RIPPLE EFFECTS: HOW CORRUPTION IN FLOOD-CONTROL PROJECTS WASHES AWAY EDUCATIONAL FUTURES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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When a country invests billions in infrastructure to safeguard people's homes, those funds promise several things beyond fewer flooded buildings. They ensure safer schools and steadier learning for students, which would ultimately boost local economies. However, when corruption siphons these resources through fictitious enterprises, inferior workmanship, and inflated contracts, the repercussions reach well beyond mere financial loss. In the Philippine setting, reports of widespread corruption in flood-control projects threaten to unleash a series of adverse effects that could deprive children of their right to education. Recent government investigations indicated tens of billions of pesos were lost. The report raises the issue of how flood protection systems and embezzled public funds will affect schools, teachers, and learners.

Flood control infrastructure such as canals, dikes, retention basins and pumping stations is meant to reduce the frequency and severity of inundation. When projects are substandard, unfinished, or outright fake, the communities remain exposed to persistent flooding. The immediate consequences on schools are self-evident: school buildings and teaching materials are routinely ruined, and classes suspended. Studies locally show that recurrent floods produce chronic effects on learning and cause physical damage to educational facilities, increased absenteeism, and loss of schooling time. These impacts compound over several years, widening the gap between better-off and poorer communities. Corruption that siphons off flood-control budgets is a tax on resilience. When a substantial portion of the allocated budget is diverted, there is limited funding for initiatives to safeguard schools, such as classroom elevation, or recovery programs after disasters. The opportunity cost is immense. Every peso lost to fraud is a peso that could have gone to repair schools, fund emergency learning kits, or train teachers in disaster-responsive pedagogy.

The impact on education is immediate and profound. Poor flood control increases the risk of families being displaced to evacuation centers or temporary shelters, where children cannot

study well, have less time for learning, and sometimes drop out. Humanitarian organizations and government data say that storms and floods cause mass disruptions of learning in the country, sometimes affecting millions of learners. Additionally, due to stress, illness-related struggles, and loss of learning resources, children's cognitive capability and academic achievement are significantly compromised. These effects aggregate, leading to lower test scores as well as higher repetition and dropout rates in the impacted regions. Corruption and poor infrastructure also do not affect students equally. Low-income families, students with disabilities, and those in informal settlements are subjected to a higher flood risk and have fewer buffers like savings, transport, or private tutoring. Wealthier households can better manage relocations and catch-up learning; poorer children will never regain what they lost. Studies show that flooding exacerbates poverty. The educational gap widens over time and leaves the already disadvantaged groups further behind.

Teachers are also caught in the undertow. They are the first responders in affected schools where they set up temporary classes, secure learning materials and provide psycho-social support to affected students. When physical infrastructure is repeatedly destroyed by floods and funds meant for mitigation are embezzled, teachers have to bear the costs of an additional responsibility for which they are not trained. In the long term, the moral injury and burnout due to absenteeism and turnover affect educational program delivery in disaster-prone areas, further increasing recruitment expenditures. Practical readiness, such as contingency lesson plans and alternative facilities, requires adequate investment and support (Bush, 2020).

Additionally, scandals involving flood projects undermine confidence in government entities responsible for protecting infrastructure and educational facilities. Communities that perceive the local government projects as corrupt may be less willing to participate in consultations, comply with hazard zoning or invest in local preparedness. Lack of social capital impedes community-based recovery initiatives and school safety programs.

The road from scandal to educational damage is not set in stone, let alone irreversible. A combination of accountability, targeted investments and planning for natural hazard risks can stop the chain effect. It is necessary to conduct a transparent forensic audit of the flood projects and channel the recovered funds into school safety initiatives high on priority. Moreover, there is a need to enhance local school-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies. Additionally, it is

crucial to enhance learning continuity programs and psychosocial support in the flood-affected regions. International recommendations and guidance on the need for collaboration across sectors to protect learners and educational investments before, during, and after a disaster (e.g., infrastructure, social protection, health, education).

The Philippines' flood-control program scandal is a reminder that investments in resilience are only as good as the systems put in place to implement them. When corruption limits the availability and quality of flood control measures, it imperils the entire education system: classrooms are damaged; learning is interrupted; inequality rises, and public trust erodes. The twin goals of safeguarding the school system in a climate-vulnerable archipelagic country and ensuring public funds' appropriate use require priority attention. Recovering from this scandal means that beyond prosecuting the implicated officials, the funds need to be diverted into smart, child-centered investments that ensure children study and remain safe irrespective of weather conditions.

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