

Learning from Adversity



FROM EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMI to volcanic eruptions and typhoons, natural disasters have been a regular occurrence throughout Japan's long history. This experience of disaster has molded our society and continually taught us fresh lessons about how to respond. Today, in the spirit of *kaizen* – our word for “continuous improvement” – we continue to learn. And in the spirit of global cooperation we are eager to share what we learn.

From our most recent tragedy, the disaster of 3/11, 2011 known in Japan as “The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami,” we have gained important new insights into the relationship between gender equality and disaster risk reduction.

In 2013, Japan's government adopted “*Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective*,” as a blueprint for all national and local authorities involved in disaster preparedness, response and reconstruction.

This document offers an overview of the new guidelines, and the thinking behind them, in hopes that this can be of use to others around the world facing similar challenges.

The starting point is to recognize that as disaster affects men and women in different ways, it is critical to have the concerns and voices of both genders reflected in disaster planning, response and reconstruction. Further, it is recognized that to build a society with robust disaster resilience, gender equality must be a fundamental value in good times or bad. Toward that end, women must share leadership roles in all aspects of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) process.

We are pleased to share these guidelines with the global community in the year leading up to at the 3rd U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015. At the conference, the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) will be revised to create the framework for its successor, “HFA-2.” In these discussions, gender will be one of the key items on the DRR agenda. By sharing these guidelines with the global community prior to the conference, Japan hopes to stimulate the adoption of gender perspectives in all facets of disaster-related planning.

Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective

THESE GUIDELINES DRAWN UP BY THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN represent knowledge gained from the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami and prior large-scale disasters. We hope they can serve as a reference for other countries as they evolve their own DRR policies.

BASIC CONCEPTS

1. Promoting gender equality during normal times

Building a strong base for disaster planning, response and reconstruction is essential. In times of disaster, existing social issues become even more acute. Efforts must be made to evolve society so as to involve both sexes in the planning process for DRR.

2. Assigning women to leadership roles

In the wake of disaster, women typically play key roles in helping communities and individuals cope with the effects. Commensurate with the importance of these roles, women must be promoted to positions where they can exercise leadership and be involved in meaningful decisions.

3. Realizing how men and women are affected differently by disasters

It is important to understand the differences in the way men and women are affected by disasters and consider these issues when creating measures for dealing with seniors, disabled people, expectant mothers, newborns and other vulnerable groups. The

participation of women is also important in the operation of evacuation facilities, for example in providing assistance to disaster victims and other activities.

4. Providing a secure environment for disaster victims

Evacuees must have access to safe, secure facilities. These shelters must offer adequate privacy and maintain security measures to protect women and children from violence.

5. Promoting gender equality through close cooperation among various organizations

In time of disaster, close cooperation between all organizations – in both the public and private sectors – is crucial. To ensure that, it is important to build links of communication and trust in normal times. Local gender-related authorities and Gender Equality Centers* should be deeply involved with local disaster preparedness authorities in various aspects of the DRR process.

**Japan's 350 Gender Equality Centers, which are organized by local authorities, provide counseling, training programs and data related to gender equality issues and other services. They are also venues for voluntary activities by women's groups.*



In an NPO in Iwate, women played key roles in the disaster planning and relief.

Necessary Initiatives for Disaster Preparation and Response

THE PREPARATION STAGE

IN JAPAN'S LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WOMEN'S LIMITED participation in meaningful decision-making has led to a wide variety of problems in times of disaster. To remedy this, it is important to adopt disaster-preparedness measures with a gender-equal perspective.

1. An increased number of women should be appointed to local public bodies responsible for disaster preparedness, and to committees that formulate local disaster plans.
2. Fire- and disaster-preparedness groups operated by local residents should foster a gender-equal environment and include more women in leadership positions.
3. When formulating plans, it may be necessary to hold women-only meetings in order to gain women's perspectives on issues that might be difficult to discuss in front of men.
4. When planning the storage of provisions, the special needs of women and families with children must be considered so as to include female sanitary supplies, items for infants and other goods to meet specific needs.
5. Disaster preparedness drills should cover a wider variety of scenarios, such as different times or days of the week. Drills should include participation by all ages and genders.
6. A universal design should be implemented to identify facilities meant to serve as evacuation centers in time of disaster.

