

Recommendation 1 Dialogue Through Collaboration

Disaster Relief Under the Impact of the New Coronavirus Pandemic

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Bio:Born in Osaka Prefecture. After completing postgraduate studies in the UK, Dr. Kuwana worked for several humanitarian aid NGOs as a staff member where she engaged in reconstruction work after conflicts and natural disasters. Currently, she is involved in post-conflict and post-disaster international cooperation as a board member and advisor of NGOs. Dr. Kuwana has been on university faculty since 2010, having served as lecturer at Ochanomizu University and associate professor at Ritsumeikan University before coming to Kindai University in 2015 where she works now. Her research areas include humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, international cooperation, and development sociology.



Localization Put to Practice in Kumamoto's Flood Relief

The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a major change in disaster relief. The dual crises of natural disaster and infectious disease are forcing complex and challenging responses around the world. In Japan, the July 2020 Kyushu Floods caused by torrential rain in the region was the first major opportunity for responders to explore the very nature of disaster relief under the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, the flood relief work in Kumamoto at that time turned out to be a trailblazing effort in that effect.

A United Nations University policy research paper (2021) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on humanitarian crisis focused on aid access and noted the following characteristics: 1) restrictions on movement within the country, 2) aid and relief restricted to immediate crisis response, 3) bans on large group gatherings, and 4) self-imposed precautionary restrictions on activities among aid workers. These and other numerous restrictions have resulted in a major shift in the relationship between local organizations and their supporters from outside of the affected communities. Many studies have shown that local actors' leadership has strengthened, and localization progressed at aid sites around the world during the pandemic.

In JPF's Emergency Response to July 2020 Floods, all 13 organizations that implemented activities worked in partnership with local organizations. JPF member organizations used their connections with organizations they had known through the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake and the 2019 Typhoon Hagibis relief efforts as a starting point for their activities, as well as nationwide networks in their areas of expertise. All in all, these were relationships that had been established prior to this disaster. On the other hand, organizations that were unable to utilize their pre-disaster connections tended to have difficulty in their aid provision. Organizations that did implement activities used ICT to host meetings and to coordinate support from distant locations, but it would take longer than usual to start aid implementation when remote communication was all they had. This made it increasingly difficult to respond flexibly to the changing needs on the ground, so strategies were also being developed to have external responders enter the disaster sites in person while taking countermeasures against the spread of COVID-19.

In the types of collaborations described above, it can be said that people explored how best to provide assistance while minimizing external responders' direct implementation, maximizing what could be left to the local community, and giving maximum consideration to prevent the spread of an infectious disease. KVOAD, which was established after the Kumamoto Earthquake, played a central role as a bridge between local organizations and external supporters through hosting coordination meetings. In line with the prefectural government's policy, KVOAD clearly stated that external responders could only provide assistance when requested by the city, town, or municipal councils of social welfare, thereby increasing the initiative of local organizations. On the other hand, this meant that if the local municipal government or the council of social welfare does not have the accurate understanding of needs among their residents, then there is risk that

aid will not reach those in need. Indeed, this proves how necessary it is to establish a system that takes diverse local needs into consideration.

New Shape of Collaboration Centered on Intermediary Organizations

As we have experienced these challenges in aid provision during the new coronavirus pandemic, we will likely need to explore new forms of collaboration in disaster relief, where those from both outside and inside the affected communities work together while local organizations take a more central role, and where we can respond to diverse local situations. What is needed in this process is a network approach, which allows for all involved to connect to heterogeneous elements at different levels of response provision. It will be difficult for people to feel comfortable collaborating with others if the only connections with each other are those that have been hastily established. So, the key will be to create connections between the disaster- and non-disaster-time activities and to build relationships that are not bound by geographic region, sector, or public-private distinctions.

Intermediary organizations can play a major role in facilitating the promotion of these connections and relationships. When intermediary organizations across Japan, JPF with its experience in overseas assistance work, JVOAD with its relationships with national organizations, corporations, and governments in disaster response, and others can engage in dialogue beginning in non-disaster times through leadership trainings and strategy meetings, then we can create more multilayered relationships across sectors where local, national, and global efforts intersect each other.

Dialogue through collaboration has the potential power to have people exchange values with each other and transform their own to solve problems beyond the insider vs. outsider or in- vs. out-of-prefecture dichotomous frameworks. However, this is easier said than done as the intermingling of insiders and outsiders is not so easy. Rather, it is said that many forms of resilience require constant failure. Going through a shared process of conflict and struggle can be the opportunity people need to get rid of the boundaries between each other and to integrate their activities. I believe that the challenges to collaboration revealed by the new coronavirus pandemic have provided us with the opportunity to open ourselves up to new possibilities for collaborations in the future.



