

Asia-Pacific Partnership for Disaster Risk Reduction Forum

Question:

The cascading and compounding impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters has shown that we must transform how disaster risk is governed. Going into 2021, please share your reflections on what is most needed to facilitate this transformation.

Reflections from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (Philippine Government Agency)...

The year 2020 has given us a preview of what is coming if we fail to address climate-related impacts and strengthen disaster resilience in all levels of governance, more importantly in the grassroots of society.

Earlier this year, the Philippines experienced the ruinous eruption of Taal volcano in Batangas. While efforts towards recovery and rehabilitation were still on the verge of government's priority, the first case of COVID-19 was declared in Manila. In March, a national health emergency was declared due to the rising COVID-19 cases in most of the major cities in the country. As experienced by almost all other countries in the world, COVID-19 took away lives, increased unemployment rate and poverty, and compromised development and economic gains, among others. While still addressing the rising cases of COVID-19, the Visayas regions experienced a magnitude 6.6 earthquake, leaving severe infrastructural damages and almost 200 casualties.

Just these past five (5) weeks, the country - particularly the entire mainland Luzon - was battered by three (3) catastrophic typhoons, one of which was super typhoon "Rolly" (international name: "Goni") which was tagged as "the year's most intense storm on the planet". These successive typhoons have inundated low-lying communities both in the rural and urban areas, damaged infrastructures and agricultural produce, displaced millions of Filipinos, and even claimed hundreds of lives.

These crises and disasters challenged almost all various systems we've been working for the past decade. Following all major efforts by the Government, specifically by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), I would like to share five (5) reflection and action points:

1. On existing systems, plans and policies.....

With these complex and compounding disasters, there is a need to revisit the National Disaster Risk Reduction Plan. Following the complexities of public health emergencies, existing systems, plans, and strategies were challenged, hence, reassessment and recalibration is deemed necessary. As we intend to develop and enhance these strategies, we should also rethink the overall development plans of the country. This will ensure that our aim to become resilient corresponds to our effort towards environmental protection and "planetary health" per se.

2. On fund and resource mobilization...

Overlapping responses to various disasters and crises caused the depletion of funds in the national, regional, provincial, and primarily in the Local Government Units. Prompt response needs adequate resources: be it fund, workforce, logistics, among others. CY

2020 made us re-think on what should be our priority investments. Further, our experience made us re-learn that indeed, contingencies are necessary; there should always be allocation for unforeseen situations that would not impede other priority programs of the government.

3. On Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation investments.....

This is a wakeup call for all of us, **we should start listening more to Science**. Plans, policies, and actions should be science-informed. Transparent and credible information on hazard, risk and vulnerabilities should be of utmost priority in local and national planning and decision-making. Existing risk assessment tools and local plans should be harmonised and centralized. The government also needs to delve further into its risk management strategies to be more proactive in its disaster response: the identification, evaluation, and prioritization of risks as well as the coordinated and economical utilization of resources should be considered towards maximized realization of opportunities. Our DRRM and climate change advocacy investments should correspond to the data, observations, study and claims of scientific investigations.

4. On Capacity Development...

Our experiences from these crises and disasters challenged all capacity development investments to disaster practitioners, responders, advocates, and the like. Hence, there is a need towards reinforcement of knowledge, strategies, technical expertise, and technical know-how to all levels of government to fully be equipped in the ever changing demands of DRRM. As policies and plans evolve, appropriate capacity building interventions should also be considered. This will enable provision of suitable and applicable technical assistance to and from the government's key players and actors.

5. On partnership building....

The government **cannot and should not** do it alone. We need partners: be it development partners, non-profit organizations, private sectors, international partners, among others. These partners will certainly complement the efforts of the government. We believe, and we've also experienced, that these partners have something to offer in the table which can strengthen response efforts. Our Department has been engaging various partners and we would like to highlight that the resources, technical assistance, and support provided has been beneficial in improving the DSWD's DRR related programs and services.

2021 is knocking at our doorsteps. COVID 19 will continue to be a threat to communities, and disasters will be inevitable and will certainly challenge different aspects in our society. But one thing is certain: life goes on! As we move forward, we unlearn, continue to learn, and re-learn, in order to reorganize, improve, and develop.

We work as one to be able to heal as one.

Thank you!

DIR. CLIFFORD CYRIL Y. RIVERAL

Director IV, Disaster Response Management Bureau, DSWD