Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Reduction – The Japanese Experiences

Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office
1. Natural Disasters and Gender Equality

**January 1995: Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake**

About 1,000 more women than men lost their lives. Most of the responsibility for taking care of the family is placed on women.

**October 2004: 2004 Chuetsu Earthquake**

Officials were dispatched to the affected areas to serve as persons in charge of “the women’s perspective.” Requested Niigata Prefectural Government to provide consultation services for women.

**July 2005: Basic Disaster Management Plan amended.**

**Perspectives on gender equality included for the first time.**

The plan clearly states that both male and female perspectives must be considered carefully (e.g., differences in needs between men and women)

**December 2005: Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality Section on disaster management included for the first time.**

Gender equality is listed under the category of disaster management (and recovery) as a field that requires new measures.

**February 2008: Basic Disaster Management Plan amended.**

The amended plan clearly states that a system for disaster management which incorporates the increased participation of women in the decision-making process for disaster management policies or in disaster management activities, as well as gender equality perspectives needs to be put in place.

**December 2010: Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality**

“Field No. 14: Promotion of Gender Equality in the Local Community, Disaster Management, Environmental Issues, and Other Areas” was newly established.

The plan clearly stated the following: **4. Promotion of Gender Equality in Disaster Management**

**March 2011: Great East Japan Earthquake**

In the affected areas of Great East Japan Earthquake…

Photos taken by staffs of Gender Equality Bureau
Issues concerning gender equality which became apparent through our experiences with the Great East Japan Earthquake

1. **Women are not involved in the decision-making process for disaster management and recovery policies.**
   - Percentage of female members for prefectural disaster management councils: 3.6%
     (There are no female members in 12 prefectures.)
     *As of April 2011*
   - Percentage of female members involved with formulating recovery plans in committee meetings: 11.2%
     *As of April 2012; Data for 38 municipalities located in coastal areas.*

2. **Differences between the needs of men and women are not considered when carrying out emergency response measures.**
   - There is no space where women can nurse their babies or change in the evacuation areas. / There is no space where women can hang up their clothes, so they are unable to hang up their underwear.
   - There is a shortage of menstrual products and women’s underwear. / Since most of the people who run the evacuation areas are men, it is difficult for women to receive and ask for the necessary supplies.
   - The withdrawal or isolation of men in the temporary housing became a problem.

3. **It is difficult to carry out response measures from the perspective of gender equality immediately after a natural disaster occurs.**
   - Immediately after the earthquake struck, the Japanese government requested that response measures be carried out while considering the needs of women or families with children. However, this was not widely recognized in the front lines of the response efforts.
   - It is also clearly stated in the Basic Disaster Management Plan that a “system for disaster management which incorporates gender equality perspectives” needs to be put in place.

It is important for involved parties to understand how to carry out emergency response measures from the perspective of gender equality even before a natural disaster occurs.
2. Action Taken by Japanese Government following Great East Japan Earthquake

Excerpt from Basic Act on Reconstruction in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake (effective June 24, 2011)

(Fundamental Principles)
The wishes of the people living in the affected areas are to be respected, and the views of a wide range of citizens including women, children, and persons with disabilities are to be reflected.

Excerpt from Proposals for Recovery ～Hope despite the Tragedy～ (Decided in The Reconstruction Design Council in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake held on June 25, 2011)

It is important that young people (who in the past were unable to find their niche in the community), the elderly and persons with disabilities (who tend to become isolated), and women (who tend to be hesitant about having their voices heard) take the earthquake as an opportunity to proactively participate in community development activities. Above all, the perspective of gender equality must not be forgotten.

Excerpt from Basic Course of Action for Recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake (Decided by Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Headquarters on July 29, 2011.)

1. Basic Philosophy
   Facilitate the participation of women in a wide range of disaster recovery activities as well as organizations from the perspective of gender equality.

5. Recovery Measures
   (1) Building a Disaster-resistant Community
      • Promote community development activities which consider the well-being of the elderly, children, women, and persons with disabilities in mind (abbreviated)
   (2) Revitalizing Community Life
      • Provide consultation services for women.
      • Create job opportunities in the affected areas for everyone, including young people, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
   (3) Revitalizing Economic Activity in the Community (Agriculture)
      • Raise income as well as create jobs in the community by combining a variety of activities including: promotion of not only agricultural production but tourism for disaster recovery and creating ties with public welfare, combined with having the elderly and women participate in the activities.

