

Necessary Initiatives for Disaster Preparation and Response

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.

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.

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 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.

Map of relevant locations in Tohoku