Information was shared among diverse organizations via online conferences in the response to the July 2020 floods. ©KVOAD

Recommendation 2 Efforts as a Grantmaking Organization

Being Considerate of Regional Characteristics While Providing Support from the Outside

Maki Saito, Domestic Division, Japan Platform (JPF)



Bio: A Tokyo native, Ms. Saito started going to Tohoku as a volunteer while working for a private company after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. She joined JPF in 2014 hoping to spend more of her time on disaster response and also feeling those who provide aid also need more support. In her work for survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake, she worked particularly on issues arising from the nuclear power plant accident. With the Kumamoto Earthquake, she was involved in the response from immediately after the earthquake and worked on programming to strengthen the power and capacity of local communities.

Lessons from Assistance Provision Overseas and for Great East Japan Earthquake Survivors

JPF was established in 2000 as a mechanism for NGOs, the business community, and the government to work together under an equal partnership to provide emergency humanitarian assistance overseas. JPF has been providing assistance through our member NGOs to survivors of natural disasters as well as to refugees and internally displaced persons due to conflicts with donations from various sectors.

In the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake, which was the first time that JPF was dispatched domestically, we began providing assistance three hours after the disaster occurred on March 11, 2011. Because the damages were extensive and widespread and the support for survivors long-term, we established the Living Together Fund to provide grants to non-member organizations that were providing aid to survivors, and we were able to support projects that propelled local-led recovery efforts in a variety of fields.

This experience taught us what was important for us as external supporters. We learned that our role is to draw strength from the people who live there in the community, to help them build a system that will enable them to build on their own experiences in the event of another disaster, and to plan for withdrawal from the disaster zone from the very beginning of any aid effort.

Our Goal in the Kumamoto Earthquake Response

As a response to the Kumamoto Earthquake, we launched relief efforts by our member NGOs immediately after the main earthquake on April 16, 2016. At the same time, we conducted research to explore what types of support would draw out the power of the local community during the reconstruction phase. As a result, we decided that our goal is to develop local human resources who are able to connect and coordinate various parties involved in reconstruction and to identify local issues and take measures to address them. As described in more detail below, we conducted a training program from February to November 2017, and gave grants to local intermediary organizations between June 2017 and May 2022.

1) Training Program: Human Resource Development to Support Local-Led Livelihood Reconstruction

This program was made up of two parts: classroom training and observation training. The former was intended to connect the reconstruction experiences of communities that had gone through earlier disasters to Kumamoto so that we could draw out the strength of people working in local relief efforts. We welcomed people to Kumamoto who had overcome challenges in their relief activities in various fields after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, 2004 Chuetsu Earthquake, and the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. For the latter, participants visited the previously disaster-affected areas and listened to the stories of local people. Participants commented positively that learning in advance about the issues that arise in the recovery process enabled them to take concrete actions early on, and that visiting previously disaster-hit communities gave them a concrete image of reconstruction and potential issues faced by these communities.

2) Grantmaking for Intermediary Support Organizations: Capacity Development to Support Human Resources

If we wanted to make sure that there are no oversights and unevenness in aid provision at the community-based level, it was necessary to develop appropriate human resources and organizations who could provide intermediary support and connect and coordinate various parties involved in response efforts in each municipality. To this end, we implemented a five-year, three-term grant program for intermediary support organizations at the city, town, and village level.

We set the objective of this program as "Making the region resilient to disasters and various social challenges." We set a goal for each of the grant terms. For the first term, it was to build connections. For the second term, we wanted the grantees to devise their own solutions to the problems that had emerged. And for the third and final term, the goal was for each grantee to reflect on their own activities since the earthquake occurred and to compile the lessons learned* so that they could establish a system where, should another disaster strike, they could build on their experiences and share them with others.

JPF provided hands-on support to the grantees from the project planning stage to the preparation of the final report. We worked flexibly as we valued the local responders' free thinking and allowed for changes made to the initial plan for the sake of achieving better results. The grant covered not only direct activity expenses but indirect expenses as well. This was based on the idea that stability in activity implementation is only possible when staffing and other indirect expenses are covered and when the administrative operations of the grantees' secretariat are sufficiently supported.

