

## 15. Promotion of Gender Equality in Disaster Prevention Field

Promotion of gender equality in the field of disaster prevention is an important task from the perspectives of both disaster prevention and gender equality. It was positioned as an important field under the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality. As for things that should be given sufficient consideration from the perspectives of both men and women, such as the differences in men's and women's needs as stipulated in the "Basic Plan for Disaster Prevention," and establishment of a disaster prevention system that includes the perspective of gender equality, efforts are being made to promote such things by asking local governments to stipulate regional disaster prevention plans, etc.

### ■ Efforts to Support Victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake

After the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in March 2011, the problems below became apparent for responding to the disaster in light of the perspective of gender equality.

- Almost no women participated in decision-making at disaster sites for things such as management of evacuation centers.
- Because women's perspectives were not taken into consideration, women faced difficulties living away from their homes because of insufficient women's supplies, lack of places for women to dry clothes, lack of places to change clothes, and lack of rooms to breast-feed, etc.
- Because there were few female leaders at evacuation centers, temporary housing, etc., there were not enough measures that considered the differences in men's and women's needs.
- Due to effects of things such as living away from home for a long time or concerns about daily life, there were concerns about an increase of violence against women and isolation of men.

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, employees at the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office are being dispatched to disaster areas and other efforts are being made to ascertain problems and needs. In addition, the responses below are being made in light of the needs of women and child-rearing.

#### ● Requests for responses that take into consideration the needs of women and child-rearing

After the disaster, various requests were made to relevant organizations about responses such as those below in relation to daily life at evacuation centers, temporary housing, etc. Information about good examples that reflected the perspectives and needs of women at evacuation centers and temporary housing were also disseminated.

- Provision of things such as sanitary items, baby formula, and baby food
- Design of evacuation centers that takes women and child-rearing into consideration, such as changing rooms for women and separate restrooms for men and women
- Evacuation center operation systems that reflect women's needs, etc.
- Measures, etc. to prevent violence against women
- Utilization of temporary housing, community operation systems, psychological care, etc.

#### ● Responses by female Self-Defense Force personnel and female police officers in disaster areas

From the perspective of considering female victims when rescuing victims and conducting support activities, female Self-Defense Force personnel were active in a wide variety of things such as listening to detailed requests about relief supplies needed by women, performing duties so that supplies would be appropriately distributed (so-called making the rounds), searching women's dormitories of companies affected by the disaster, and providing support for bathing.

Units of mainly female police officers were formed from police stations throughout the country, and they were dispatched to Iwate Prefecture, Miyagi Prefecture, and Fukushima Prefecture. In order to eliminate various problems that arise due to living in an evacuation center for a long period of time and secure the safety and peace of mind of disaster victims, female police officers, etc. visited evacuation centers, got close to the victims, and conducted support activities such as sympathetically listening to their problems.

### ● Projects for consultation about women's concerns and violence

After the disaster, local governments and private sectors worked together and gained the cooperation of expert consultants from throughout the country. They set up places in the disaster areas for consultations about women's concerns and violence, took phone call consultations, and provided direct consultation by consultants conducting interviews and visiting temporary housing. These activities provide a way for women in disaster areas to make consultations with peace of mind. Efforts are being made to concretely solve problems, by things such as getting close to women who have various worries due to the disaster and providing them with advice to eliminate their concerns, and introducing sources of support provided by local governments, etc.

The needs of women in disaster areas are also being ascertained through the consultations made at consultation centers set up in disaster areas, and this information is provided to local governments and then utilized in efforts to support disaster victims.

### ● Responses for pregnant women

Consultation centers were set up for consultations about things such as a system for accepting pregnant women, etc. in disaster areas, and when there were requests from local governments or medical institutions that were affected by the disaster, prefectural governments etc. were asked to handle the matter appropriately.

Prefectural governments, etc. were also asked to make it possible for pregnant women to receive appropriate services for health checkups by local governments in the place where they had evacuated, regardless of whether or not their certificate of residence had been moved.

Local governments were also asked to make efforts to secure preferential housing for pregnant women, etc. who had been affected by the disaster and evacuated.

### ● Support for women to find employment, start businesses, etc.

For consultations related to workers affected by the disaster being fired because of taking maternity leave or child care leave or being fired because of their gender, equal employment special consultation centers were set up in the Equal Employment offices at Prefectural Labour Bureaus in disaster areas, etc. Finely-tuned responses were made and guidance was given in order to prevent trouble.

