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The Great East Japan Earthquake taught us many lessons.

We recommend the followings

to prepare for future mega-disasters in Japan;

1. To receive international assistance in an efficient manner in order to maximise the good-will of international community;
2. To establish national minimum standards in humanitarian assistance based on the international norms and standards in order to protect rights of affected population, and
3. To train, register and mobilise disaster relief professionals both in national and international level.

Study Group on the Great East Japan Earthquake

& International Humanitarian Assistance

Part I: System for Receiving International Assistance

The following eight recommendations are presented, specifically with regard to the system for receiving international assistance, which is now common practice when a large scale disaster occurs.

1-1. A clear basic policy on receiving international assistance during disasters

As it is expected that international community will offer assistance when a large scale natural disaster hits Japan, the Government of Japan should pre - establish its basic policy clarifying the criteria and procedures for receiving - or declining - offers of international assistance. Putting in place such a policy will help not only promote diplomatic relations but also compliment domestic response efforts. The basic policy and overall procedures for accepting international assistance should be translated into foreign languages and shared with the international community during the pre - disaster phase

1-2. Enhancing the role of the Government for acceptance of international assistance

A comprehensive disaster management body within the Government of Japan should make centralised and proactive decisions on the acceptance of incoming international assistance. This body will need to be strengthened in a way that can bear full responsibility in terms of quick and smooth acceptance of assistance, including transport of relief goods and personnel to disaster affected areas, temporary storage of relief items.

1-3. Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for accepting international assistance

In order to support quick and smooth acceptance of international assistance with centralised and proactive decisions by the comprehensive disaster management body in the Government, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) needs to be developed for the officials of the respective Ministries. Joint exercises testing such SOPs with the involvement of multiple stakeholders need to be conducted once a year. The SOPs need to be developed by taking into consideration existing international guidelines.

1-4. Legal arrangements and administrative orders

Legal arrangements and administrative orders on liability for damages and indemnification need to be put in place for handling any damages caused by international responders as well as any accidents or incidents that may occur to international responders. Based on the lessons learned of receiving international assistance in the past and in light of the existing international guidelines such as the International Disaster Relief Laws (IDRL), exceptional legal measures and administrative orders need to be put in place before a disaster strikes.

1-5. Concluding partnership agreements

Legal frameworks with foreign countries, from where the likelihood of receiving international assistance is high, should be established in advance, so that legal problems related to accidents/damages associated with relief operations can be avoided.

1-6. Securing and developing human resources

A system needs to be developed that allow pre - registration and deployment of human resources those who have experiences related to international disaster relief from outside the Government structures. The Government of Japan should nurture 'disaster response professionals' who have sufficient knowledge and experience to lead effective coordination in the acceptance of domestic and international assistance.

1-7. Ensuring accountability

The Government of Japan should bear full responsibility to monitor the utilisation of international assistance and to explain the results and impacts of such assistance to the international community with the use of standard reporting formats.

1-8. Timely dissemination of accurate information to the international community

The Government of Japan should develop a system by which it can communicate well with the international community from the on - set of large scale disasters. The messaging should include damages caused, response activities and specific needs for international assistance, and the Government's communications efforts need to be more proactive, timely as well as be conducted in English.

Part II: Application of the existing international norms and standards

In the response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, existing international standards such as ‘Human Rights Based Approach’ and The Sphere Project – the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response’, as well as specialised knowledge and capacity of private companies, NGOs/NPOs and individual volunteers were not fully utilised. It is therefore recommended that based on the existing international standards, minimum standards applicable to disaster response are established and applied in Japan. In view of current international practices, closer involvement of actors other than the Government and designated public institutions is also recommended.

2-1. Establishment and application of national minimum standards for future disaster response in Japan

With a view to improve Japan’s disaster management system, and to ensure fully responding to future large scale natural disasters in Japan, it is recommended that an expert group, which is tasked to review the existing Japanese disaster management system from an international and institutional point of view, is established. More specifically, such an expert group should discuss and implement action items indicated below.

