



JPIC-IDC, INC.

The background of the slide is a photograph of a tropical beach. In the foreground, there are several palm trees with green fronds. In the middle ground, a small white boat with a teal stripe is beached on the sand. The background shows more palm trees and a clear sky. A large, semi-transparent orange circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CLIMATE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING INTERSECTIONS AND STRENGTHENING RESPONSES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Free the Slaves (FTS)

Free the Slaves (FTS) was founded in 2000 and has since committed itself to ending modern slavery. Today, FTS is widely recognized as a leader and a pioneer in the modern abolitionist movement. Through its work, FTS has driven systemic policy changes and empowered local communities to take leadership roles in their own protection. FTS prioritizes and fosters the creation of spaces for collaboration, serving as a catalyst that unites organizations, governments, and communities, thereby amplifying the collective impact of the anti-slavery movement. To advance its mission further and create a slave-free world, FTS has developed a unique multi-dimensional approach.

Justice Peace Integrity of Creation, Integrated Development Center, Inc. (JPIC-IDC)

is a faith-based Philippine NGO committed to strengthening families, protecting women and children, empowering communities, and addressing issues of human trafficking in the most vulnerable communities. JPIC-IDC believes in the holistic development of persons in their communities so that they are able to carve the kind of development they can pursue. JPIC-IDC is committed to work for: a continuing holistic education, the strengthening of families, protection and care of women and children, integral empowerment of communities towards sustainable development, and disaster preparedness and emergency response and rehabilitation.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Global estimates indicate that 49.6 million people are victims of modern slavery worldwide (ILO, Walk Free, IOM 2022). The vulnerability of individuals and communities to modern slavery is determined by factors such as conflicts, corruption, inadequate healthcare, poverty, gender inequality, racial inequality, human rights violations, migration and displacement, and harmful cultural norms. However, it is increasingly recognized that climate change also intersects with modern slavery (UN General Assembly, Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, A/77/170, 2022).

On the one hand, illegal extractive activities such as fishing, mining, and logging – that are typically perpetrated by criminal organizations, gangs, and armed groups in areas where the law enforcement arm of the State does not reach – most often rely on forced labor (including forced child labor) extracted from vulnerable, marginalized, and neglected communities. At the same time, those illegal activities of extraction are responsible for environmental degradation, including deforestation, contamination of water resources, and soil degradation, which severely alters the ecosystem and exacerbates the effects of climate change (Arenas Cornejo 2023; Decker Sparks et al. 2021).

On the other hand, climate change-related events can create and/or exacerbate vulnerability to modern slavery (Brown et al. 2021; Stoklosa et al. 2021; Gurung, Clark 2018). Specifically, communities without adequate pre-hazard preparation strategies and post-hazard recovery strategies are adversely affected by calamities and are driven into conditions of heightened vulnerability such as poverty, unemployment, lack of proper healthcare, and forced displacement. In these conditions, they inevitably become (more) vulnerable to exploitation into forms of modern slavery by ruthless human traffickers. The risk of exploitation becomes more acute when the impacts of climate change intersect with preexisting factors of vulnerability, such as gender inequality, race-based discrimination, and human rights violations (Gyawali, Keeling, Kallestrup 2016; Stoklosa et al. 2021).

Conversely, communities that are equipped with effective preparation and recovery strategies are better positioned to resist the devastating impact of climate hazards. As such, they are less vulnerable to the risk of exploitation by human traffickers.

