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Letter to the Editor

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We write from the Philippines, a large archipelago along the typhoon belt and Pacific Ring of Fire. On average, the country is visited by 20 typhoons¹ and 200 felt earthquakes yearly, and has over 20 active volcanoes.²

Disasters damage health infrastructure and prevent access to health facilities due to flooding, debris, and damaged roads. As a result of these, people-centered early warning systems are needed to facilitate timely and effective information dissemination, and knowledge exchange. In the Philippines, the Nationwide Operational

Assessment of Hazards (UP NOAH), and its mobile counterpart, the country's online hazard assessment website HazardHunterPH, are free and publicly available online tools that allow users to evaluate any area in the country for natural disaster risk (Figure 1). These initiatives empower communities and guide early action and advanced planning.

Recent calamities like Typhoon Haiyan also underscored the importance of anticipating and preparing for disaster-related injuries, food- and water-borne diseases, and obstetric emergencies.³ Health services delivery must be included in disaster preparation and management. Mobile emergency facilities (such as disaster relief tents) must be readily available, and well-equipped referral centers must be identified in advance.

Critically, disasters are associated with multiple health risks that further limit capacity for resilience. Survivors experience physical, psychological, and social consequences, with mental health concerns often outlasting their physical injuries.⁴ Therefore, health must be prioritized even during disaster recovery and rehabilitation, and widespread implementation of the recently passed Mental Health Act and Universal Health Care Act in the Philippines is necessary.

As disasters expose and exacerbate a community's vulnerabilities, disaster support programs, including those that directly address public health issues, must examine socio-cultural, environmental, and political determinants of disasters to develop grounded interventions and enhance recovery.

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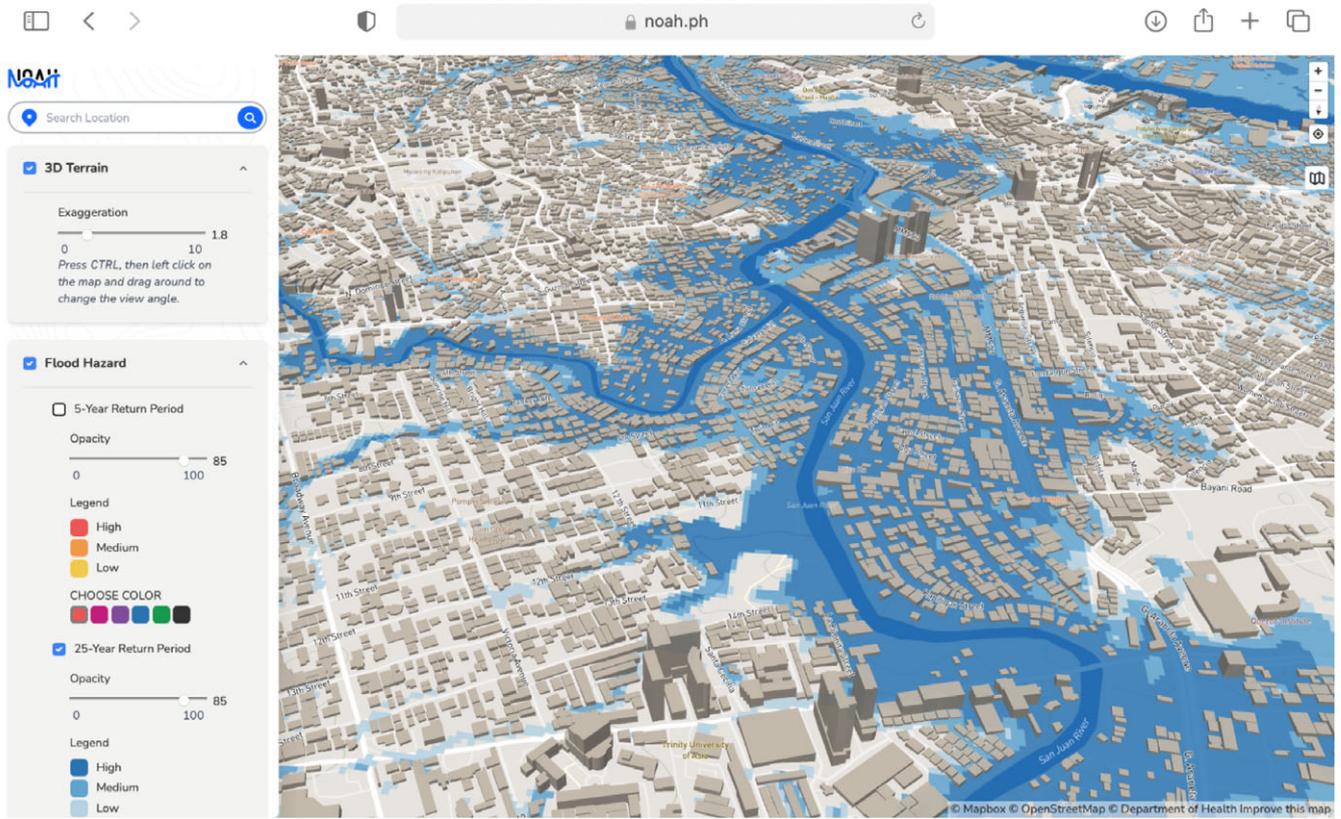


Figure 1. UP NOAH (Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards).