

Disaster management

—to be better prepared

Several times over the years, Randolph Valen Bides and Dr. Myrna Rivera have worked in the same places. Randolph, a Fire Chief Inspector, is the head of the Special Rescue Unit (SRU) of the Bureau of Fire Prevention in Metro Manila. Dr. Rivera heads Health Emergency Coordination at Tondo Medical Center, a Manila hospital of the Philippine Department of Health.

Where they sometimes meet are the sites of Metro Manila's worst disasters: fires, bombings, collapse of buildings, etc. Their most visible work is search and rescue, but much less visible are their preparedness efforts, which include planning, training, drills for prevention and mitigation, and then recovery and rehabilitation.

Nothing prepared anyone for the calamities of 2009. A typhoon poured a month's worth of rainfall on Metro Manila in six hours. Raging floodwaters killed hundreds of people and destroyed the homes of hundreds of thousands. Soon later, a typhoon struck north, causing landslides and more deaths.

"The typhoons 'Ondoy' and 'Pepeng' tested our capabilities in managing various incidents in all aspects," says Randolph. The bureau tries to make the public aware and ready to handle these calamities but "chaos, disorder and loss of lives and property still abound," he says.

Both Randolph and Dr. Rivera agree that it is important for them to learn more on comprehensive disaster risk management. In January-February 2010, JICA sent them to Tokyo for a six-week course.



Dr. Myrna Rivera and Randolph Bides in training

They were among 18 participants from different countries given knowledge and experiences on natural disaster management in Japan and Hyogo Prefecture.

After their return, the participating organizations will produce final outputs using results brought back by the participants.

Shortly before departure, Dr. Rivera said she was keen especially on two subjects: the roles of national and local governments in disaster management in Japan, and the role of the private sector, such as NGOs, in disaster management.

At disaster sites, Dr. Rivera says, a feeling of "*kapatiran*," or brotherhood, prevails among people from government hospitals in different regions, and between them and people from other agencies, like Randolph's unit. In the Tokyo course, "I hope to see if there can be unified effort, teamwork with the private sector and NGOs."

Randolph's SRU is responsible for training, deployment and actual operation of the fire bureau's rescue teams in Metro Manila, the only region with an SRU. After the JICA course, he is expected to revisit the bureau's policies, circulars and standard procedures, and propose changes that will help to modernize the agency.

Moreover, he is expected to prepare a training module for all government offices and NGOs, like fire volunteers. "The training of one officer will effectively serve as training for the whole organization and the community," he said.



Geronimo Sy while training in Japan

Young Leader at Justice Department

"JICA continues to support good governance so critical to our work, even beyond the excellent training we had," says Attorney Geronimo L. Sy, the youngest career Assistant Secretary of the Department of Justice (DOJ) who recently tapped JICA technical expertise in competition law.

Asec Indy, as he is known to friends, was a State Prosecutor before he went to Japan in 2008 for a JICA course on The Criminal Justice Response to Corruption. He currently chairs the Integrity Development Action Plan Committee of the DOJ to implement ideas and best practices from the program. His other advocacies include harnessing technology in the service of law and introducing innovative rules to speed up dispute resolution.

Persons with disabilities as trained leaders

"I take an active role in propagating the Rights and Privileges of Persons with Disability... so that PWDs will no longer be discriminated against," says Thess Lloren, a member of the executive committee of *Tahanang Walang Hagdanan*, or House Without Steps.

Thess, who became a polio victim at age three, received her education through a Tahanan program. After finishing a finance degree at a Catholic university, she joined Tahanan immediately "so I can help other disabled too."

JICA sent Thess to Japan in October-December 2008 for a program to develop the leadership skills of persons with disabilities.



Thess Lloren (seated second from left) with other JICA trainees at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, Japan