

Disaster Management Education in schools – A Must!!

Grenada can take a page from the Shichigo Elementary School located in Sendai, Japan, which is taking a comprehensive bottom-up approach to disaster management education.

The impact of Climate Change is calling for disaster-related education to be taken seriously so that the number of lives and properties usually lost, can be reduced.

Last year, the Shichigo Elementary School, which is the third-largest public elementary school in Sendai with a population 1,089 students, fully included aspects of disaster awareness in its curriculum; thereby minimising the negative impact of disasters.

Sendai is a major regional center north-east of Tokyo. It was in the area hardest hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011 where more than 20,000 people died and many still missing.

Shichigo Elementary is one of two schools that started the education programme as a pilot project after the March 11, 2011 disasters. The Shichigo Elementary was a shelter to more than 2500 residents of the city during and after the earthquake and tsunami.

At the Japanese public school, students across grades one to six are introduced to different aspects of disaster awareness and preparation in different subject areas that were applicable to their levels. The Grade ones learn about the dangers that could come with an earthquake, identifying objects that may fall, move, or collapse. The Grade fours learn about problem solving and how rice farmers, whose livelihood had been wiped out by the disaster, were able to rebuild their lives through a rice-planting project, which started in May 2017. The fifth graders listen to experiences from people who suffered damage and loss

from earthquakes and tsunami disasters.

Students keep a bosai — (a hood made of flame resistant material) – in their desk at school along with a knapsack containing essentials in case of disaster.

The students undergo a total of 30 hours annually of disaster – related education.

“The programme can be transferred anywhere in the world,” Vice Principal Masaki Nakatsuji said to a group of Caribbean and Pacific Island reporters part of the 2017 Pacific-Caribbean Journalists’ Programme, noting that disaster preparedness rules are applicable to every country.

In a recent interview with the Chief Education Officer (CEO) of Grenada’s Ministry of Education, Elvis Morain admitted to Grenada’s participant in the 2017 Japan Journalists’ programme that Disaster Management is a priority area not just for Education but generally. He told *The Grenadian Voice* reporter that “It’s something we need to focus on, it’s everybody’s business,” stating that when disaster strikes everyone is affected.

“I see the need for disaster management education in our schools, the thing is how best to implement it because it needs to happen as of now. I think it’s something we ought to start the conversation on and see how we can get it in the school’s curriculum, as a stand-alone or heavily incorporated in other subjects,” Morain said. He suggested a phase-in approach to start or through established clubs.

The CEO noted that disaster management is incorporated in subjects like Social Studies and Geography but not as a core subject. “There might just be a need for a greater inclusion of disaster management...this is a big thing throughout the world,” he said.



Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education - Elvis Morain



Mr. Masaki Nakatsuji, vice principal of Shichigo Elementary School, in Sendai, Japan. The public school has developed a comprehensive disaster preparedness curriculum for its 1,089 students. Photo by Floyd K. Takeuchi/Waka Photos

However, Mr Morain said there isn’t a current discussion about having disaster management being featured as a stand-alone subject in the curriculum. He explained that there is a process to include new subjects on the curriculum; discussions, priorities, cooperation of teachers, etc.

Morain admitted that training children in schools is important because the teachings are manifested in the wider community. “Students are a real vessel for transmitting information,” he said.

The CEO noted that while hazards cannot be averted, the question is how they are managed? He went on, “Education is dynamic and we have to find ways to address our needs through education. It is a pertinent issue that we really

need to sit and look at and see how best we can prepare our students and by extension the nation to really deal with any situation....”

He said having content to teach is important rather than leaving it up to chance that the teachers would research it. He said Grenada would welcome draft documents from Japan, noting that it would be “easier to have something you can work with than to start from scratch.”

He expressed confidence that Japan would be willing to offer technical and other support to Grenada in that regard.

The former Acting Disaster Coordinator of the National Disaster Management Agency (NaDMA), Samantha Dickson, in



A Tohoku Institute of Tecnology undergraduate student helps Shichigo Elementary School students make ema tablets out of recycled materials. Ema tablets are hung in public areas and showcase students' prayers and hopes -- in this case, for the continuing recovery of the eastern Japan region from the 2011 earthquake and disaster that devastated the area. Photo by Floyd K. Takeuchi/Waka Photos.



Shichigo Elementary School 5th graders made these ema prayer boards with the assistance of undergraduate students from the Tohoku Institute of Technology. Photo by Floyd K. Takeuchi/Waka Photos

a recent interview with this newspaper also cited the need for disaster awareness education to be included heavily in the schools’ curriculum. She asserted that “Disaster awareness has to be cross cutting throughout all disciplines on curriculum.” She

explained that “there’s a cost (insurance and loss - maths, economics), there’s data that it happens (geography and social sciences), it destroys livelihoods and the society (agriculture, social studies), it injures persons (Biology) and calls for constant planning and

building back better (History, technical areas). Whether we subscribe to believing in a higher being or believe that human-induced activities are the cause (Religion, Climate change), events will happen - it’s only a matter of time.”