



CASE STUDY

Private Sector Partnerships in
Disaster Management in the
Philippines—A Story of Resilience
Through Relationships

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend a sincere thank you to our colleagues at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the OCHA Philippines Country Office, the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), and all others who shared their experiences regarding the Philippines' journey in engaging the private sector in disaster management.

A particular thank you goes to Rene "Butch" Meily, Karen Smith and Manja Vidic, whose interviews formed the foundation of this case study. We appreciate that some of the memories you shared are over a decade old and understand that some details may have faded with time.

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One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

May 2025

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Cover photo

Prepositioning aid as part of the Henry Howard Resilient Together project. Photo credit: PDRF.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

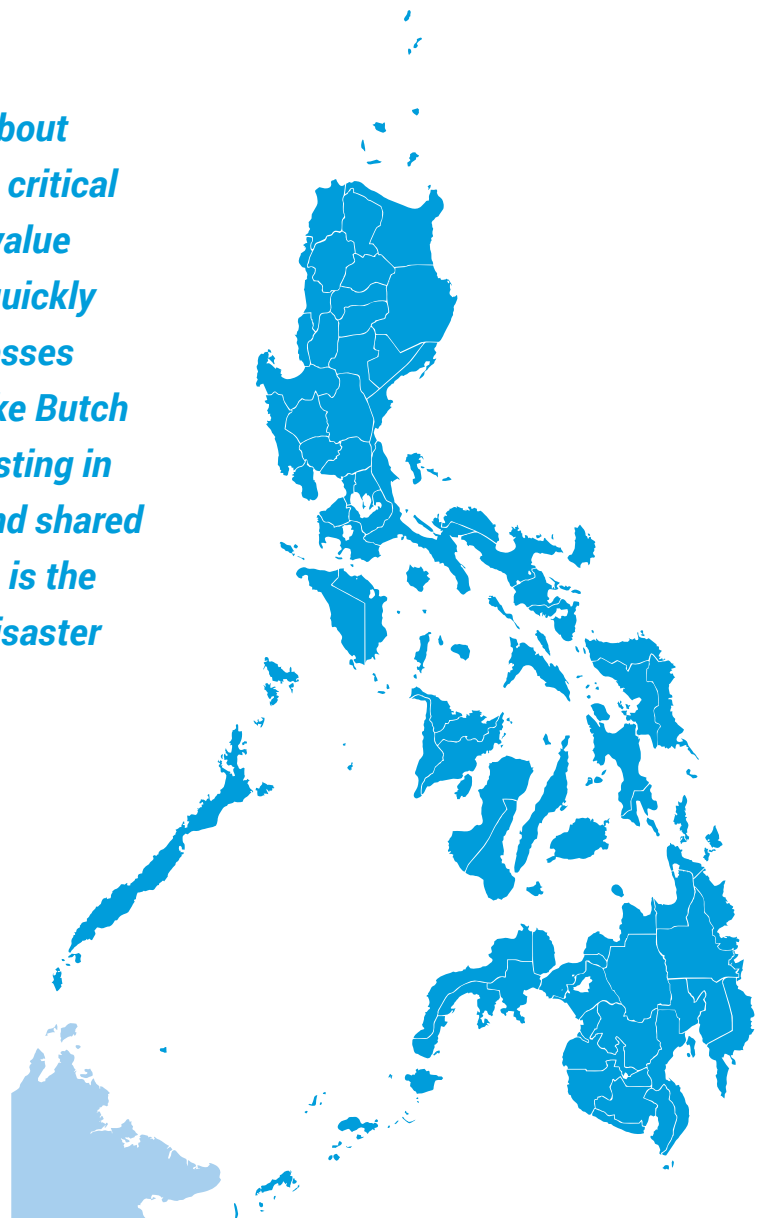
In recent years, the Philippines has faced some of the world's most catastrophic disasters, from Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 to six consecutive tropical cyclones in October 2024. Experience has shown that disaster management is far too significant a challenge for any single sector to tackle alone.

In the Philippines, the private sector has become a key partner in disaster preparedness, response and recovery, working alongside the Government, the United Nations and civil society to safeguard lives and livelihoods. The primary coordinator of private sector disaster management efforts in the country is the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), which was started in 2009 through company contributions in response to Typhoon Ketsana. Its journey to becoming a member of the Philippine Humanitarian Country Team offers insights and lessons for humanitarian organizations and businesses worldwide, serving as an example of how public-private partnerships can evolve in this sector.

