

10 March 2022

## **The 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Environmental and Rural Development: Sharing RCE Experiences on Disaster Management**

### **Context**

The Asia-Pacific region has been regarded as most disaster-prone due to the occurrences of natural calamities, among which is the increasing frequency of stronger, more devastating typhoons. These disasters adversely impact economic activities, increase vulnerability of countries to environmental degradation and social disparities. Efforts to mitigate the aftermath of disasters entail a community-based multistakeholder approach.

The Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), acknowledged by the United Nations University, are regional or local networks of formal, non-formal and informal education organisations dedicated to deliver ESD in the locality where it is situated. RCEs across the world embark on sustainability initiatives and projects that benefit regional and local communities.

### **Special RCE Session**

At the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Environmental and Rural Development (<https://www.iserd.net/>) held on 5 March 2022, which was organised online by the International Society of Environmental and Rural Development, the Bohol Island State University, Philippines, and the Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation, Japan, and co-organised by the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), a special RCE session was held on the topic of “*Disaster Management: Community-based responses in the aftermath of devastating typhoons*”. There were more than 100 participants in the conference. A majority of them attended the special session, which delved into the important role of education, multistakeholder partnership, and community engagement in dealing with local problems, particularly in the aftermath of devastating typhoons. It shared experiences, and discussed lessons learned on how RCEs in the typhoon-hit regions in the Philippines should respond and contribute to mitigating the adverse impacts of disasters. The presentations on the RCE network, disaster education and resilience, and the experiences of four RCEs in the Philippines were immensely informative.

### **RCE and Disaster Management**

In disaster management, there needs a platform for inclusive partnership in the community for working together for preparedness and to respond to adversities. Introduced by *Ms. Miki Konishi* of UNU-IAS, RCE is a strategic and practical multistakeholder vehicle for regional and local partnership and collaboration to tackle complex sustainability issues in the respective communities and regions. Acknowledged by the United Nations University, RCE is a unique and powerful mechanism that translates the global sustainable agenda into local actions (<https://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/>).

Effective leadership role of higher education institutions (HEIs) is important through integrating disaster management education in curricula and practicing them in partnership with local communities. Policy introduction and implementation at various levels through multidisciplinary educational curriculum and incorporation of disaster risk knowledge in formal and non-formal education can strengthen the capacity at all levels to understand disaster risk and also help for effective risk communications. This was a message from the keynote speaker, *Dr. Indrajit Pal* from the Asian Institute of Technology, who led two

ProSPER.Net joint research projects on disaster resilience and education (<https://prospernet.ias.unu.edu/projects/past-projects>).

### **Sharing RCE Experiences**

Participants learned from the experiences of four RCEs located in the Philippines, all of them led or supported by higher education institutions – namely, RCE Bohol led by Bohol Island State University, RCE Cebu with secretariat at University of the Philippines Cebu, RCE Northern Mindanao led by Xavier University, and RCE Ilocos led by Mariano Marcos State University.

The Bohol Island State University, RCE Bohol Secretariat attended to the needs of the typhoon victims in collaboration with a hospital and a number of local government agencies, according to *Dr. Bernabe M. Mijares Jr*, by providing relief goods distribution, such as food and clothing, as well as basic services, mental health and psychosocial interventions. In all these provisions, it was validated that effective disaster interventions in communities should be through a collaborative and multistakeholder approach.

RCE Cebu, represented by *Prof. Maria Rosario Piquero-Ballescás*, shared experiences related to relief assistance initiatives and responses extended to affected residents and communities to draw and call attention to certain concerns related to disaster risk reduction and management amid the COVID pandemic. Concerns pertain to ensuring no one affected is left behind, ascertaining the type of assistance, ensuring relief friendliness to the environment and COVID health protocols, and addressing multiple or simultaneous hazards (pandemic, typhoon, flood). Typhoon disaster is not only about local actions but requires an urgent call to global climate justice and a coherent action for building resiliency.

*Engr. Dexter S. Lo* of RCE Northern Mindanao, through a Xavier University project, introduced their designed and developed geographic-based analysis tool, to capture the unique characteristics of a particular location at a particular time, to help local government units (LGUs) ensure more suitable and workable plans of action. It establishes dashboards that are problem-focused, solutions-driven, customised, accessible, and timely, and also includes other hazards imminent and unique to each locality such as floods, landslides, and earthquakes – capturing a multi-hazard approach and integrated risk perspective. They demonstrated broadening disaster preparedness and response not only on crisis management but also on risk management.

RCE Ilocos, represented by *Prof. Marlowe U. Aquino* of Mariano Marcos State University, shared the disaster risk mitigation management program in Ilocos Norte Province. Community participation, empowerment, and responses serve as learning factors for local government units' continuous effort in developing programmes that enable people and communities to be adaptive, responsive, and resilient in times of disasters and crisis. The HEI-LGU-Community Partnership (HLCP) is one functional-operating model that supports the development of appropriate disaster risk mitigation management programmes adaptive and suitable for people and communities, emphasising community resources, cultural strengths, and self-reliance.

### **Conclusion**

HEIs need to view disaster management through the lens of community engagements for local-level actions utilising participatory and multi-methodological approaches - “developing solutions with and for the community” is a worthy slogan. The interface of academia and local multistakeholders, through local ESD networking, is expected to broaden into the future and there would be expansion in localisation of knowledge employing the new paradigm of disaster risk management. Empowering local communities in

disaster management through academic outreach by mobilising RCE networks would become more prominent and strategic. It is imperative to call for global climate action and justice for more effective local-global disaster risk reduction and management.

(Acknowledgement: The special RCE session was chaired by *Prof. Mario T. Tabucanon*, Adjunct Professor at UNU-IAS, co-chaired by *Dr. Jeeranuch Sakkhamduang* who is affiliated with RCE Greater Phnom Penh, and with the technical support of *Mr. Ognen Oncevski*, Tokyo University of Agriculture)