow them to better understand the range of issues involved. Exchange programs are also being developed so that students from Harvard and local universities can work on ideas and potential solutions together.

The **international conferences** will convene practitioners, academics, and other experts from across disciplines and sectors. Participants will discuss research findings and recommendations, as well as potential new collaborations across sectors.

## OTHER DISASTER ACTIVITIES

For nearly a decade, the Asia Center has been funding and co-sponsoring disaster activities on campus and overseas with faculty members and researchers from across Harvard schools. We supported seminars and conferences with the Program on Crisis Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government; assisted with funding for the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies' research on the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan; co-hosted an interfaculty panel discussion on the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (2013) with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and the Program on Crisis Leadership; co-sponsored HHI's research on the strengths and gaps in disaster response across sectors in the Philippines in 2015; supported a conference in 2016 organized by HHI and the Harvard Graduate School of Design that brought together scholars, government officials, professionals in the arts and design, international NGO's, and practitioners in humanitarian aid; co-sponsored in 2017 a panel discussion and photography exhibit focused on two communities four years after Typhoon Haiyan; supported the design of an earthquake museum and policy center in Nepal in response to the 2015 earthquake, also in 2017; and in 2018 co-funded a scoping study designed to map disaster management practices in Myanmar.

Global crises such as natural disasters transcend borders and disciplinary fields. The Asia Center recognizes the importance of thinking across and among disciplines and regions to address issues with such devastating and far-reaching scope. We are fortunate to be able to collaborate with colleagues at Harvard and abroad, and to have generous support that makes this work possible. We look forward to welcoming new partners to work with us in addressing these crises.







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