7. System of Recovery Assistance
   Establish system for promoting gender equality within the recovery process.
Basic Disaster Management Plan Amended (December 2011, September 2012, January 2014)

- **Administration of the Evacuation Areas**
  The plan clearly states that the evacuation areas must be administered by considering the needs of women as well as families with children by doing the following: promotion of the participation of women in administering the evacuation areas; provision of special spaces for women (clothes drying areas, changing rooms, and nursing rooms); the distribution of menstrual products and women’s underwear by women; ensuring the safety of the evacuation area, etc.

- **Administration of Emergency Temporary Housing**
  The plan clearly states that the emergency temporary housing must be administered by assuring the safety of the residents, providing psychological health care to prevent solitary death or withdrawal, building a community among the residents, as well as promoting gender equality and making arrangements so that the views of the residents, beginning with women, are reflected.

In addition, topics such as **procuring and transporting materials and supplies** (differences between the needs of men and women must be considered), **restoring community life and deciding the basic course of action for recovery** (facilitate the participation of women in a wide range of recovery and restoration activities as well as organizations), **community development with a focus on disaster management** (the views of women must be reflected) are discussed numerous times in the plan.

Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures Revised (June 2012)

In an aim to reflect the views of people from a wide range of professional fields in the community disaster management plans, it was decided that in addition to officials employed by disaster management and other agencies (who served as Ex officio members), members of voluntary disaster management organizations or those with an academic background can be appointed as members for prefectural disaster management council.
Examples of efforts to raise the percentage of female members

- Appoints women (regardless of job title) who work for designated public institutions or designated local public institutions (communications, transportation, gas, media) (Tottori prefecture: 40.3%)
- Actively recruits female prefectural officials (appointing directors of related departments and divisions or directors of nursing service departments at prefectural hospitals) (Niigata prefecture: 24.3%)
- Recruits female college professors, as well as women representing community women’s groups, welfare organizations, childcare associations, kindergarten joint associations, etc. (as the 8th council member) (Saga prefecture: 29.9%)

(Remark: Data gathered by Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office)
3. Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective

(May 2013)

<Background>

- It is crucial for persons concerned to understand disaster response from a gender equality perspective in daily life.

<Guidelines and Instruction handbook>

- Presenting basic articles, based upon disaster experiences of the past, to be used as guiding principles for local governments to take actions and respond from a gender equality perspective in prevention, emergency, recovery and reconstruction, and other stages.

- Expecting local governments to draw up or revise local disaster management plans, shelter management manuals, and so on, to draw up guidelines or manuals individually, and to establish organizations for disaster prevention and reconstruction from a gender equality perspective. Being available for reference to volunteer fire or flood brigades, welfare and child commissioners, community disaster prevention organizations, NPOs, NGOs, community groups, companies, universities, and other organizations that engage in disaster prevention or reconstruction activities.

- Providing an instruction handbook with checklists and casebook.

4. Examples of Response Measures in Areas Affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake

[Example Response Measure 1]
Resumption of Services at Childcare Centers during Natural Disaster
(Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture)

During the Great East Japan Earthquake, the circumstances were such that the response measures had to be carried out in a collective effort by not only administrative officers but firefighters, police officers, members of the Self-Defense Forces, medical personnel, welfare service workers, as well as local residents. As a result, the decision was made to continue childcare services, under the condition that the buildings of the childcare centers were safe on the day of the earthquake, and childcare centers were notified of that decision.

In light of this decision, municipal childcare centers as well as private licensed childcare centers stayed open and continued their services, with the exception of childcare centers where the buildings were damaged and therefore could no longer be used. 47 municipal childcare centers continued their services on March 12, the day after the earthquake struck. Nearly 80% of private licensed childcare centers also continued their services on March 12, and services were resumed at all childcare centers 13 days after the earthquake struck.
[Example Response Measure 2]
Setting Up a Special Space for Women in Evacuation Areas
(Fukushima Prefecture)

BIG PALETTE FUKUSHIMA, a convention complex located in Koriyama City, Fukushima served as
the largest evacuation area in the prefecture, due to the nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear
power plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company, which occurred following the Great East Japan
Earthquake. The circumstances inside were extremely chaotic even one month after the day of the
earthquake. For women in particular, there was no space where they could have privacy, and they had
trouble finding areas where they could change or nurse their babies.

In response to such circumstances, a special space for women was set up as a place where women
staying in the evacuation area could feel safe and secure.

The main purposes of the special space for women were to allow the women staying in the evacuation
area feel safe and secure as well as allow them to get to know the women living in the community
(Koriyama City), and services provided inside the space included the following:

(1) A space where women can relax and feel safe
(2) Information on consultation centers as well as distribution of crime prevention alarms
(3) Provision of women’s supplies
(4) Provision of a cafe corner group, cooking events, or craft workshops to allow women
to get rid of their stress and enjoy themselves
(5) Consultations with lawyers or provision of a space for holding volunteer activities
   (e.g. massages)
Educational Program on Health and Well-being for Men Held in the Temporary Housing (Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture)

Ishinomaki City offers an educational program on health and well-being for men living in the temporary housing in Ohashi district. The title of the program is “Ohashi Men’s Club” and the aims are providing healthy living and opportunities for community exchanges. While the program advertises “providing healthy living,” it also aims to prevent locked-in syndrome, suicide, and solitary death—all of which can happen while living in temporary housing—as well as alcohol dependence, which is caused by stress and loneliness. The workshops in the program cover health-related topics—such as “How to Drink Alcohol Effectively,” “Prevention of Lifestyle Diseases,” and “Oral Health.” There is also a cooking and tasting class, as well as workshops on exercise, health consultation, and measuring blood pressure and weight.

The educational program on health and well-being is organized by the City, visiting care workers, and the Nursing Association. The temporary housing visiting care workers played a major role in planning the program, recruiting participants, as well as organizing each class. In addition, various support personnel from outside, eating habit improvement promoters, as well as residents of the temporary housing are also involved with running the program as volunteers.

The participants are naturally able to form personal ties and carry out the activities while envisioning creating their own groups.

[Participants of Educational Program (cooking class)]
[Example Response Measure 4]
Women’s Only Workshop Held at time of Collective Relocation for Disaster Prevention to High Ground (Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture)

Opinion exchange meetings were started in Jusanhama district, Kitakami-cho, Ishinomaki City in hopes of reaching consensus among district residents on the collective relocation to high ground for disaster prevention. In addition to the Kitakami Comprehensive Branch Office, college professors, nonprofit organizations, and the Japan Institute of Architects participated as volunteers. In this community, it was the custom for the “head of each household” (mostly men) to gather together and make decisions on issues involving the community. However, the officials of the Comprehensive Branch Office, based on what they heard when visiting Yamakoshi-mura, Nagaoka City, Niigata to observe their community development activities focused on disaster recovery, recognized the importance of the participation of women in discussions as soon as possible, and decided to hold a women’s only gathering and discussion.

Opinions were exchanged actively in the women’s only workshop. Contrary to men, who tend to put on airs as they tend to be conscious of their role as head of the household, women were able to express their opinions honestly—including issues related to concerns about relocating to high ground, as well as financial issues.

Not only that, based on their deep knowledge of the families as well as the community, the women made detailed observations on daily life. They asked, for instance, if they were to relocate to high ground, whether there is a slope that the elderly women could climb up from the beach if something were to happen.
[Example Response Measure 5]
Helping Women Start Businesses in the Affected Areas through the Entrepreneurship Start-up Workshop (Iwate Prefecture)

- Sankaku Planning Iwate, a nonprofit organization, by utilizing its seven years of experience with holding lectures on starting businesses, initiated the “Women’s Entrepreneurship Start-up Workshop” as a project entrusted by the non-govermental organization Oxfam Japan: Support Project for the Financial Independence of Women in Disaster-affected Areas. The aim of the workshop was to support the financial independence of women living along the coastal areas of Miyako City, Iwate, where the local industries took a significant hit due to the Great East Japan Earthquake.

- Instructors who have long been involved with helping women start businesses in Iwate Prefecture while serving as Morioka City business support managers provide start-to-finish instruction as well as detailed support such as offering information on subsidies, social networks that could be utilized, or regional resources, as well as offering consultation that is appropriate for the psychological state or living conditions of women affected by the earthquake.