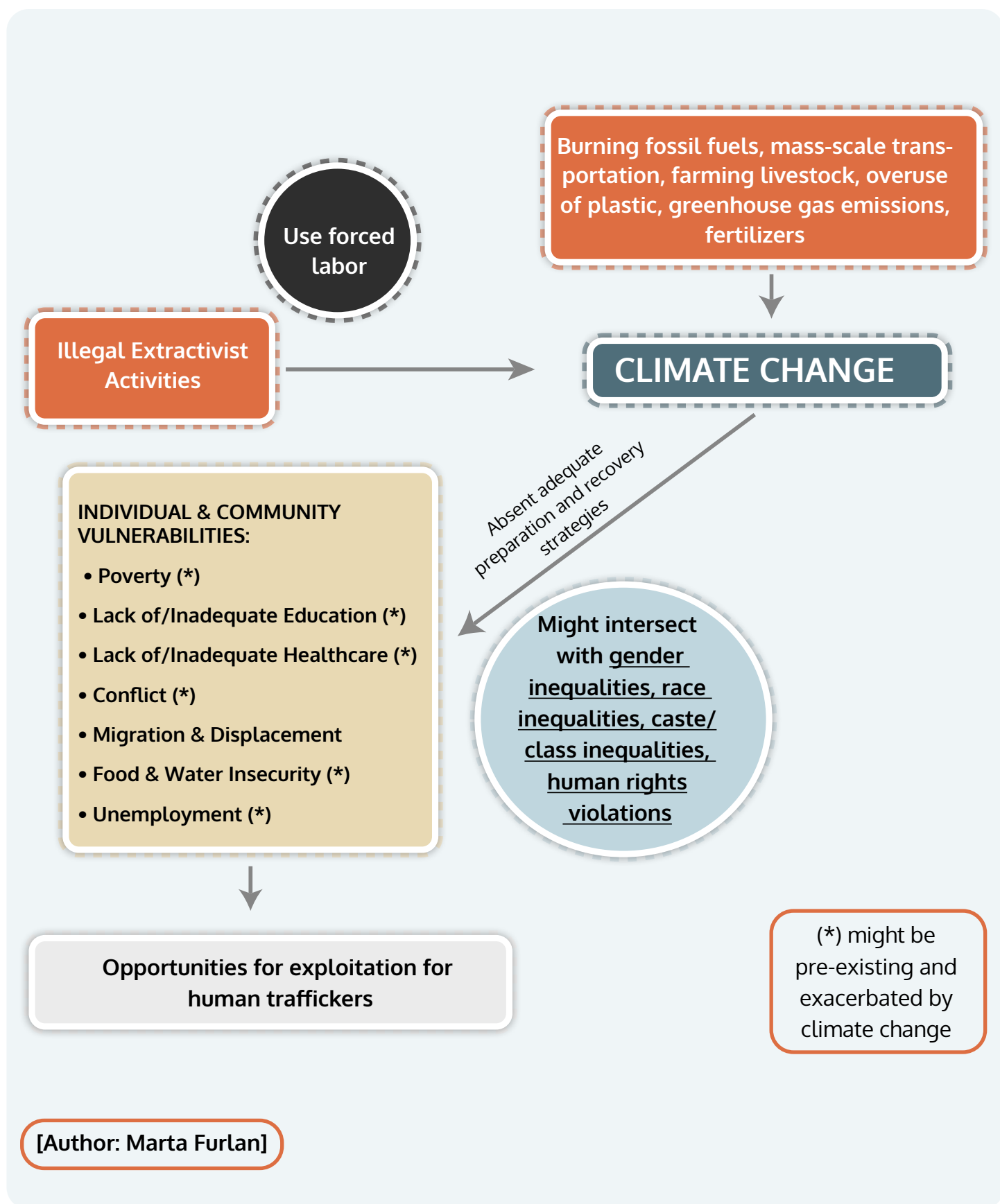


Figure 1. The climate change-human trafficking nexus

Findings

This study explores how climate change-related hazards influence vulnerability to modern slavery in the Philippines, a country where climate change-related calamities and human trafficking are prevalent (Eckstein, Kunzel, Shafer 2021). Specifically, this study focuses on four barangays (smallest administrative division in the Philippines) in the regions of Eastern Visayas and Caraga, which over the past decade have experienced a wide range of hazards such as heavy rainfall, floods, typhoons, cyclones, earthquakes, and sea level rise.