“The private sector plays a dual role in disaster response. On the one hand, it's about philanthropy—saving lives and protecting critical assets. On the other, it's about restoring value chains and reactivating the economy as quickly as possible. The State depends on businesses and foundations to step in, and leaders like Butch and the PDRF team have shown that investing in emergency response centres, alliances and shared platforms is the way forward. Networking is the key to building stronger, more effective disaster responses.”



Gustavo González,
former UN Resident Coordinator and
Humanitarian Coordinator in the
Philippines.





As part of the PDRF mobilization of private sector support for the response to Tropical Cyclones Trami and Kong-Rey in October 2024, aid went out in trucks and boats to affected communities. Photo: Ayala Foundation via PDRF.

This case study draws key lessons from the experience of the private sector in the Philippines, notably the importance of

- establishing strong relationships with Governments and UN partners before disaster strikes
- aligning efforts with government needs
- acting as an accelerator of integration
- building community resilience

For businesses and private sector networks, we hope it serves as an example of what is possible with persistence and determination, to pave the way for better coordination in the realm of disaster preparedness, response and recovery to foster resilience.

For humanitarians, understanding how businesses operate is essential. Building these partnerships takes effort, but when trust and resources come together, the results can be extraordinary.

By fostering cross-sector collaboration, the Philippines is demonstrating that resilience is a shared success driven by close, effective partnerships. The country is a testament to the power of public-private collaboration in creating a more potent and effective disaster response, and we are honoured to share its story.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Philippines has faced tropical cyclones, earthquakes and other natural hazards, earning it first place in the 2024 [World Risk Index](#). The country has responded by developing a finely tuned disaster risk reduction and management system, involving a range of stakeholders that leverage their respective strengths. From the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council to the members of the Philippine Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the private sector, each player contributes a crucial piece to the resilience puzzle.

While the private sector has long been active in disaster response in the Philippines, for years it largely offered ad hoc support that was not well integrated into national and local disaster response systems. However, this changed after Typhoon Ketsana in 2009 and Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, two catastrophic disasters that revealed the limitations of working in silos.

During Haiyan, private sector contributions to the UN Haiyan Strategic Response Plan (SRP) – both from individuals and organizations—were the largest single source of funding, [making up nearly one-third \(29%\) of the total SRP funding](#). This figure likely underestimates contributions, assistance and relief and recovery activities from Filipino companies. Since then, Filipino companies have evolved from ad hoc responders to key partners in national and local disaster management.



Rescuers ferry stranded residents while other people wade on Ortigas Avenue in Cainta Rizal, Philippines, due to massive flooding caused by Typhoon Ondoy in 2009. Photo credit: Edwin Bacasmas of Inquirer via PDRF.

The private sector's role, now formalized through partnerships with the Government and humanitarian actors, has reshaped how disaster management actors collaborate in the Philippines. Today, the private sector has been seamlessly integrated into disaster management through networks such as the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF), a founding member of the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative (CBI). Other business networks also engaged in local development issues, such as the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), whose member companies adopted partner communities in the poorest provinces, or the Corporate Network of Disaster Response (CNDR), a non-governmental organization (NGO) which focused on disaster preparedness and coordinating relief efforts of different companies.

These partnerships ensure that resources, expertise and logistics are mobilized. In the case of PDRF and its role in disaster response, they allow this to happen immediately, enabling fast and coordinated responses that minimize impact and accelerate community recovery. By fostering cross-sector collaboration, the Philippines is demonstrating that resilience is a shared success driven by close, effective partnerships.

This case study explores how the private sector became a reliable and fully recognized partner in disaster management in the Philippines and how collaboration with national and humanitarian actors is a matter of shared responsibility. It is a story of culture and relationships—bridging gaps, building trust and creating a united front against some of the greatest threats facing the country.



Shell Pilipinas and PDRF distributed hygiene kits to the affected families from the Kanlaon Eruption in Bago City, Negros Occidental, July 2024. Photo credit: PDRF.

