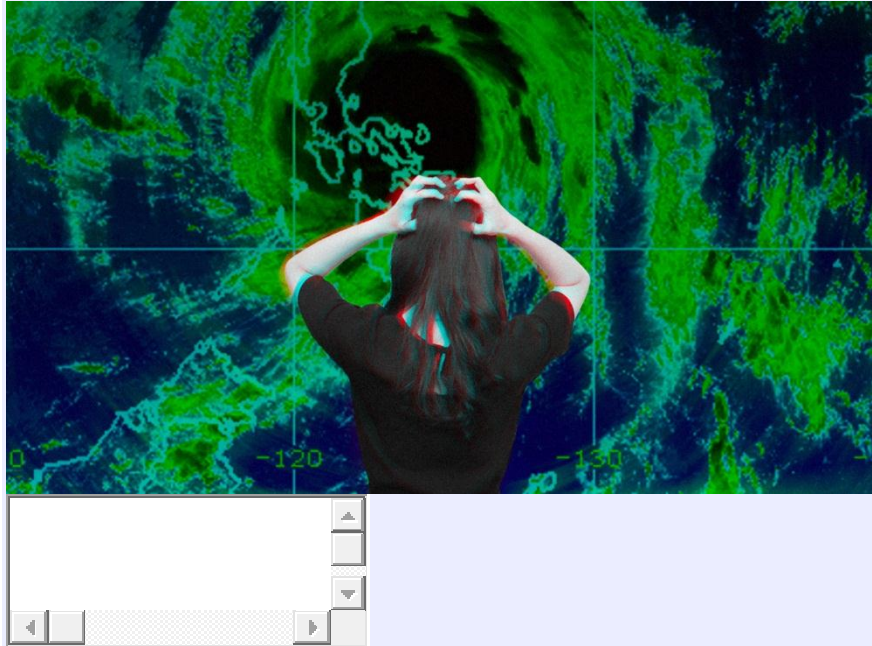


[OPINION] Disaster fatigue

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'We need our disaster field workers, our scientists, and our civil servants...to be appointed to key and decisive — and ideally top — positions in our disaster governance institutions'

2020 is the year of catastrophes, with the Taal eruption, the COVID-19 pandemic, and now our typhoon season. After the devastation of Typhoon Quinta, then came Rolly, one of the strongest storms to have made landfall on record. Then, just when we thought we had enough of typhoons, several more came. We are now experiencing the full impact of Ulysses – and this may not be the last typhoon we have this year.

What is disaster fatigue?

Isabella Khoo, writing for the Huffington Post, says that disaster fatigue happens when our mind is bombarded with bad news. There are adverse psychological effects on individuals, families, and communities when disasters come one after the other. But I think disaster fatigue has both macro and meso dimensions. Even institutions and organizations get overburdened and stretched

out, too, as they are made up of people with finite resources. Disaster frontliners and managers are human beings who have limited mental and physical capabilities.

Local government units and the national government, then, do not run on infinite assets. For example, much of their budget has already been diverted to the COVID-19 response. People's ability to give materially is also finite. In a recent conversation with a senior officer of a major volunteer organization, the officer said she was worried that a fundraising event may not be possible, as people had already given so much for pandemic-related efforts, and that the businesses of potential donors had been severely affected.

Addressing disaster fatigue

Recognizing that disaster fatigue encompasses the individual, organizational, and social levels is crucial. Scientists are warning that COVID-19 may not be the last pandemic the world will face in the immediate future. Our location in the Pacific of Ring of Fire also exposes us to multiple hazards such as volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. We also have more typhoons or tropical storms than most countries, and these will dramatically change in frequency, intensity, and direction due to climate change.

As such, we have to improve our disaster risk management (DRM) policies and practices. The keywords are efficiency, synergy, and impact. Efficiency means delivering necessary social services quickly to prevent and manage disaster risks. This is not just about making relief goods reach disaster-stricken communities faster; it is also about making decisive reforms in our national laws and institutions. Disaster managers have more than enough to worry about, yet they spend most of their time navigating circuitous bureaucratic procedures and dealing with slack in the procurement process. This drains the mental and physical resources one needs to focus on strategies for building resilient infrastructure, promoting disaster literacy, and minimizing disaster losses.

<https://www.rappler.com/voices/imho/opinion-disaster-fatigue>