DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: A CALL OF THE PRESENT TIME

by:

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The Department of Education (DepEd) is responsible for providing safe teaching-learning facilities and hazard-free environment to the schoolchildren. Former secretary Jesli A. Lapus (2008) reiterated that aside from the business of providing basic education, saving lives and properties is a challenge accepted by all stakeholders in private and government entities.

The World Disaster Reduction Campaign (2007), presents an overview of the campaign “Disaster Risk Reduction begins at school” and the lessons learned from good practices in different countries affected by various natural and man-made disasters found out that children are the most vulnerable age group during any disaster, especially those attending school, as school buildings are often destroyed. The campaign is based on the assumption that disaster risk education in schools will empower children to play a role before and after a natural hazard, thereby reducing the adverse effects of such disasters. It aims to raise awareness and mobilize various stakeholders to ensure that disaster risk reduction is fully integrated into school curricula in high risk countries and that school buildings are built to withstand natural hazards.

As mandated by the constitution, DepEd is the agency of the government primarily responsible for the education and manpower development of the country and for the formulation, planning, implementation and coordination of the policies, plans, programs and projects in the areas of formal, informal, and non-formal education at the elementary, secondary and the alternative learning system.
In addition, the role of education nowadays does not only confine within the four corners of the classroom. As mandated, education plays vital role to develop life-long learners who are able to survive and apply their acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes in their everyday lives, along with this, the main core of education perhaps is, it serves as a tool for life existence and survival.

Disaster preparedness is a series of actions taken to make sure that the impact of hazards is lessened. As of this time, various natural and manmade disasters hit our country, it is therefore, disaster preparedness should be institutionalized in every public and private educational institution throughout the country.

We cannot stop natural hazards from happening but we can reduce the damages if we institute preparedness measures. Assessment and planning is an area of preparedness which includes establishing an ongoing school safety committee to lead disaster risk reduction and disaster response planning in our school. Holding regular meetings (including staff, parents/guardians, students and local community leaders) to develop and review out mitigation, preparedness and response plans. Learn about local resource and assets available in the community nearby from private and public sources, and discus shared use of resources post-disaster.

Meanwhile, physical protection as part of school preparedness includes assessing if the building has been located appropriately, designed and built according to current building codes/safety standards for disaster safety, and inspected by a qualified structural engineer. Likewise, when earthquake, and windstorm strike, tall and heavy furniture, secured computers, televisions and other electronic equipment, hazardous materials, supplies, propane gas tanks, water tanks, lighting fixtures, roof elements, railings and parapets, heating and cooling devices, storage tanks and other items that could kill, injure, or impair educational continuity had fastened.
School preparedness includes response capacity in supplies and skills, as school preparedness in disaster management includes having guidelines and holding post-disaster drills to practice safety skills with all staff and students at least twice a year. Having a buddy system for those needing help. In holding simulation exercise at least one a year where operational teams practice response organization as well as procedures and skills in damage assessment, information-sharing, light search and rescue, first aid, fire suppressions and family reunification.

Certainly, some school managers, heads of the school, teachers and even heads of the families failed to act on it during times of uncertainty that needs sounds decision making and causes loss of thousands of lives and school properties due to mismanagement and unpreparedness to emergency and calamities.

In the absence of routine policies and procedures or even a clear protocol for disaster management, pupils may be placed at risk to ill-advised evacuation efforts or neglected during severe emergencies. Hence, insufficient consideration has been given to the emergency preparedness planning and management with respect to meeting needs of vulnerable students. The findings suggest that disaster preparedness is under resourced and possibly neglected.

One of the most tragic disaster that hit the Philippine involving the loss of school children lives was 2006 Leyte Landslides where a massive rock slide-debris avalanche occurred on February 17, 2006 in the Philippine province of Southern Leyte that caused widespread damage and loss of life. The deadly landslide (debris flow) followed a ten-day period of heavy rains and a minor earthquake (magnitude 2.6 on the Richter scale) and the catastrophe resulted to an official death toll of 1,126.

At around 10:30 on February 17, 2006, a cliff face of a ridge straddling the Philippine Fault collapsed in a combination rockslide-debris mass movement event, locating and subsequently burying Guinsaugon village in the town of Saint Bernard. Up
to ten smaller landslides had occurred within the previous week in the vicinity of St. Bernard, but Guinsaugon was the worst-hit community.

Recently, last July 6, 2017, a 6.5 magnitude earthquake affected Leyte, Tacloban and Cebu City destroying houses, buildings and other infrastructures which include school buildings and facilities.

At the outset, we are not be able to prevent the earth from shaking, the wind from blowing, or the rain from falling. However, with disaster management preparedness in terms of assessment and planning, physical and environmental protection and response preparedness we can prevent these events from becoming disasters. Since schools are our universal institution for sharing knowledge and skills, the expectations for schools to be role models in disaster preparedness is high. Successful disaster mitigation is one of the ultimate tests of the success of the education we provide over generations, hence, a call of the present time that all of us, as educator should be equipped with preparedness in disaster management.

References:


