

“...I struggled a long time, but it was all worth it.”

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Luchie Corales is a woman from Barangay Palaypay, municipality of Basey in Samar province. She's 39 years old, and part of women-led DRR committee and GBV watch group in their barangay council, and a member of their women's association, Palaypay Women's Association (PAWA). She's married with two sons: the eldest is 21 years old and currently in third year in college, and the youngest is already 19 years old and an incoming freshman in college.

Before she got involved with PKKK in 2004, she was not aware of her rights and always followed the commands of her husband. She recalled the time when her husband keeps telling her to stay at home “when I come back home, make sure you're in the same place where I left you.” She even had no voice in managing their family's budget, and had no opportunity to go outside and mingle with her friends and even neighbours.

“Way back then, I always followed my husband's demands; I had no courage to challenge this kind of treatment because he's the one working hard to provide our needs. I thought this was just simple jealousy and this treatment is his way of showing his love and just want to protect me.”

Four years after super typhoon Yolanda struck their community, she received relief and training and this served as her eye opener. She realized how her rights was denied especially in times of disasters.

After participating to trainings, she slowly started to go out of her comfort zone. She actively got involved in their barangay council. “I am grateful for ActionAid and PKKK for giving me an education about my rights.” It was not easy persuading my husband, I felt that he owned my mind, my body—my life. At first, she had difficulties in making him understand her rights to participate in the community. She presented her reading materials about women's human rights from the trainings she attended, and her husband thought that she's trying to fight back. After several persuasions she did to make her husband understand her, he finally started to understand her rights.

“After receiving the acceptance from my husband, I felt that I owned my body – I finally felt freedom. I struggled a long time, it was a long process but it was all worth it.” Luchie shared that violence against women is common in their community and even her neighbours are also not exempted. “I want to set an example to other women who also have similar experiences that I had by getting out of my chain and started to socialize with other people and share my knowledge to others.” For her, if she can do it, other women can also do it. Joining women's associations will help lessen their pains, and change it into strength to move forward. “I started sharing my knowledge to my husband and two children. I believe that to achieve gender equality, it should begin with family members.” It is a slow but sure process, and eventually they'll be able to understand our sentiments.

As a woman leader in DRR work, it was difficult to influence officials as self-interest prevails. One of the challenges was underestimating the capacities of women in doing response. “We befriended our barangay captain, we tried to persuade him and let him realize that women-led DRR committees are always ready to assist the community.” Luchie and her colleagues in women-led DRR proved to their barangay captain that they are dependable. When typhoon Hagupit “Ruby” hit the areas of Samar, women-led DRR

members are in complete uniform, ready to respond even though they are not called for an emergency coordination meeting. Because of this, the barangay captain finally acknowledged and accepted the group. "It is like persuading my husband, it also took a long time after our barangay captain finally accept our group." "My heartfelt gratitude to ActionAid and PKKK for giving me chance to enjoy my rights as a woman, I gained my self-worth and I am where I am right now because of them. I can finally say that I can stand on my own.

As of the present, Luchie has a great relationship with her husband, he's supporting her advocacy and involvement in their community. He even drives her home as late as 10 o'clock in the evening as she struggles to get a transportation at night. "Our hard work and commitment as women-led DRR has finally paid off—we finally gained the barangay captain's trust and he finally let us manage the 5% allocation of the GAD budget."

For Luchie, she finally found her peace of mind, but the work doesn't stop there. "I hope that we can also influence others even the municipal level. Barangay Palaypay is just 1 out of 51 barangays of Basey, I just wish and hope that they also have committed women leaders to serve their community in times of disasters to prevent another tragic disaster like Yolanda."