CONTEXT SETTING: THE ORIGINS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

THE PHILIPPINES IN THE NORTHWESTERN PACIFIC BASIN

An archipelago of over 7,000 islands located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, the Philippines is highly susceptible to natural hazards, including tropical cyclones, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. For the Filipino community, the frequency of these disasters means that preparing for disruptions is part of daily life for every household. Culturally speaking, the population is keenly aware of the different risks that they face, having experienced significant disasters firsthand. They know that working together is the only way to build resilience.

“My most vivid memory growing up is seeing the roof of our house torn off during a typhoon and seeing my father—a deeply respected man who fought during World War II—run screaming down the stairs. Everyone in Asia has a story that has to do with a typhoon, a volcanic eruption or a war.”



Rene “Butch” Meily,
President, PDRF

There are several reasons for the rise of public-private partnerships and the active involvement of the private sector in disaster management in the Philippines. For businesses, disasters pose severe risks—disrupting supply chains, impacting employees and halting operations. This is particularly true in high-risk areas like the Philippines, where effective contingency planning is essential. But disasters don’t just disrupt businesses; they impact entire communities. Much of the private sector’s engagement in the country is rooted in the Filipino Bayanihan spirit—a tradition of communal unity and people giving their all for the common good, without expecting recognition or reward. As deeply embedded members of their communities, companies are uniquely positioned to respond to disasters by offering solutions tailored to local needs.

For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the PDRF launched SIKAP ([Synergizing Recovery Initiatives, Knowledge and Adaptation Practices](#)), a free online hub for micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). With resources on loans, recovery programmes and mentorship from industry leaders, SIKAP helped MSMEs recover and adapt, strengthening communities and the economy. Initiatives like SIKAP exemplify how business foundations in the Philippines contribute to local preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS DURING DISASTERS: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS

EARLY CHALLENGES

The private sector has long played a role in disaster response in the Philippines, partnering with humanitarian organizations to support affected populations. For example, during the 1990 Luzon earthquake—a 7.8 magnitude event that resulted in over 1,600 deaths—local companies mobilized helicopters to transport rescue teams and deliver medical supplies to the hardest-hit areas. However, these efforts were often isolated and ad hoc, led by individual companies. A turning point occurred between 2008 and 2009 when a series of devastating tropical cyclones ravaged the Philippines.

[Typhoon Ketsana](#) made landfall in September 2009, causing widespread flooding in Metro Manila and surrounding provinces. Approximately 80 percent of Manila—home to over 12 million people—was affected, with the storm destroying more than 16,000 homes.

In response to the disaster, the Office of the President of the Philippines issued [Executive Order No. 838](#) on 16 October 2009, establishing the Special National Public Reconstruction Commission. Tasked with leading large-scale recovery efforts, this commission quickly realized that government action alone would not suffice. As a result, it engaged the private sector, seeking additional support and innovative solutions to address the flooding caused by the typhoon. This collaboration led to the creation of the Philippine Disaster Recovery Foundation (PDRF).

In its early days, PDRF used office space loaned to the organization by PLDT, Inc. (formerly the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company) and was staffed by individuals seconded by the company. A key aspect of the PDRF's success is that businesses provided not just financial support but also in-kind resources and the skills and capacities of their human resources. In this way, the private sector came to be seen as more than just a funding source, emerging as a key partner in conceptualizing and implementing solutions.

In 2015, the organization rebranded as the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation, reflecting its broader mandate and focus on long-term resilience. This shift emphasized the importance of private sector partnerships not only in immediate disaster response but also in preparedness and recovery, working to better equip communities and businesses to withstand future disasters.

Today, PDRF is the primary private sector coordinator for disaster management in the Philippines, bringing together leaders from the country's largest corporations and NGOs. Under the leadership of businesspeople such as Manuel V. Pangilinan (Chair of PLDT, Inc.), Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala (Chair of the Ayala Corporation) and Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, PDRF formalized its role through a cooperation agreement with the Public Commission, marking a new chapter in public-private partnerships for disaster management.

THE PHILIPPINE DISASTER RESILIENCE FOUNDATION

The [Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation \(PDRF\)](#) is the country's primary private sector coordinator for disaster risk reduction and management. Established in 2009 as a business-led coordination body, PDRF was created to complement government efforts in areas where resources and capacities are limited.

PDRF's mission is to harness the collective power of businesses to enhance the country's disaster resilience. Its approach is centred on collaboration, innovation and sustainability, aligning private sector capabilities with government and humanitarian priorities. Today, PDRF has evolved into a cross-sector, nationwide platform that mobilizes the country's largest businesses and MSMEs, guiding their contributions towards effective disaster management. Businesses can support PDRF's work through financial contributions, in-kind donations or direct involvement in its various programmes.

PDRF operates its own Emergency Operations Center (EOC), one of the world's first private sector-led, self-sufficient operations hub. The EOC continuously coordinates warnings, disaster evacuation, asset inventory and emergency services. PDRF has taken on a regional and global role, supporting peers during major crises, such as the Türkiye earthquake, and monitoring storms and disasters worldwide through the EOC.

As a CBI Member Network, PDRF shares its experience and learnings with the other CBI Member Networks, developing knowledge products such as its [Guidance on Emergency Response Planning](#).



In 2018, PDRF launched the first Business-led Emergency Operations Center, in Clark, Pampanga. It remains a world-class example of what a BEOC can look like and offer in terms of disaster management. Photo credit: PDRF.

THE CATALYST: THE IMPACT OF TYPHOON HAIYAN

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS IN DISASTER COORDINATION AND RESPONSE

In 2013, the Philippines experienced a series of back-to-back disasters, including volcanic eruptions, super typhoons like Haiyan (the strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded) and the Bohol earthquake. The same year also saw the [Zamboanga siege and armed conflict](#). These events made it painfully evident that the country urgently needed more coordinated disaster management.

Before these disasters, the private sector, UN agencies and government bodies often operated in silos, with key actors and authorities frequently unfamiliar with each other. As PDRF's Chief Resilience Officer Guillermo Luz recalls, "We knew some key people in the Government, but mostly in economic ministries like finance, trade and energy—not the national disaster management offices or the Office of Civil Defense."

During the humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan, the national Government called on PDRF to help procure supplies to feed 27,000 school children for a month, a task the organization accomplished efficiently. Foundations, businesses and chambers of commerce worked hand-in-hand with humanitarian agencies to support recovery, including rebuilding some of the approximately 1.1 million homes affected by the storm. In partnership with the International Rescue Committee, [PBSP launched an innovative voucher and cash grant programme](#) to help those affected purchase the materials they needed to rebuild their homes.

The private sector was keen to contribute, and with major companies like the Ayala Corporation, PLDT and Jollibee offering support, the capacity to rebuild was significant from the outset. At the time, PDRF was focused on disaster recovery, a strong entry point for engagement with the humanitarian community. Moreover, PDRF was open to working with OCHA, helping bridge the gap between the private sector and humanitarian actors to better align their activities.



Multipurpose building and evacuation center built in the Philippines after Super Typhoon Haiyan decimated the country in 2013. Photo credit: PDRF.

THE POST-HAIYAN SHIFT: REDEFINING ROLES FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In the immediate aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, Karen Smith, a Humanitarian Affairs Officer with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was deployed to the Philippines as the Private Sector Focal Point—the first time OCHA had assigned a staff member specifically to this role. Initially, she had a limited understanding of the situation on the ground and what to expect. However, she quickly realized that progress depended heavily on navigating a small network where personal relationships played a crucial role.

“My experience in the Philippines, when I was deployed as private sector focal point in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, drove home the importance of relationships to build trust between sectors and to catalyze better collaboration on emergency response. It’s a lesson that lies at the core of the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business initiative mandate, because businesses are a powerful and strategic partner that should not be reduced to just a source of funding.”



Karen Smith,
Head of the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund, OCHA

Filipino companies, especially large corporate foundations, were used to stepping in to help with recovery but had never done so in a coordinated manner. Some attribute this reaction to Filipino culture, in which faith and religion emphasize helping one’s neighbour. At the same time, the frequency of extreme weather events and sudden-onset disasters in the Philippines means that most people have personally experienced such crises and thus inherently understand the importance of helping when and where one can.

Over time, and building on efforts to coordinate private sector engagement, CEOs, government officials and NGO representatives began to recognize the value of joining forces to avoid duplicating efforts and enhance efficiency.

After Super Typhoon Haiyan, nine of the [Philippines’ largest companies pledged to lead reconstruction efforts](#) in specific areas. Just days after the storm, Butch Meily, the President of PDRF, met with the mayors of affected barangays to assess on-the-ground needs. PDRF responded quickly: a three-hour meeting was scheduled to plan the next steps in recovery with local companies, but it concluded in under 30 minutes because everyone was immediately aligned and ready to act.



