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BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

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Typhoons are here to stay, and they're getting stronger and stronger as climate change continues to worsen. Rising earth temperature, according to scientists, results to increased evaporation. This then results to an increase in the volume of rainfall. Global warming, reports Greenpeace, "will also induce higher temperature differences between the land and sea surfaces, causing an increased transport of precipitable water to the continents, and an increase of convectional rainfall."

In other words, the Philippines should expect more Typhoon Franks and Typhoon Ondoy, considering that the archipelago is part of the typhoon belt, described by meteorologists as "a belt between 10 and 40 degrees North latitude where typhoons are common".

Aside from floods and landslides, we will have more volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis because, according to Pag-asa, we are also in the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire and in the

geologically unstable region between the Pacific and Eurasian tectonic plates.

The Philippines also suffers major man-made environmental crises aggravated by a soaring population growth rate, including loss of agricultural lands, deforestation, soil erosion, air and water pollution, improper disposal of solid and toxic wastes, loss of coral reefs, mismanagement and abuse of coastal resources, and overfishing.



Just like in every disaster – as what happened to Guimaras when it was devastated by an oil spill in 2006 and Metro Iloilo when Typhoon Frank struck in 2008 – Metro Manila will now be facing a greater challenge of

response, rescue, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction following the onslaught of Typhoon Ondoy. But it should not end there. The Philippines should now institute a comprehensive disaster risk reduction and management program that will also focus on the anticipatory stages of disaster, which includes risk identification and analysis, risk reduction, prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

Past and recent disasters should give Congress enough reason to pass the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Act of 2009 which provides for a comprehensive range of actions and measures pertaining to all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management. The proposed law, according to co-author Bukidnon Rep. Teofisto Guingona III, aims to replace the existing Presidential Decree 1566, which established the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) and the Office of the Civil Defense (OCD) presently under the control of the Department of National Defense (DND).

The DRRM Act also aims to transfer the direct supervision and management of disaster relief and control from the DND to an autonomous and independent agency which will be directly under the control of the Office of the President. Under the measure, the OCD shall be transformed into the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), and the present NDCC will become the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

But more than creating a new office, a much greater challenge would be how to build resilient communities.

The Metro Iloilo-Guimaras Region – learning from Typhoon Frank and the Petron oil spill disasters – is now leading the call for bioregionalism, where DRRM will become a major consideration in growth management and spatial planning. In fact, “Weathering Uncertainties: Building a Resilient Region” was the theme of the Western Visayas Regional Planning Summit organized in March 2009 to find ways and means on how to build new types of communities that can cope with the serious threats of climate

change and weather the coming environmental shocks.

The Summit stressed the need for inter-local cooperation, recognizing the fact that no single local government unit can counter climate change challenges all by itself. “Climate change actions require concerted efforts of local governments and their partners to manage a changing and more invasive environment,” notes environmental champion Elisea Gozun, keynote speaker during the Summit organized by the Metro Iloilo-Guimaras Economic Development Council (MIGEDC), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

In building resilient communities, bioregional planning should now become the core – where local government units should embrace the reality that it is now the environment that directs what development path communities should take. They should acknowledge the fact that they live in a naturally-defined area called the bioregion, recognize their individual and collective roles in this bioregion, and examine what threatens it, and thereafter institute mitigation and adaptation measures. These mitigation and adaptation measures should now become major considerations in managing the growth not of individual local governments but of the bioregion as a whole. Lessons can be learned and innovated from best practices developed in areas that have built mechanisms to cushion the impact of environmental shocks.

Our experiences have shown that a single natural calamity can easily wipe out decades of development if no safety nets are put in place. The role of bioregionalism, therefore, is to preserve growth by building resilient communities.