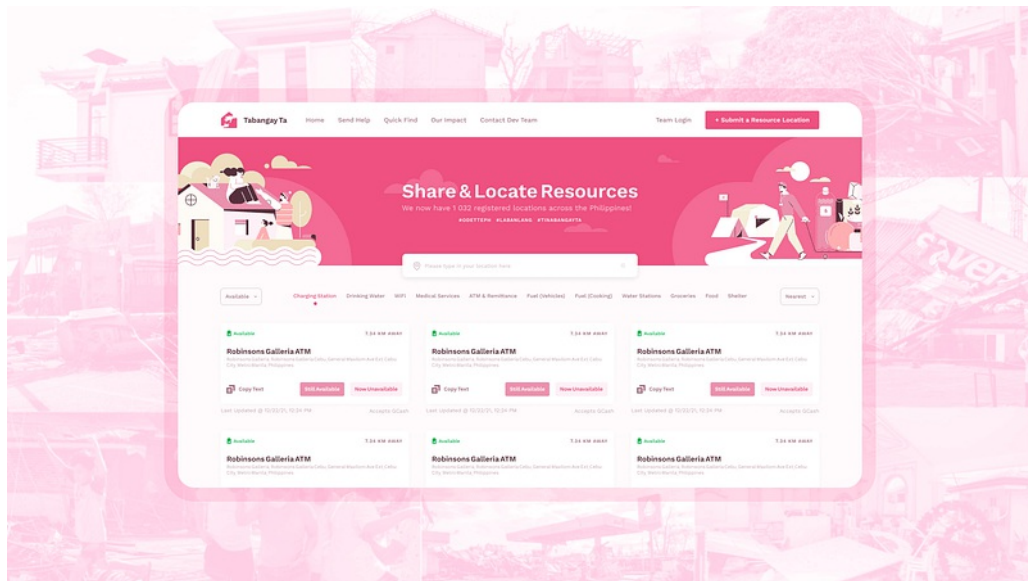

The Tabangay Ta Initiative

A Story of Human-Centric Product Design in Crisis



The initial redesign I thought was good. I've come to learn that it isn't—but it makes for a good cover photo.

The world of product design is often viewed through the lens of creating sleek interfaces and optimizing user experiences. However, sometimes, the most compelling design stories are born from a Christmas. One that took the *gift* of lives away as Super Typhoon Rai ravaged my home: Cebu Philippines.

This is the tale of the Tabangay Ta Initiative, where I used design and no-code development to make a significant impact by cross-collaborating with developers around the world during one of the Philippines' darkest hours.

Discipline

Product Design, User Research, Interaction Design, Product Thinking

Timeline

Dec 2021—Jan 2022 (Disaster Response)

Role

Designer (Product & Social Media), Full-Stack Developer (Bubbl.io)

For

Cebu, Philippines

Tools

Figma, Bubbl.io

Introduction

Super Typhoon Rai (Odette) was not just a natural disaster; it became the catalyst for an unprecedented human-centric design project that would connect devastated communities to essential resources in their darkest hours.

Tabangay Ta, a crowd-sourced directory platform, emerged as a lifeline for victims of Super Typhoon Rai (Bagyong Odette). The objective was simple yet profound: **to efficiently connect those in need with critical resources during a disaster**. In this project, I wore multiple hats—from user research to social media management—in a whirlwind of challenges and triumphs.

Super Typhoon Rai (Odette) made landfall in the Visayas and Mindanao region of the Philippines on December 16, 2021. It brought a relentless barrage of torrential rains, violent winds, landslides, and storm surges before exiting on December 17. The sheer scale of the disaster was staggering, with an estimated 513,000 families affected, and many left displaced, their homes reduced to rubble.

I was one of them.



A broken window from a house in the subdivision where I'm from.

I was stuck in traffic as my mother drove us out of Lapu-Lapu City and into Cebu, where we were provided housing by a friend. Frantic calls to check on family and friends yielded little response. I turned to Facebook for updates. It was in the midst of this anxiety that a glimmer of hope emerged. My co-workers from Manila shared the “Tabangay Ta Initiative.” This website aimed to help affected areas access vital resources through crowd-sourced data and location-based information.