Shell Pilipinas and PDRF distributed hygiene kits to the affected families from the Kanlaon Eruption in La Castellana, Negros Occidental, July 2024. Photo credit: PDRF.

That day, numerous companies volunteered to rebuild classrooms, houses, hospitals and health centres, provide boats for fishermen and support small businesses whose premises had been destroyed. PDRF worked with the business community, local NGOs and the Government, acting as the focal point for private sector participation in relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In the following years, the CEOs of some of the largest companies in the Philippines decided that simply reviving the economy after a disaster was not enough. They realized that they needed to foster stronger relationships with government partners and UN agencies to move beyond merely responding to disasters by contributing to preparedness and coordination for future crises.

“When responding to disasters, having the right network is everything. You need private sector partners, the UN Resident Coordinator, OCHA and other UN agencies to work together.”



Manja Vidic,
former Head of OCHA Philippines

In many ways, Typhoon Haiyan served as a catalyst for strengthening and accelerating public-private partnerships and intensifying coordination between humanitarian agencies and the private sector. PDRF reorganized its structure and expanded its mandate to encompass the entire disaster lifecycle: preparedness, response and recovery. At the same time, PDRF hosted inter-cluster meetings with UN partners and attended UN agency meetings to represent private sector interests and coordinate private sector help.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING: THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Relationships between the private sector and humanitarian actors are not always straightforward, as the private sector is not a traditional participant in the humanitarian response system. However, in 2013, private companies in the Philippines demonstrated foresight and readiness to engage in disaster response. For example, the GSM Association, a leading organization in the mobile telecommunications sector, was already on the ground before Typhoon Haiyan struck, deploying more personnel than the humanitarian community at that time.

Karen Smith emphasizes that private sector engagement is a two-way relationship: *“We wanted to share what we [the UN] were doing and understand what they [the private sector] were doing. Engaging with all actors on the ground falls naturally within OCHA’s mandate as a coordination broker in emergencies.”*

Private companies are part of the local community, and the support they provide builds on their relationships with the community. MSMEs play a vital role in the Philippine economy, [comprising 99.63% of all businesses, employing 66.97% of the workforce and contributing 35.7% of the country’s value-added production](#). Through initiatives like the [Livelihood Seeding Program](#), which provides business development assistance to MSMEs in barangays, PDRF has adapted its disaster recovery methodology. Its approach prioritizes rapid economic recovery for MSMEs while focusing on vulnerable populations and enhancing community independence from external assistance by preparing MSMEs for future disruptions.



Left to right: Gustavo Gonzalez (Former UN), Manja Vidic (Former OCHA Philippines), Miguel Garcia (PDRF) and Butch Meily (PDRF) arrive at the PDRF Operations Center in Clark, Pampanga, the Philippines. Photo credit: OCHA.

INTEGRATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR INTO NATIONAL AND HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEMS

In the Philippines, private sector participation in disaster response has evolved from event-specific recovery initiatives to a nationwide disaster management platform. This development has been essential to its integration into the national and international humanitarian system. This integration was driven by key individuals including Butch Meily, President of PDRF; Gustavo González, former UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines and Karen Smith, former Private Sector Focal Point for OCHA. They and many others shared a vision of a private sector that is more actively engaged in emergency response activities. This vision developed from participation in inter-cluster coordination meetings to the inclusion of PDRF as the private sector representative in the [Humanitarian Country Team \(HCT\)](#), nominated by former UN Resident Coordinator Ola Almgren.

HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is a strategic forum for operational decision-making and oversight, established and led by the Humanitarian Coordinator. It includes representatives from UN agencies, the International Organization for Migration, international and national NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other key humanitarian actors. The HCT is responsible for addressing strategic humanitarian issues and developing frameworks to guide emergency responses, such as Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs).

PDRF has been mentioned in official reports from OCHA and the HCT, such as the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). For example, its contributions were highlighted in the report on private sector engagement by the PDRF during Typhoon Trami in 2024 (p. 17).

To enhance coordination, PDRF has also adopted the 3W reporting system, a standard humanitarian tool that tracks who is doing what and where during a crisis. The use of this tool ensures more effective collaboration between the private sector and humanitarian actors, improving response efforts and resource allocation.



