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Place-based knowledge and belief systems on socio-natural hazards in the Philippines

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Due to its location in the Pacific Ring of Fire and along the Pacific Typhon Belt, and a population over 100 million, the Philippines is ranked as one of the most disaster-afflicted countries. Indigenous people account for 15 percent of the population. They possess rich knowledge and belief system that facilitate their subsistence amidst the socio-natural hazards.

The paper is part of a multidisciplinary project, which aims to capture the diversity of place-based knowledge. Through archival research, fieldworks, interviews, and ethnographic workshops in selected areas, the project aims to understand experiences, behaviors and attitudes towards socio-natural hazards. This information is seen as an important means to facilitate knowledge transfer to future generations.

The Ibaloi and Kankanaey gold miners in Itogon, Benguet (Cordillera, Luzon) and the Ivatan fishermen in Sabtang Island (Batanes Islands) have a deep understanding of their environment, including socio-natural hazards. However, knowledge system evolves along with new experiences, as it coexists with other forms of knowledge, and as it is challenged by new forms of anthropogenic hazards. Old practices may also lose their value along with changes in lifestyles. In both areas, many members of the younger generation missed the opportunity to learn from the elders. Itogon as a mine site and Batanes as a tourist destination meant increased interactions, exchange of information, and mobilities among the cultural groups and their non-indigenous counterparts. This paper highlights the challenges of representing indigenous knowledge in the context of disaster risk reduction.