THE LESSON 1

Preparation by local women ensures quick response

Prompted by local officials in Sendai, women of all ages living in the city's Iwakiri neighborhood began to meet in 2010, sharing opinions and developing plans for disaster response from a women's perspective. Discussions among the group's 20 members led to the "Iwakiri Women's Disaster Preparedness Proclamation," which urged women to plan their response in advance in order to react quickly to a disaster.

Issued only months before the 3/11 quake that struck Sendai and the surrounding Tohoku region, the proclamation is credited with heightening local awareness at a critical time, thereby helping to ensure quick and orderly evacuation. What's more, group members played important roles in ensuring that the special needs of women, children and seniors were met by local evacuation shelters.

Local women became deeply involved in heightening awareness of disaster planning.



THE DISASTER ASSISTANCE STAGE

Part 1: Immediately following a disaster

Following a disaster, extra consideration should be given to problems and challenges specific to women. Systems should be able to respond rapidly in providing accurate and timely emergency information.

1. Evacuation guidance

- In addition to mobile-phone networks and emergency public-address systems, email and SMS networks should be developed in order to better provide evacuation information to women who are indoors (engaged in caring for small children or seniors, for example) when disaster strikes.
- Local residents and disaster-response groups should cooperate in guiding and assisting the evacuation of expectant mothers, nursing infants and their guardians.

2. Disaster response

- Women should be assigned to responsible positions at each disaster response headquarters, and other women should be assigned to the administration offices.
- Immediately after a disaster occurs, a system of support for child-rearing and nursing care should be implemented, so that rescuers, firefighters, medical personnel and others working to restore lifelines can work in an environment free from worries about their children and loved ones.

3. Shelter preparation

- Arrangements for the use of facilities should be prepared in advance in locales where large numbers of people may have a hard time returning to their homes. These should include separate areas for women and men as well as areas for joint usage.

THE LESSON 2

Pre-planned childcare frees first responders

When disaster strikes, critical first responders must be able to drop everything and rush to the scene. That's why each base of Japan's Ground Self Defense Forces (GSDF) has facilities and procedures ready on short notice to receive the children of personnel called suddenly to disaster zones.

Hours after the 3/11 earthquake, temporary childcare facilities were opened at 19 GSDF bases. Thanks to quick care for 1,138 children, 931 personnel were ready for immediate dispatch to the affected areas. This greatly enhanced the GSDF's response readiness, especially among female personnel with children.



First responders need to know all's well on the home front.



Part 2: Opening and operating evacuation shelters

Evacuation shelters used in previous disasters have lacked many vital facilities for women, making them extremely uncomfortable. They lacked private areas for breast-feeding and changing rooms, for example, and the toilets were dark and difficult to use. One lesson learned from these experiences is the importance of appointing women to leadership positions in the shelters.

1. Each facility should include a breast-feeding room, separate toilets for men and women, clotheslines for drying laundry, dressing rooms and recreational spaces.
2. Both men and women from among the evacuees should be appointed to organizations operating the facilities, and at least 30% of the leadership should be women.
3. The distribution of sanitary goods, underwear and other women's products should be handled by women, and these items should always be easily accessible. Organizers should ensure that women-only spaces and women's toilets are always available.
4. The health of expectant mothers, nursing infants, elderly women and others should be a major concern. Measures should be taken to create a sanitary environment, beginning with preventative measures against contagious diseases.
5. In order to prevent violence against women or children, security patrols should protect the sleeping areas and spaces designated for women only. To ensure safety and maintain a sense of security, other measures such as distributing crime-prevention buzzers should be considered. Most of all, organizers must create an environment that does not tolerate violence, with quick and comprehensive support given to any victims.

THE LESSON 3

Creating safe space to help women evacuees

When tens of thousands were forced to evacuate, a convention center in Koriyama served as shelter to more than 2,500 people. With so many people crammed in a facility that was itself damaged, conditions became extremely disorderly, particularly for women.