- Women with various resources and motives (e.g. the desire to turn the services that lack in the community following the earthquake into a business, the desire to protect the farmland which they have inherited from their ancestors, as well as their desire to expand the distribution routes for farm produce) participated in the workshops and materialized their vision.

Note: Information gathered from “Disaster Recovery from the Perspective of Gender Equality: Collection of Case Examples,” Gender Equality Section, Reconstruction Agency
5. Global Efforts


Resolution on “Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters”

Japan submitted a draft resolution for the first time. The aims of the resolution were to share with all nations Japan’s experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake, lessons learned one year after the disaster, as well as how to facilitate emergency response measures which keep gender equality in mind. The resolution was adopted by the consensus of member states (proposed by Japan; 50 nations including Japan made the proposal through joint efforts).

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Stresses the need to consider the well-being of vulnerable people (e.g. women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities) as well as the importance of developing an inclusive society in which those people are participating. Also requests all nations and international organizations to implement the following measures:

A. Consider the views and needs of women as well as families with children, formulate and implement disaster recovery projects which keep gender equality in mind.

B. Give special attention to the prevention of abuse against women, preventing exploitation (including human trafficking), protection of victims of violence, and provision of legal and other services.

C. Provide data according to sex and age, keep a record of the rescue efforts from the perspective of gender equality, and share examples of success stories and incorporate them in the disaster management plans.

D. Recognize the importance of the roles of female volunteers and promote them in an aim to give special consideration towards the needs of women.

Resolution on “Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters”

A draft resolution, which was a follow up on the resolution from the 56th Session of the CSW held two years ago, was submitted. The resolution was adopted by the consensus of member states (proposed by Japan; 79 nations including Japan made the proposal through joint efforts).

The resolution stressed the need to give special attention to the vulnerability of women during a natural disaster (particularly women who are pregnant, are nursing their babies, or who are adolescents); the rise in violence against women following a natural disaster; the need to engage in post-disaster relief efforts while considering the needs of women and families with children; as well as creating opportunities for the participation of women in the decision-making process for such issues as disaster management, response measures, and recovery and restoration; the importance of gender and age based statistics; the importance of sharing emergency response success stories as well as lessons learned and reflecting them in disaster management plans, etc.


(*Views expressed in Expert Examination Committee Meeting on Gender Equality (held February 2014) were also reflected in the framework.)
Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the High-level Partnership Dialogue: Mobilizing Women’s Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction

UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
UN-hosted conference to discuss international strategy on disaster risk reduction

The 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

• 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai City
• New International Framework “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” was adopted.
  ✓ regulates expected outcome and goals, instruction principle, priorities for action and international collaboration.
  ✓ includes some points Japan set a high value such as advance investment on disaster risk reduction, “Build Back Better”, Human-centered approach and importance of women’s leadership.

I intend to make sure that the strength of such women is drawn upon in order to reduce disaster risk and recover from those disasters, as well as to ensure that each region can stand up on its own in the post-disaster phase. We believe that women’s leadership is indeed essential in order to stand up to disasters.

Today, I announced Japan’s new cooperation initiative for disaster risk reduction. Under this initiative, over the next four years Japan will train 40 thousand officials and people in local regions around the world as leaders who will play key roles in disaster risk reduction and reconstruction.

One of the major projects that will be undertaken through this initiative is the launch of the Training to Promote Leadership by Women in Disaster Risk Reduction.

In order for us to create a society that is truly resilient and able to withstand natural disasters, it is essential that we make women the driving force behind such efforts.
The Hyogo Framework for Action: lessons learned, gaps identified and future challenges

7. There has to be a broader and a more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk. [...] Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards.

III. Guiding principles

19.(d) Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective in all policies and practices; and the promotion of women and youth leadership; in this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens;

19.(g) Disaster risk reduction requires a multi-hazard approach and inclusive risk-informed decision-making based on the open exchange and dissemination of disaggregated data, including by sex, age and disability, as well as on the easily accessible, up-to-date, comprehensible, science-based, non-sensitive risk information, complemented by traditional knowledge;

IV. Priorities for action

Priority 4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

32. [...] Empowering women and persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches are key.

V. Role of stakeholders

36. (a) (i) Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as build their capacity for alternate livelihood means in post-disaster situations;
References

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