I settled into the place with food, water you had to pick up from deep wells, and a 3G signal. Worries raced across my head as I thought of my grandparents who were knees-deep into this metaphorical quicksand. And then it hit me: I was in the position to help.

The Problem—A Desperate Quest for Resources

Communities in the wake of the disaster were grappling with a dire problem. Finding basic resources such as food, water, shelter, and electricity had become an ordeal. The extent of damage varied widely across regions, complicating efforts to determine where resources were available.

Our mission was clear—to utilize the web app to help as many as possible, despite limited internet access, and to populate the platform with resource data.

![[Image: Early Versions of the Web App]](Image URL)

Image: Early versions of the web app, built using the no-code platform Bubble.io

Insights From the Heart of the Crisis

To truly understand the needs of the affected communities, we created a dedicated Facebook page, the primary communication channel for disaster-stricken areas. Conducting surveys and interviews on Facebook and Facebook Messenger became our most effective data collection method. Through these interactions, we began uncovering the core issues people faced and started deciphering the path forward.

![[Image: Facebook Survey Insights]](Image URL)

Image: Insights from Facebook surveys

How Might We? The Birth of Innovation

With user responses in hand, we embarked on a journey of ideation and innovation. Key questions emerged:

1. **How might we share resources efficiently?** Users faced difficulties accessing the site due to limited internet data, preferring social media platforms like Facebook and Reddit for information. The platform lacked social sharing features, restricting the reach of critical information.
2. **How might we know if a resource is available?** Users often arrived at locations only to find stores closed or supplies exhausted.

Following the Research: Early Ideation Stages

Building upon our research, I started sketching concepts and wireframes to visualize potential solutions. The developer then transformed these ideas into prioritized features.

Impact Graphics

Our efforts had a tangible impact. I co-led a team of 21 Filipino developers from around the world. We helped 6,601 victims locate essential resources. We raised ₱340,900 and donated 34 generators to 8 cities affected by the typhoon. Through our platform, we received 1,235 updates from the community, a testament to its crowd-sourced nature.

My Other Contributions

My role extended beyond design and research. I took on diverse responsibilities, including:

Social Media Management

I also led the redesign of our brand, making it cleaner and more accessible. I spearheaded the creation of various social media graphics, playing a pivotal role in reaching our impact of ₱340,900 and aiding in the donation of 34 generators across Cebu.

Our social media initiatives also achieved significant milestones. On Facebook, we reached 400,000 people, and our updates garnered attention from 1,345 individuals. This massive outreach culminated in our feature on local news.

![Image: Social Media Management](Image URL)

Image: Designing social media assets

Back-End Data Entry: Developers added a back-end data entry feature for volunteers to input new resources discovered through social media insights. I scoured my Facebook feed for publicly available resource information in affected areas, enriching our database.

![Image: Back-End Data Entry](Image URL)

Image: Accessing back-end data entry

A Testament to Resilience

With developers iterating based on user feedback, the web app evolved remarkably. We achieved the following in just a few days:

Before: Early Versions of the web app

After: A streamlined platform with two sections for resource search and real-time availability updates, accompanied by an embedded map and social sharing options.

Our Impact on the Community

In just five days, we transformed the web app into a fully functional

resource hub. As healing began in affected communities, the app amassed over 895+ resources from various provinces in Visayas and Mindanao. Sponsorship from local media further expanded its reach.

Project Learnings & Challenges

This journey was a masterclass in the essence of design. It taught me:

- **Design Priority:** Usability and UX, especially in a crisis, must prioritize functionality over aesthetics. Minimalistic design was essential for users with limited internet access.
- **Openness to New Experiences:** Beyond skills, this endeavor offered an opportunity to make friends remotely and provide assistance to those in need, a profound learning experience.

Design That Changes Lives

The Tabangay Ta Initiative is not just a success story; it's a testament to the power of human-centric design in times of crisis. It reaffirms that, in adversity, innovation and collaboration can shine through, making a profound difference in people's lives. Design, at its core, is about solving problems and creating meaningful impact, and this project embodies that spirit in the most inspiring way.

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