In April, three groups – prefectural officials, a local gender equality center and a local women's group – came together to provide support to women in this chaotic environment. Women-only areas were set up and supervised, creating a venue for volunteer groups to provide a variety of services, including a coffee corner, meeting spaces, massages and more. A help desk offered information and legal advice and distributed security devices.

By creating safe and orderly space amid chaos this initiative allowed volunteers to provide effective assistance to women in the massive shelter.



Women-only areas were set up in evacuation centers.

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THE DISASTER ASSISTANCE STAGE

Part 3: Temporary emergency housing

If women are involved in the planning, design and operation of temporary housing, these facilities will become much more livable and will better reflect the residents' needs.

1. Meeting facilities should be provided and supported so that residents can easily interact with each other and avoid becoming alienated from their surroundings.
2. When building multi-unit emergency housing, self-governing organizations should be nurtured and supported, with women making up at least 30% of the directors.
3. Public health nurses, specialists and life support staff for both men and women should perform periodic visits, and make efforts to identify and resolve problems. Training of such support staff should take place in advance, along with safety measures for the protection of both disaster victims and the support staff.
4. Communication links should connect the facilities to the Gender Equality Centers and other private-sector support groups. Residents should be given contact information for these groups, along with advice on protecting women against violence.
5. Programs should be created for men to prevent the social withdrawal syndrome that is particularly common among middle-aged and elderly men following a disaster. Consultation services for men should be set up and contact information for these services should be disseminated.

THE LESSON 4

Special support for men

Men often react to trauma and the frustration of life in emergency housing by drowning their sorrows in drink. This can lead to depression, alienation and, too often, to suicide or death from other causes.

The "Ohashi Men's Club" was set up in tsunami-stricken Ishinomaki in July, 2012 to address such problems among men in temporary housing. Calling it a "men's club" was key as few would have gone to a "health workshop aimed at reducing alcohol dependence," which is what it was meant to be.

Club activities, decided in consultation with the participants, included cooking and exercise classes as well as courses on health: oral hygiene, checking blood pressure, measuring body weight, etc.

A total of eight sessions were held with the number of participants growing throughout the program, which was supported by local government, the nursing association and visiting support workers. Support workers from outside led the planning, but the actual operation grew to include staff (for promoting healthy dietary habits) and volunteers from among the residents.



Cooking, not drinking,
at the men's club.



THE RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION STAGE

A gender-equal perspective is also important to the process of recovery and reconstruction after a disaster. The following initiatives are important.

1. The process of reconstruction planning should feature increased participation by women in the policy-making process.
2. In planning public housing for disaster victims, women should be involved in decision-making from the planning and policy stages, and women's opinions should be taken into account in the construction of such facilities.
3. When necessary, meetings exclusively for women should be arranged to collect residents' opinions. An environment that facilitates concrete suggestions from the residents should be created using surveys aimed at individuals.
4. Efforts should be made to help women disaster victims find employment, since they have fewer opportunities than men. Support should also be given to women interested in starting businesses.
5. The situation in each disaster area must be monitored, and gender statistics maintained in order to circulate PDCA (plan-do-check-act) measures for the reconstruction process.

THE LESSON 5

Giving women a voice in reconstruction

Jusanhama is a fishing village on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture that was destroyed by the 3/11 tsunami. After the disaster, it was decided to rebuild on safer ground, and discussions began toward forming a consensus among village residents. So in October, seven months after the tsunami, a coalition of volunteers – including academics, NPOs and the Architectural Association of Japan – traveled to Jusanhama to hold workshop-style events and exchange views with residents.

