

Keyword: climate-change

Headline: More needed to reduce climate change risks and impacts

Byline: None

Published Date: 03:36 AM November 25, 2014

Section: opinion

Word Count: 391

Content:

The first anniversary of Super Typhoon “Yolanda” (international name: Haiyan) reminds us that the Philippines is already suffering from the effects of climate change.

We at the Climate Change Network for Community-Based Initiatives (CCNCI) fear that not enough measures have been undertaken to prepare the country for future disasters.

The Philippines may have the best legislation, such as Republic Act No. 9729 or the Climate Change Act of 2009 and RA 10121 or the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. But these laws have not substantially lessened the vulnerability of the poor in times of calamities. As a network of NGOs directly involved in disaster preparedness, rehabilitation and recovery, we have witnessed this again and again. The situation in Yolanda-affected areas proves that much has yet to be done to address the adverse impacts of climate change. One year after the tragedy, thousands still live in cramped, dangerous temporary shelters; and the poor—farmers and fisherfolk—have not received adequate livelihood assistance.

It seems that the Aquino administration is not keen on the complete rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery of the Yolanda-hit provinces. While the total damage and loss has amounted to P571 billion, the Aquino administration’s Yolanda Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Plan is pegged at only P171 billion, or 30 percent, of the actual needs.

If the country’s leaders have realized the seriousness of the issue at hand, why is the budget for climate change research, for example, equivalent to only 0.5 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP)? The recommended allocation for climate change research is 2 percent of the country’s GDP. Even worse, there is yet no comprehensive study on the impacts of climate change on the Philippines.

We at the CCNCI will continue to do our share in reducing the risks of disasters and in mitigating the effects of climate change at the grassroots level. But we can only do so much given our limited resources. We urge our leaders to do more—invest in disaster preparedness, conduct science-based risk reduction and climate change adaptation, strengthen the barangay risk reduction and management councils, among others.

We need to act now.—SUYIN JAMORALIN, executive director, Citizens’ Disaster Response Center, convenor, Climate Change Network for Community-Based Initiatives

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