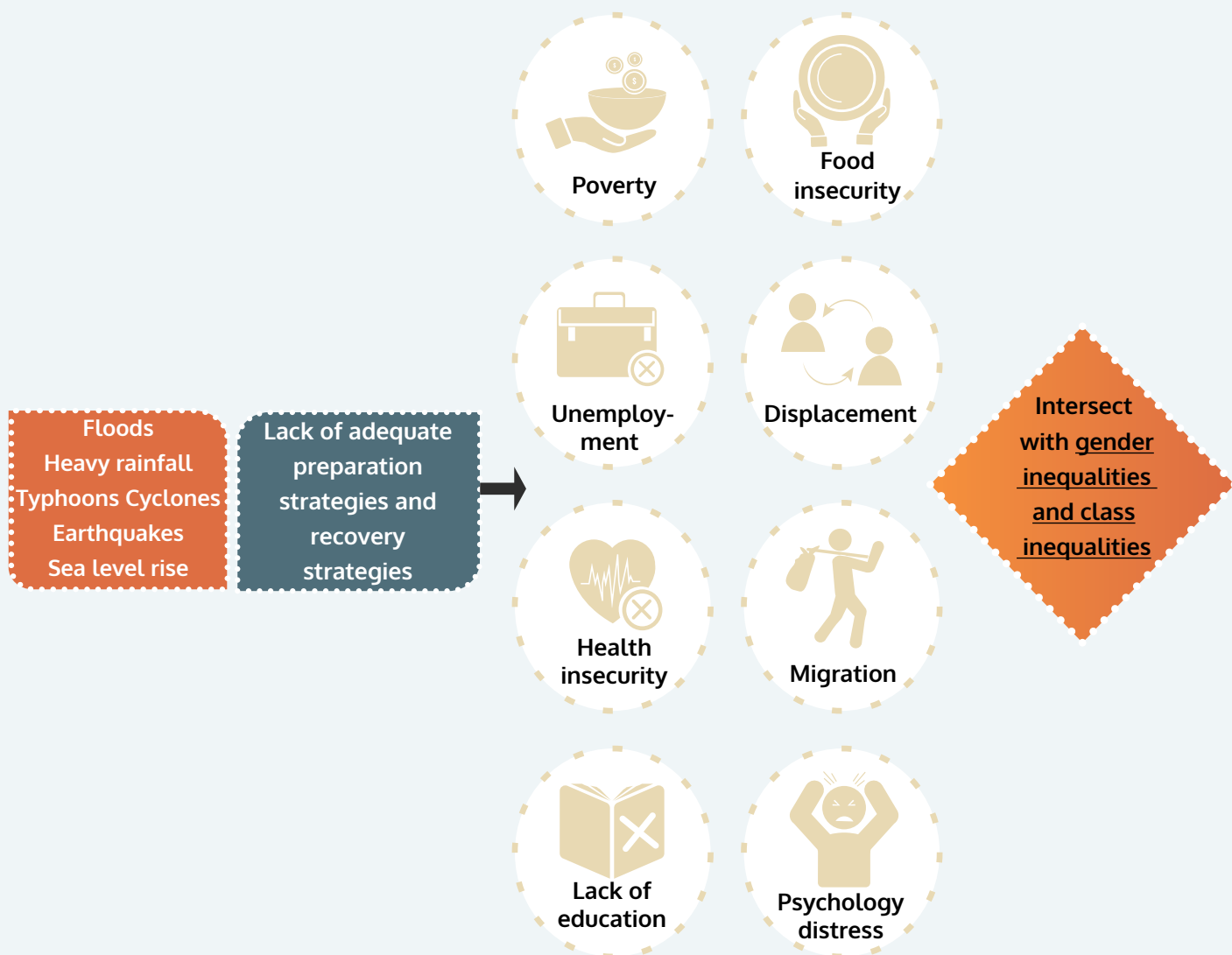
The communities that participated in our research have revealed that they implement some pre-hazard strategies to prepare for those calamitous events. However, these preparations are mostly insufficient as they tend to focus on mitigating the impact of sudden events on food, water, and housing. Moreover, location, exposure to previous disasters, awareness, age, family size, and socio-economic status shape the kind of pre-hazard strategies adopted as well as their effectiveness, which means that the level of preparedness varies considerably within the same community.

Similarly, the community members with whom we spoke confirmed that post-hazard recovery strategies are adopted. However, those strategies focus on the recovery of the environment, infrastructure, housing, and food supplies. Conversely, healthcare and education are neglected, which seriously limits the effectiveness of the overall post-disaster response. Moreover, the food relief, reconstruction assistance, and financial support provided by government authorities and non-governmental organizations is insufficient, untimely, and discriminatory.

Characterized by inadequate pre-hazard preparation strategies and post-hazard recovery strategies, the barangays that we studied are adversely affected by natural hazards, especially with respect to the environment, public infrastructure, housing, the economy, food and water, health(care), livelihoods, and education. Adverse impacts are interconnected and travel from one area to the other. For instance, direct shocks to infrastructure were found to jeopardize health, food and water, livelihoods, and education.


Affected by the devastating impact of natural hazards, communities are driven into conditions of multi-dimensional vulnerability. Most notably, our study found that communities in Eastern Visayas and Caraga are driven into poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, (domestic and international) migration, displacement, lack of access to healthcare, lack of access to education, and psychological distress.

Moreover, it was found that post-hazard vulnerability is made more acute by pre-existing gender inequalities and class inequalities, which expose women and lower-class individuals to additional difficulties. For instance, our conversations with local communities revealed that certain recovery programs offered by the government (e.g. cash-for-work programs) are thought exclusively for male workers. Similarly, many instances were identified in which post-disaster recovery assistance was provided exclusively to powerful and wealthy individuals, well connected with the local authorities.