JPF's response to the Kumamoto Earthquake contributed to information sharing among various stakeholders, delivery of concrete assistance to disaster survivors, and to the goal of providing life-saving support to the entire community. In addition, when the July 2020 Kyushu Floods occurred, relief activities within Kumamoto Prefecture were led by aid groups that had accumulated experiences and expanded their cooperation in the Kumamoto Earthquake response. In that sense, I believe we were able to achieve, to a certain extent, the development of a system and human resources capable of building strong communities that can prepare for disasters to come. We would like to think that our activities helped lead the community to "Build Back Better" as stated in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which has been adopted at the 2015 United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.



Reporting session in Tokyo on the outcomes of the community capacity building project ©JPF

*The lessons learned from disaster relief in the Kumamoto municipalities have been compiled into four booklets (See QR code in Useful Links on p.32).

Recommendation 3 Tips from Overseas Cases

Disaster Relief in Italy

Ryo Matsumaru, Professor, Department of Regional Development Studies, Faculty of Global and Regional Studies, Toyo University



Bio: Born in Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture, Dr. Matsumaru graduated from university in 1986 with a degree in civil engineering and has worked as a development consultant for over two decades on disaster prevention projects in Japan and overseas. He has extensive experience in developing countries in developing flood control, urban drainage, disaster prevention, and post-disaster reconstruction plans as well as capacity building among government officials. He has been at Toyo University since 2013 where he has seminars on disaster prevention. Dr. Matsumaru has supported JPF since immediately after the Kumamoto Earthquake, engaging in monitoring, advising, and capacity building of organizations working in Kumamoto.

Hot Meals at Evacuation Shelters

With large-scale disasters, evacuees will be living in the evacuation shelters over the long term. In the Kumamoto Earthquake, it took about 7 months for all shelters to close. There are various challenges regarding life in a shelter, but one thing that should be improved is meals.

Meals are something that everyone needs every day. Immediately after the disaster, people are thankful to be able to eat at all. However, when they are served only rice balls, bread, and catered boxed bento meals day after day during their prolonged stay in the shelter, evacuees are not only deprived of the enjoyment of food but may also develop health problems, making it essential that high-quality meals are provided to them. Even if it is just one hot meal a day, it will be a time of relief for the evacuees.

When we look at how other countries have dealt with this, we see how hot meals are served in some countries from the very early phase of evacuation right after the disaster. For instance, in Italy, emergency food trucks are ready to dispatch to various locations and to have volunteers in charge of cooking (who have gone through training by the national government) prepare meals inside these trucks. When the city of Camerino in central Italy was hit by an earthquake in 2016, food trucks arrived there on the same day and served pasta and other hot meals. Similar examples can be seen in Albania (where an earthquake struck in November 2019), where hot meals are served as a means to provide a sense of relief to the survivors.

With the current conditions found in Japan, it is difficult for evacuation shelters to prepare their own hot meals because using heat to cook food would be hard for many shelters. But providing hot meals by using food trucks may be something that aid-providing organizations can take up.



Inside temporary housing for small families

All photos © Toyo University

Making Constructed Temporary Housing Better

Temporary housing, where people who have lost their homes in a disaster spend their temporary period of residence, should be something that gives the disaster survivors hope for recovery and reconstruction of their lives and communities. Although there has been a recent increase in the number of wooden homes constructed as temporary housing and the quality of the housing is also gradually improving, there are still many problems in terms of living conditions. Some of these issues include electrical home appliances not being supplied to the residents which makes it difficult to start living in these housing immediately, the long distance to parking lots, limited public transportation surrounding temporary housing complexes, and grocery and other shopping being inconvenient. Furthermore, the limited two-year tenancy period may lead to anxiety for disaster survivors that they could lose housing again.

In the aforementioned city of Camerino in Italy, there is no fixed tenancy period and a wider range of high-quality temporary housing was provided to disaster survivors than in Japan. It probably had something to do with the reconstruction of the old city center, a historic district, being expected to take decades. Still, the temporary housing there already came not only with major home appliances but also beds and dishes, and disaster survivors were able to start living immediately after moving in. In front of each temporary housing was a small yard where residents could have plants and keep pets. Parking spaces were also right in front of the housing for the convenience of the residents.

Quality of temporary housing and the accessibility of parking spaces may be beyond the control of the civic sector. But it may help lead to improvements when disaster hits if the civic sector had discussions with the local government and other parties during non-disaster times. It may also be helpful for disaster survivors, who are putting up with difficult living conditions, if those who are providing assistance to them could keep in mind that these are the issues they have had to endure.



A small yard and parking space provided in front of each temporary housing

Temporary housing comes in three sizes: 40 sq. meters for 1-2 persons, 60 sq. meters for 3-4 persons, and 80 sq. meters for 4+ persons.