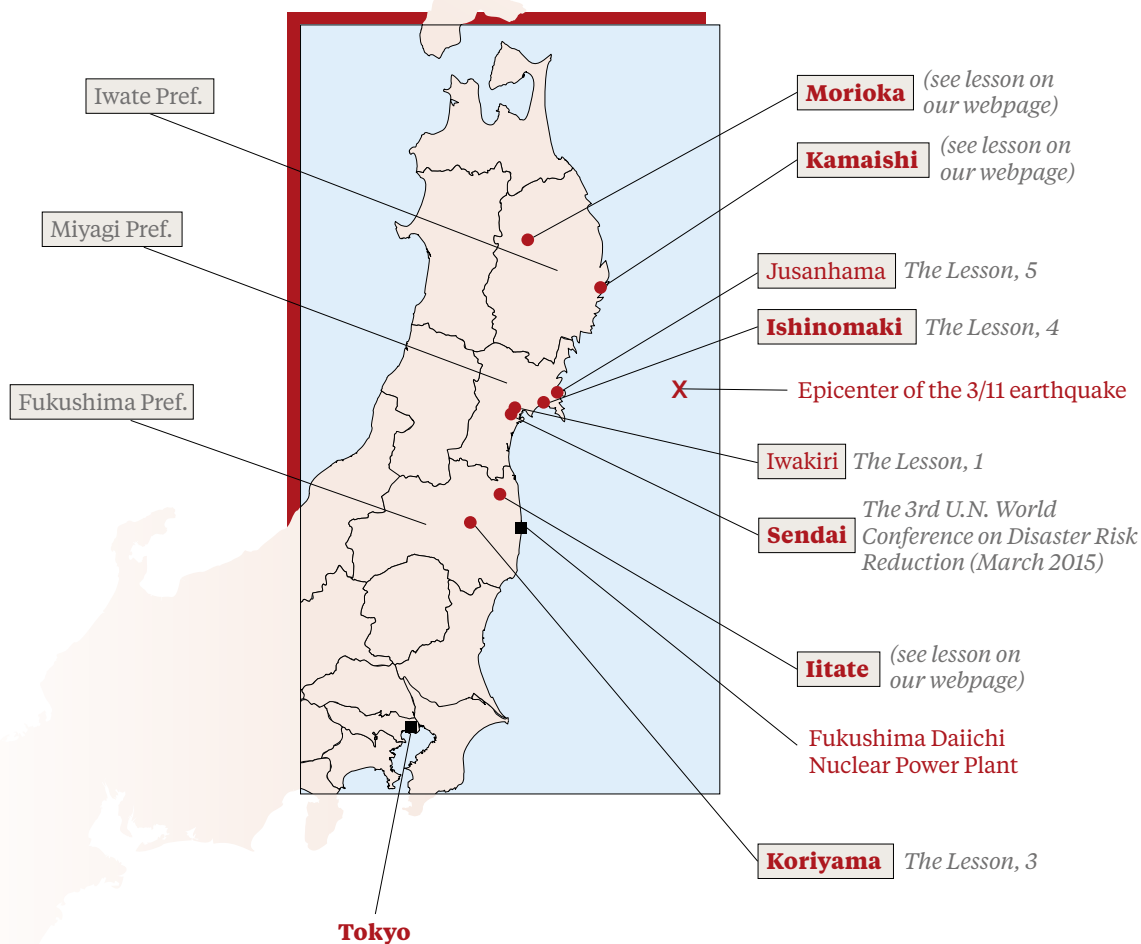
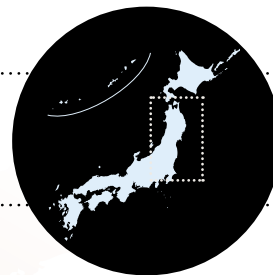
By tradition in a village like this, all major decisions are made by the local patriarchs – so that was what people were expecting. But having studied similar reconstruction efforts, officials from the local municipality – Kitakami Ward of Ishinomaki City – recognized the importance of giving women a voice. So they held a women-only meeting in November.

Out of the shadow of the local men, the women spoke frankly of their anxieties over the move to higher ground and their fears about the cost of it all. Gradually, their familiarity with the surroundings and everyday family needs led them to provide very detailed criteria for reconstruction – things like how sidewalks should be gently inclined to make them accessible to seniors.

Plan for a new, safer village informed by the voices of local women.



Map of relevant locations in Tohoku



Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan

1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 100-8914, Japan

www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/mge/drr

Registration system, opinion and comment: https://form.cao.go.jp/gender/en_opinion-0001.html