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Figure 2. Natural Hazards and Conditions of Vulnerability in Eastern Visayas and Caraga



Under these circumstances, communities become exposed to the risk of exploitation by human traffickers. In Eastern Visayas and Caraga, exploitation mostly takes the forms of:

- **Labor trafficking and forced labor.** This is especially observed in the fishing industry, in the construction industry, and in the stream mining industry. However, forced labor is also observed in the domestic sector, especially when individuals (mostly women) resort to domestic or international migration to cope with the negative effects of calamities on their traditional livelihood activities.

- **Hazardous child labor.** This is especially observed in mining, construction, agriculture, forestry and logging, and manufacturing. In these sectors, children are employed for extremely long hours, are paid below the minimum wage, are exposed to hazardous situations, and are denied protective equipment. Most often, hazardous child labor is associated with school dropout. Typically, children involved in hazardous labor come from poor families that lose their income after natural hazards and that find themselves forced to resort to negative coping strategies.

- **Sex trafficking.** This form of trafficking mostly involves women from poor farming families that in the aftermath of a disaster relocate from rural to urban areas to make a living. Most of them are employed in establishments such as bars, hotels, restaurants, and brothels. While some are

lured with false promises of decent and legitimate jobs, others are aware of the kind of situation that awaits them but decide to accept it nonetheless due to the perceived absence of alternatives.

- **Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).** Here, minors are trafficked for sex exploitation purposes in nightclubs, bars, brothels, hotels, and other establishments. Traffickers include parents, friends, neighbors, and other adults. In some cases of CSEC, adolescents may be complicit in the trafficking of other minors. Foreigners are also involved in CSEC, either because they frequent establishments where CSEC is occurring or because they run trafficking operations themselves.

- **Online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC).** Here, children are forced into taking nude pictures or videos that are later sold online or are forced to participate in online sex chats. As in the case of CSEC, parents and relatives are most often involved as recruiters and traffickers, seeing this as a way to make money in time of hardships.

Moreover, our findings reveal that in the observed communities these forms of exploitation are further facilitated by widespread corruption among officials in charge of policing labor sites, weak enforcement of anti-trafficking law, and harmful cultural norms. The latter are especially prevalent in the communities' widespread acceptance of child labor (even when hazardous) as a legitimate strategy to cope with poverty.