As part of the PDRF mobilization of private sector support for the response to Tropical Cyclones Trami and Kong-Rey in October 2024, aid went out in trucks and boats to affected communities. Photo: Ayala Foundation via PDRF.

TIMELINE

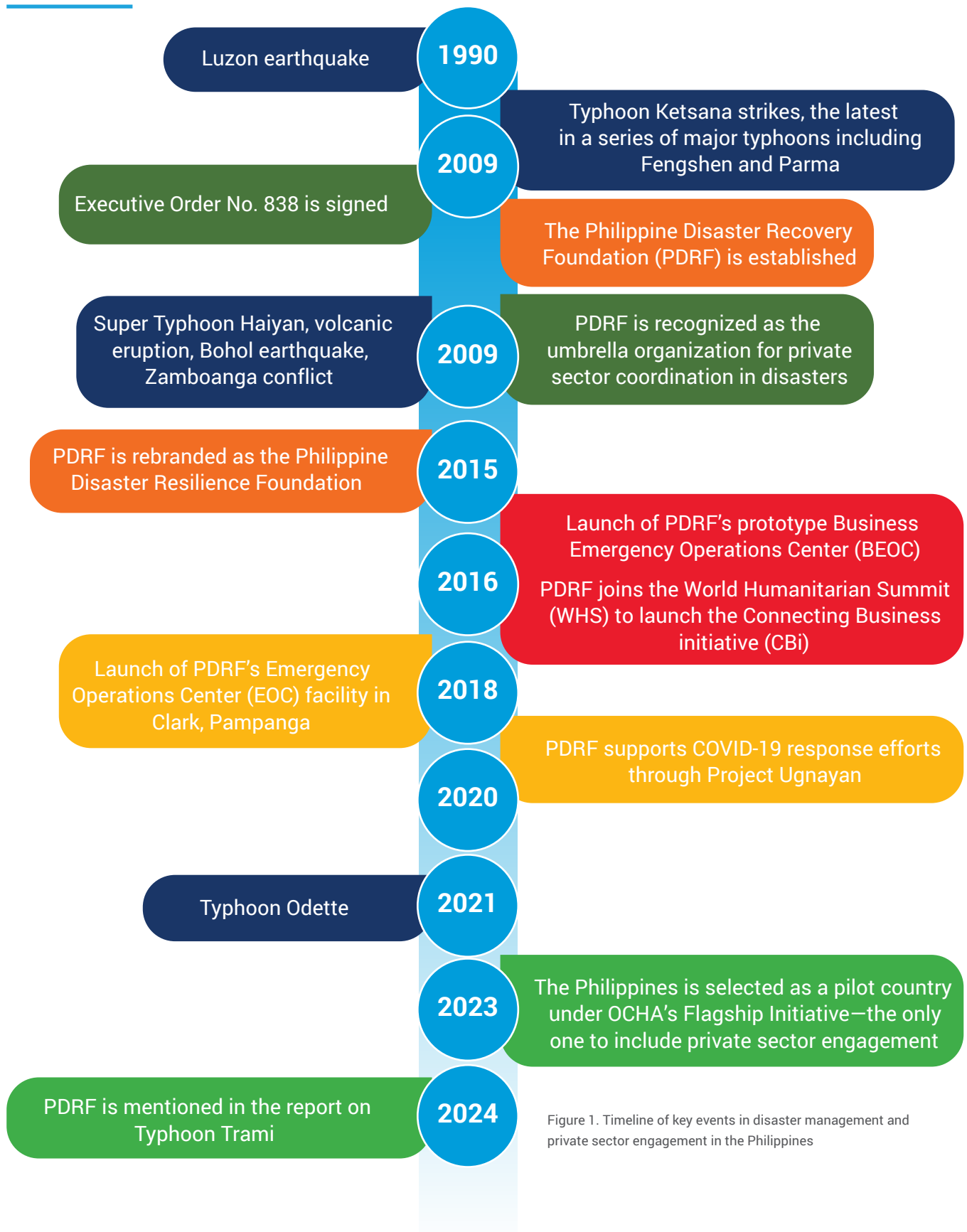


Figure 1. Timeline of key events in disaster management and private sector engagement in the Philippines

“The private sector plays a dual role in disaster response. On one side, it’s about philanthropy—saving lives and protecting critical assets. On the other, it’s about restoring value chains and reactivating the economy as quickly as possible. The State depends on businesses and foundations to step in, and leaders like Butch and the PDRF team have shown that investing in emergency response centres, alliances and shared platforms is the way forward. Networking is the key to building stronger, more effective disaster responses.”



