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Philippines

Philippines in times of disasters: The State - In the Eye of the Storm

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On the 17th of December 2011, Northeastern Mindanao had been hit by a never-expected disaster. Thousands were killed in a short a time, millions of pesos worth of properties were destroyed and several hundreds of people were missing. This disastrous event was brought by the strong current of water from the river with tons of logs and mud in it. The darkness and the destructive flood buried and flashed away the dreams and future of those families, communities and children. Experts named the typhoon in local and international as Sendong and Washi respectively.

In the aftermath, there were massive displacement of survivors and communities, dead bodies in the river banks, streets and coastal areas retrieved to even to nearby towns and regions. It was a regrettable year ender for 2011 among the population of Cagayan de Oro, Iligan and Dumaguete cities.

The disaster was even worst because of the revelation of the incapability of the government in responding to the said situation. The burden of responding to the needs of the survivors was passed on to the civil society organizations, the churches, peoples' organizations and volunteers. Up to the third month after the disaster, no plan was offered to and made with the survivors. And in the process of defining the rehabilitation and rebuilding lives for the survivors, no consultation for the survivors happened except those done by the non government organizations. Among those worst attitude of the government personnel was the grand standing and manipulating the goods for the survivors by claiming the goods as their efforts and used as best political preparation for the coming 2013 local elections. Here is a case of the elite politicians victimizing the survivors for the second time.

Disasters again and again

Prior to the disastrous Sendong, majority of those poor victims were urban poor and minimum wage earners suffering the economic disaster by the high rising prices of commodities and low social services from the government and more and more of these families were even threatened by the massive unemployment and contractualization of labor sector.

Right after typhoon Sendong, government did not even think of responding to a minimum action to convince investors for instance to lower the prices on petroleum products, localized suspension of the 12% value added tax to commodities and moratorium to lower down the rates of energy and power. But not a single action aside from the political grand standing and self-serving speeches of these politicians on the cancelation of logging permits only to be recalled later. Investigations for the incident were made only to safeguard those responsible for the massive tree cutting and divert the attention from the government's policies of disregarding the environment for logging and mining industries.

Sad to note also are questions among responders. Fly by night private organizations also used the survivors' situation to make money. NGOs of family dynasty built consortiums and joined networks then reported to their funding partner the network's efforts and saving the funding for their organization and family interests. International funding organizations and response groups have literally robbed local potentials from local responding organizations, offering high fees and incentives in the name of capacitating the local organizations but in the end, it turned out staffs were pirated and hired with high paying jobs to do the dirty works and profits go to the NGO executive who parachuted in the affected areas. More so, these international organizations felt like they owned these local personnel and their employees – a master and a slave relation or the capitalist and the worker to contextualize it

today.

More and worst disasters will happen when people and the masses will be used and fooled by these vultures. The more the collective response must the people have the less these opportunists can take advantage of the victims.

The State and its Vibrant Contradictions in Actions

Policy combating the effects of climate change was passed and to give teeth to the law, a disaster risk reduction and management law again was passed with penalties and sanctions for the violators while on contrary the government encouraged open pit mining and massive “selective” and “responsible” logging. Preservation of environment has been also in the primary program of the government that is why organic farming and sustainable agriculture laws were passed and put budgetary allocations for the implementation of such laws, but again, line agencies and even policy makers are promoting chemical fertilizers and manipulating agricultural industry in favor of the investors and not the masses. Thus, conversion of lands for business is only one of such manifestations how the government takes care with its people and the economy.

These were the only few contradicting pronouncements, actions and initiatives of the government in the past and more so in the present.

Such posted real challenge for real response from the peoples and movements. Revolutionary movements and disaster response groups must always bear in mind that the government is always an institution to subjugate and put the interest and welfare of the masses in its last priority. It is an institution to oppress and implement the interest of the capitalist and oppressive system. These glaring realities can always be seen during the times of the disasters like in Sendong.

In principles and in practice, the well being of the masses and environment shall always be a non-negotiable matter. This means that environment must be saved from the capitalist dominance or else, there's nothing left to the people especially the masses. Then, it is an obligation of all marginalized and struggling for the liberation of humanity to liberate ecology from the greediness of capitalists.

The real constant disaster that the world's masses are experiencing is the capitalist neo-liberal assaults killing every human and the environment, and our response shall always be revolutionary which is not neglecting the important role of the masses themselves. The gains of these revolutionary struggles shall be with and for the masses and the direction will be the elimination of all kinds of exploitation including that of the environment.

The need to expose and eliminate those money-making and opportunist organizations and individuals is a duty of all survivors and responders like building the society free from oppression and deprivation.