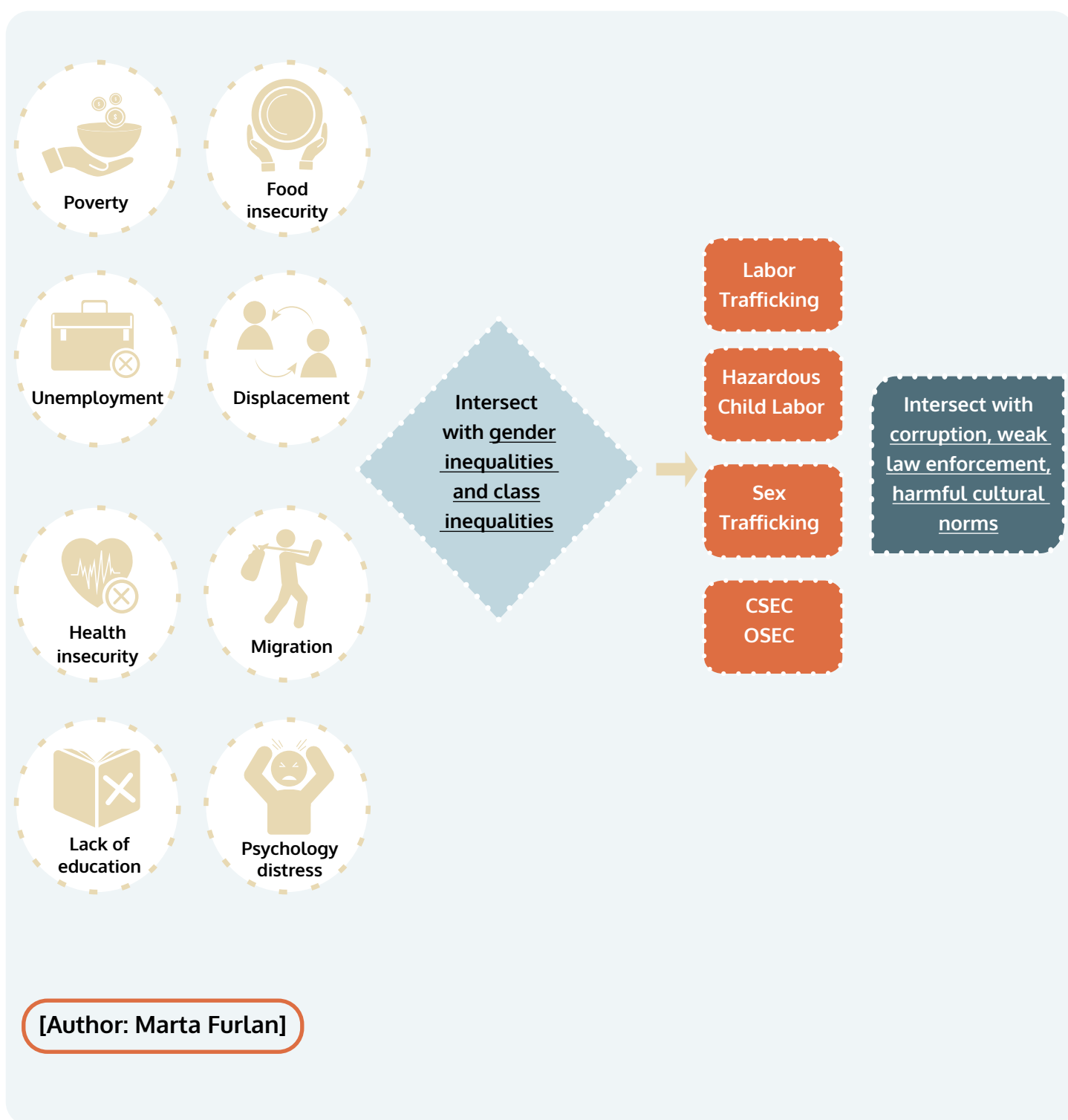


Figure 3. Post-Disaster Vulnerability and Human Trafficking in Eastern Visayas and Caraga



Recommendations

Building on the findings, recommendations are offered to reduce vulnerability to trafficking among hazard-affected communities. These recommendations are tailored to the Philippines' context. As such, they primarily address the Philippines' government, NGOs working in the Philippines, and community leaders in the Philippines' barangays.



Philippines' government

- **Strengthen the capacity of local communities in hazard-affected areas.** In the barangays most exposed to climate change, the government should invest more resources into building the capacity of local communities to adequately prepare for natural hazards as well as to respond to natural hazards promptly and effectively across different sectors (e.g. healthcare, economy, education).
- **Enhance the quantity and quality of post-disaster assistance.** Following natural hazards, the government should provide cash-for-work programs, financial assistance for immediate needs, scholarships and school supplies, and holistic healthcare. Distribution should be equitable and just.
- **Introduce modern slavery considerations in sustainable development programs and climate change policies.** The government should embrace a whole-of-government approach whereby modern slavery considerations are introduced in the formulation of climate change solutions and developmental programs.
- **Increase funding for initiatives that build communities' resilience to natural hazards.** The government should provide funding opportunities for programs that address the root causes of slavery among hazard-affected communities and increase the latter's resilience to calamities. These can be direct service provision, training and capacity building, as well as enhanced research, monitoring, and evaluation.



NGOs working in the Philippines

- **Enhance the quality and quantity of post-disaster assistance, especially among families that are excluded from government assistance.** Following natural hazards, humanitarian NGOs should enhance and increase assistance (e.g. food aid) and extend it to those populations that are excluded from government aid. Distribution should be timely, unconditional, just, and adequate.
- **Conduct trainings on climate-resilient activities, climate-smart agriculture, and livelihood diversification.** In hazard-prone barangays, development NGOs should conduct skills development workshops that prepare people to occupations in non-climate-sensitive sectors as well as workshops on climate-smart agricultural practices. They should also help communities to minimize the impact of hazards by diversifying and planning livelihood activities.
- **Conduct awareness-raising campaigns about modern slavery in hazard-affected barangays.** In climate change-affected barangays, anti-trafficking NGOs should conduct awareness raising campaigns on the intersection of modern slavery and natural hazards. Here, special attention should be devoted to those sub-communities that are more exposed to the adverse effect of calamities (e.g. farmers, poor households, children).
- **Establish survivor networks in climate change-affected communities.** In climate change-affected barangays, anti-trafficking NGOs should encourage the establishment of survivor networks and meaningfully engage with them. They should provide survivors with opportunities to raise awareness, educate the community on how to detect exploitation attempts, and lead the formulation of anti-trafficking programs.



Community leaders

- **Address harmful cultural norms that typically prevail in hazard-affected barangays.** Religious leaders, business leaders, and educators should capitalize on their influence to condemn harmful cultural norms that typically prevail in hazard-affected and poverty stricken communities, such as those norms that encourage children's engagement in labor and in the sex industry.
- **Promote a culture of solidarity and strengthen mutual support networks.** In hazard-affected barangays, community leaders should promote a culture of solidarity among community members and should encourage people to cooperate to better deal with hazards (e.g. initiating a joint saving scheme to support reconstruction at the neighborhood level).