Gustavo González,

UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines

PDRF’s success is rooted in its direct collaboration with local and national agencies through the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), where it represents the private sector. Additionally, the PDRF’s cluster system aligns with the Government and the [UN cluster approaches](#), enabling rapid support and coordination.

The system organizes 70 member companies into industry-based clusters to maximize resource mobilization and interoperability according to businesses’ skill sets. CBI Member Networks like PDRF function as bridges between the private sector, Governments and the broader humanitarian system.

Through this system, businesses can directly support life-saving and life-sustaining efforts alongside UN agencies and civil society organizations by working with the NDRRMC and participating as private sector representatives in platforms like the HCT.

The Philippines is one of four pilot countries implementing the Enhancing Community Resilience strategy under the [OCHA Flagship Initiative \(FI\)](#). The FI seeks to redesign humanitarian aid according to community priorities and strengthen public-private partnerships to drive localized, community-led resilience. The strategy focuses on three key regions—Region 5, Caraga Region and Region 8. This initiative integrates private sector knowledge into humanitarian efforts, leveraging their unique expertise, resources and networks.

PDRF has built up its knowledge base in recent years. During Covid, it provided [service continuity training](#) for public hospitals and select government agencies. Drawing on business continuity planning, this training provided tools to ensure that essential public services could remain operational or recover quickly after an emergency.



HCT Retreat conducted at the PDRF Operations Center. Photo credit: Tandemic.

LESSONS LEARNED

The context for fostering effective public-private partnerships will differ from country to country. However, key lessons can be drawn from the experience of the Philippines, offering valuable insights for businesses and federations or chambers of commerce aiming to engage effectively in disaster management:

- **Establish strong relationships with Governments and UN partners before disaster strikes.** Building trust during “times of peace” is essential to working together and delivering a tailored, coordinated response when emergencies arise.
- **Align efforts with government needs.** PDRF’s cluster system organizes businesses into sectors such as water, telecommunications and power, making it easier to provide relevant services during disaster recovery efforts.
- **Act as accelerators of integration.** CBI Member Networks like PDRF function as bridges between the private sector, Governments and the broader humanitarian system. By working with national disaster management offices and representing the private sector on platforms like the HCT, businesses can contribute their skills and resources directly to life-saving and life-sustaining efforts alongside UN agencies and civil society organizations.
- **Build community resilience.** Supporting local businesses and employees is not simply good practice—it is a strategic investment in long-term community resilience. By ensuring that MSMEs recover quickly, CBI Member Networks like PDRF help reduce dependency on external aid and strengthen the fabric of their communities against future disasters.

Call to action for humanitarians: Businesses, private sector associations and foundations operate differently from traditional humanitarian organizations. Because of this, humanitarian organizations like OCHA and other UN agencies need to develop what Manja Vidic calls “business-savvy skills” and learn the different operational languages of private sector players to work effectively with them.

CONCLUSION

The Philippines illustrates that resilience is a team effort rooted in trust and collaboration. The key lesson is clear: relationships matter. By building strong connections with Governments and UN agencies before disaster strikes, everyone knows who to contact and how to work together during emergencies.

PDRF's success as a private sector convener, coordinator and representative highlights the importance of aligning with both government and humanitarian priorities. Through its sector-specific approach to emergency response, PDRF has shown how private stakeholders can bridge essential gaps in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. By facilitating coordination between businesses, humanitarian actors and local communities, PDRF ensures that efforts are coordinated and effective. Its targeted support for local MSMEs bolsters the economy and makes entire communities more resilient.

For humanitarians, understanding how businesses operate is essential. Building these partnerships takes effort, but when trust and resources come together, the results can be extraordinary. The Philippines is a testament to the power of public-private collaboration in creating a more potent and effective disaster response.



PDRF and Shell Pilipinas collaborating on preparedness and response activities during the Habagat monsoon season in Rizal, Philippines, here in response to Typhoon Carina in 2024. Photo credit: PDRF.

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