- Develop national minimum standards that are based on the existing international norms and standards as well as examples from overseas, and that do not contradict with Japan’s local characteristics and socio - cultural background. Such minimum standards should include methodologies of needs assessments as well as types and qualities of assistance to be provided;
- Ensure that institutional aid providers fully recognise their obligations to abide by humanitarian principles including humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence and etc;
- By fully recognising that assistance needs during disasters differ depending on variables of the affected populations, such as gender, age, disability, nationality, mother tongues, family composition and livelihoods, and reflect such variations when developing the national minimum standards appropriately;
- Put in place administrative measures that ensure full participation of the affected populations in consultations where they can demand the assistance they need, and thereby transform the current disaster relief system into the one which is more closely aligned with the human rights based approaches;
- Explore concrete measures to realise the principles outlined in the ‘Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender - equal perspective’ issued by the Government of Japan in May 2013; and
- Promote awareness - raising among the disaster response actors in Japan on the recent developments and debates on the international standards in disaster relief.

2-2. Role of NGOs/NPOs, the civil society and actors other than designated public institutions

- Recognising the role of NGOs/NPOs and the civil society more institutionally, guidelines for local authorities should be developed, by which these diverse actors can promote the national minimum standards, and help integrate them into local disaster management plans.
- NGOs/NPOs and the civil society should recognise their leading roles in promoting responses to meet the diverse needs of the affected populations and in enhancing human rights based approaches. NGOs and the civil society should also strengthen their engagement in the policy processes in this particular domain.
- Coordination mechanisms need to be built in the pre - disaster phase, so that NGOs and NPOs can implement their assistance programmes in a coordinated and collaborative manner. For this purpose, frameworks of coordination need to be designed; a secretariat facilitating the coordination work needs to be supported; human resources of those who are involved in the coordination work needs to be developed, and roles of NGOs/NPOs need to be articulated in local disaster management plans.

- NGO/NPO staff should participate in the relevant meetings and trainings as well as build relationships with other actors during the pre - disaster phase, so that smooth and effective deployment of assistance can be ensured. In addition, common codes of conduct should be developed for NGOs/NPOs involved in assistance activities.

Part III: Human Resource Development

Providing support for human resource development of practitioners, who are familiar with disaster response and assistance for affected populations, is critical in realising rapid response; ensuring the quality of assistance; as well as making sure that response activities are systematic and well-coordinated - including appropriate acceptance of international assistance - in future large scale disasters in Japan. With the aim of human resource development of those who are equipped with necessary knowledge and skills for disaster response and who can fully demonstrate required competencies in the midst of crises – both in Japan and overseas – the following seven recommendations are made.

3-1. Identification of priority areas where human resource development is particularly needed

3-2. Identification of professional duties to be targeted for human resource development

3-3. Implementation system of the human resource development programmes

3-4. Basic curriculum and methodologies of trainings

3-5. Functions required for human resource development

3-6. Registration and mobilization of the pools of trained professionals

3-7. Promotion of international cooperation building on domestic disaster response experiences

This study group:

Reviewing the experience, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Kobe and the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) jointly organised a Public Seminar on International Humanitarian Assistance on July 5, 2012 at the Hiroo Hall of the Japanese Red Cross College of Nursing in Tokyo.

At the end of the seminar, it was decided that we should not leave the seminar as a one-off event but establish a study group to continue and deepen these discussions based on the achievements of the seminar. A study group was established hosted by the Japanese Red Cross Institute for Humanitarian Studies and voluntarily joined persons from various organisations engaging in international humanitarian assistance.

The study group members from various backgrounds participated in a personal capacity beyond organisational boundaries, sincerely engaged in dialogue from professional perspectives, and committed to giving up their own time in contributing to produce the following recommendations.

The full page of the report on the Study Group is available as an annex of the Journal of Humanitarian Studies, Vol.3, March 2014, and its on line version (<http://www.jrc.ac.jp/ihs/index.html>).



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