In order to recover from the disaster, various offices and ministries are also making efforts to support women in finding employment, starting businesses, etc. in disaster areas. Such efforts include supporting the startup of social businesses and developing leaders in order to settle daily life and environments, etc. in regions, creating employment, and providing support for finding employment through Mothers' Hello Work program, which is intended for women who want to find employment while raising children at the same time.

## ■ The Role of Gender Equality Centers in Supporting Disaster Victims

Gender equality centers, which are important bases for promoting gender equality in regions, provide information on a regular basis, and conduct PR and awareness projects, consultation projects, etc. Through such activities, the advantages of having a collaborative system with various bodies that conduct regionally-rooted activities are being utilized, and they have become a nucleus for support activities conducted by such bodies, even in times of disaster. In addition to utilization of networks among gender equality centers throughout the country and support for disaster victims, such as provision of support information for women and provision of aid supplies, etc., they played a major role in making use of the knowledge obtained thus far and providing support at evacuation centers and temporary housing from the perspective of gender equality that takes into consideration women and households raising children.

## ■ Framework for Recovery that Includes the Perspectives of Women and People who Live in the Affected Areas

The Basic Act on Reconstruction in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake that was enacted in June 2011 states as a basic philosophy that, "opinions of the residents in the disaster-afflicted regions shall be respected and opinions of a wide range of people including women, children and the disabled persons shall be taken into account".

The "Basic Guidelines for Reconstruction in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake", which were formulated

in July 2011 by the Reconstruction Headquarters, clearly state a basic philosophy of “From the standpoint of gender equality, women’s participation will be promoted in all reconstruction process,” and they state that gender equality and women’s perspectives in particular should be reflected in reconstruction measures.

The Reconstruction Agency, which began operations in February 2012, set up its own gender equality team, created positions responsible for gender equality at each of the Bureaus of Reconstruction in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, and is promoting gender equality in the process of recovering from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

## ■ Formulation of New Disaster Prevention Measures that Utilize the Lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake

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The Central Disaster Prevention Council, which consists of Japan’s Prime Minister, the entire Cabinet, representatives from designated public organizations, and academic experts, revised the Basic Disaster Management Plan in December 2011 to reflect reconsideration of disaster prevention measures in light of fundamental strengthening of earthquake and tsunami measures based on the Great East Japan Earthquake and recent disasters, etc. The revised Basic Disaster Management Plan more specifically includes content promoting women’s participation in the operation of evacuation centers, efforts for operating evacuation centers in consideration of the needs of women and households raising children, promotion of women’s participation in emergency temporary housing, and consideration so that it is possible to reflect the opinions of women and other people living in disaster areas.

In addition, due to revision of the Basic Disaster Management Plan in September 2012, the perspective of gender equality was included in recovery and reconstruction of disaster areas by things such as a clear statement that “from the perspective of gender equality, women’s participation will be promoted in all places and organizations related to recovery and reconstruction”.

## ■ Promotion of Women’s Participation in Decision-making Processes

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In light of lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent responses, reconstruction plans are being formulated and regional disaster prevention plans are being revised. The Cabinet Office and related ministries are encouraging local governments to reflect various perspectives in the recovery process and make it possible for women to participate in the process of determining measures and policies related to plans for regional recovery, disaster prevention plans, etc.

As of April 1, 2012, the number of prefectures that had no female members on regional disaster prevention councils established by local governments based on the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures was 6, and this was a decline from 12 prefectures the previous year.

In June 2012 the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures was revised, and from the perspective of reflecting the opinions of a wide variety of parties in regional disaster prevention plans it was made possible to newly appoint to regional disaster prevention councils people who formed independent disaster prevention organizations or academic experts, in addition to the positions conventionally allotted to heads, etc. of regional government organizations.

## ■ Resolutions at the International Conference

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At the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was held at the United Nations headquarters in March 2012, a consensus was adopted on a draft resolution (“Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters”). This resolution aims to share Japan’s experiences and lessons with other countries and deepen international understanding one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as promote disaster efforts that take women into consideration. It is the first submission that Japan has ever made to CSW.

Specifically, it emphasizes the necessity of consideration for women, as well as vulnerable people such as children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, and the importance of creating an inclusive society by having such people participate. It seeks the following from individual countries, international organizations, etc.:

- Consideration of the perspectives and needs of women and households raising children, and formulation and implementation of recovery projects that take gender into consideration
- Special consideration of violence against women, prevention of exploitation that includes trafficking in persons, protection of victims of violence, and provision of legal and other services
- Preparation of data according to gender and age, recording disaster relief from the perspective of gender, sharing good examples, and utilizing such things in disaster prevention plans, etc.
- Awareness and encouragement of the importance of the role of female volunteers in order to consider women's needs, etc.