

Real disaster risk reduction challenge in PH is at local level

The Philippines has embraced the new framework that the United Nations 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) adopted to guide UN member-states in efforts to substantially reduce losses from disasters in the coming years.

The new framework will give the Philippines a validation of its policy-strong and political commitment that DRR (disaster risk reduction) is the way to go, said Margareta Wahlstrom, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's special representative for disaster risk reduction.

In the Philippines, you already have all the instruments, the framework, the theories. But I think the challenge is so much what happens at the local level. And with a tough geography, your country should take a look at how the system works and how, for example, resources are channeled down, the capacity strengths, who is monitoring or supervising DRR efforts, she told the Inquirer.

The new DRR framework, called "Sendai Framework for Action," stressed the need to reduce the level of existing disaster risks and prevent the creation of new ones.

When interviewed, Wahlstrom pointed out that the Philippines has so many, many good things. But I realize Filipinos might be a little frustrated with how the DRR system and the services work.

Well, sometimes very quick and sometimes slow, but I don't think that's really the fundamental issue, which is as a disaster comes to you, make sure you put all the pieces into place to make it work and to deliver to the people. So now, it's checking that it really works and helping it oil the machinery, she said.

Wahlstrom cited the Philippines for taking DRR very seriously.

Look at the huge Philippine delegation and the size of its commitment to come here. Of course, their participation in the conference will compel the Philippines to act on its own perceived gaps (in DRR programs) and define where your country needs to go, she added.

61-STRONG PH DELEGATION

The 61-strong Philippine delegation was jointly led by Social Welfare Secretary Dinky Soliman and Sen. Loren Legarda, the UN's DRR champion for the Asia-Pacific region.

Also in the group were National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council Executive Director Alexander Pama, also the head of the Office of Civil Defense; Public Works Secretary Rogelio Singson; and Representatives Rufus Rodriguez and Mel Senen Sarmiento.

The five-day 3rd WCDRR closed on March 18 here, attended by more than 6,000 delegates from 180-plus countries.

The conference was held at the Sendai International Center, just 10 kilometers away from the city's coastal area that was hit on March 11, 2011, by a 9-magnitude quake and an ensuing tsunami that left over 16,000 people dead and thousands missing in the Tohoku region.

FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE

The Sendai Framework for Action, which succeeded the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action, also encouraged public and private disaster risk reduction strategies to shift from reactive approaches to proactive ones to reduce the vulnerability and exposure of people and assets to natural hazards.

For the Philippines, the post-2015 framework will serve as its DRR manifesto in the coming years.

In its official statement to the WCDRR, the Philippine government assured the country remains steadfast in its commitment to continue working for safer, sustainable, climate change-adaptive and disaster-resilient communities [geared] toward building a stronger nation and world.

It noted that its DRR efforts go hand-in-hand with its climate-change adaptation and sustainable development plans and programs.

COST-EFFECTIVE

The just-ended WCDRR said managing disaster risks needs to become a defining characteristic of sustainable development and that reducing disaster risks is a cost-effective investment in preventing future economic losses.

Accelerated efforts are needed to reduce exposure and vulnerability, preventing the creation of new risks and to ensure accountability for disaster risk creation, it said.

It reported that between 1994 and 2013, an average of 218 million people were adversely affected annually by natural hazards.

During the period, 6,873 recorded disasters claimed 1.35 million lives, or an average of 68,000 deaths a year, excluding unrecorded loss of lives due to drought.

Asia was hit by 2,778 disasters over the 20-year period, affecting 3.8 billion people with 841,000 deaths.

DISPLACED

The WCDRR said that between 2008 and 2013, up to 155 million people worldwide suffered short- or long-term displacement by disasters.

With estimated economic losses due to disasters now averaging \$250 billion to \$300 billion a year, governments should set aside at least \$314 billion a year to meet expected average losses from earthquakes, tropical cyclones, tsunamis and floods.

Every \$1 invested in DRR results in savings of \$4 to \$7 in disaster response, it said, adding annual investments of USD 6 billion could reduce losses by \$360 billion.

The United Nations, in its 2015 Global Assessment Report on DRR, has warned that disaster risks could seriously undermine the capacity of a number of countries to develop across multiple dimensions.

This is a challenge not only for low-income countries such as Madagascar and Haiti, but also for middle-income countries like the Philippines, Honduras and Jamaica, and for high-income countries like Greece. Although Jamaica and Greece have lower relative risk compared to the Philippines, Fiji, Honduras and Madagascar, the negative implications for development are very similar, it added.

The 193-member body added that while the principal challenge to Greece relates to economic growth, the main challenge facing the Philippines is one of social development.

UN-JICA AGREEMENT

In a related development, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) have signed an agreement that aims to boost global efforts on disaster risk reduction.

The deal was forged Wednesday by Wahlstrom, head of the Geneva-based UN agency, and JICA president Akihiko Tanaka in simple rites at the WCDRR.

Among their areas of cooperation are mainstreaming DRR, strengthening DRR institutions and the building back better strategy in DRR programs and promoting capacity development in Third World countries, a conference statement said.

The Philippine Disaster Recovery Foundation (PDRF) plans to put up a disaster operations center in the country to coordinate private sector efforts for disaster relief and recovery during major disasters.

This was announced on Wednesday by PDRF president Rene Meily in a WCDRR session hosted by the Islamic Relief Worldwide, where he said his group would be working closely with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

The PDRF is cochaired by Manuel Pangilinan, PLDT chair; Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala, CEO of Ayala Corp.; and Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle.