

Women's Session

Women's Role in Disaster Risk Reduction

Date and time: October 11 (Thu), 2012, 13:00–14:00

Venue: Hyogo Prefecture Guest House Meeting Room No. 1

Participants:

Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Keiko Takegawa, Deputy Director-General for Gender Equality, Cabinet Office

Keiko Kiyohara, Vice President, Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute

Akiko Domoto, President, Women and Disaster Network Japan; former Governor of Chiba Prefecture

Reiko Masai, President, Women's Net Kobe

Hiroko Hara, Vice-Representative, Japan's Network for Women and Health (WHJ)

Yoriko Meguro, Chair, NGO Gender Action Platform

Tamiyo Kondo, Associate Professor, Kobe University; Research Fellow, Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI)

Yoko Saito, Researcher, Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI)

Yuki Matsuoka, Head, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Hyogo Office (UNISDR Hyogo)



Summary of remarks:

Margareta Wahlström

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

The UN Secretary-General's message for the 2012 International Day for Disaster Reduction (October 13) —the theme of which was "Women and Girls - the [in]Visible Force of Resilience" —highlights the need for women and girls to be at the forefront of disaster risk reduction.



The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is implemented in many countries. Although the HFA calls for disaster risk reduction to incorporate gender perspectives, many issues remain for its realization in the respective countries.

Women contribute to the community in many roles and should not be regarded solely as “vulnerable.” More visual recognition should be given to their capabilities.

Keiko Kiyohara

Vice President, Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was the first time gender issues in disaster situations became apparent. Women’s perspectives were lacking from the management of relief supplies and operation of evacuation shelters. The HyogoPrefectural Gender Equality Promotion Center offered counseling 24 hours a day, and collected feedback from women. It



also helped the publication of *danjo kyosei no machizukuri teigen* (Proposals for Gender-Equal Community Building). Subsequently, the national government conducted legislative reforms pertaining to disaster response policies and gender equality in disaster response.

However, the same issues re-emerged in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake. On the other hand, support activities by NPOs and the private sector made active progress.

Future tasks include the following: 1) Development of concrete rules and manuals based on accumulated experience; 2) Empowerment of individuals and uninterrupted succession by future generations; 3) Active involvement of national, prefectural and municipal governments; and 4) Networking and training of women leaders across sectoral (public, private and NPO) boundaries.

Akiko Domoto

President, Women and Disaster Network Japan; former Governor of Chiba Prefecture

In response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, women’s perspectives were added to basic policies on post-disaster reconstruction and basic plans for disaster risk reduction. These included matters like providing a separate line-drying space for women at evacuation shelters.



Women are typically categorized as vulnerable under disaster situations. Rules pertaining to women’s roles and women’s participation in decision-making should be in place before a disaster strikes. Such rules should also reflect the opinions of men. Gender mainstreaming benefits both women and men.

Reiko Masai

President, Women's Net Kobe

Women’s Net Kobe has offered support for women since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Initially, about 60 percent of the telephone counseling concerned domestic violence. There were also calls about child abuse by wives who were overwhelmed by the responsibility of single-handedly raising children while their husbands lived away from home due to work.



I was involved in the launch last May of Women's Network for East Japan Disaster (Rise Together), which conducts surveys and training, publishes information and makes policy recommendations. What has changed most from 17 years ago is the implementation of measures to prevent violence against women. In contrast, little progress has been made regarding evacuation shelters, in terms of living conditions of women, gender roles and lack of women’s participation in shelter management and operation.

Hiroko Hara

Vice-Representative, Japan's Network for Women and Health (WHJ)

I submitted a proposal for incorporating gender-equal perspectives in responses to the Great East Japan Earthquake. The proposal included 1) Participation of women in decision-making processes, 2) Inclusion of more women members in the “Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake” and 3) Active participation by disaster-affected women, elderly and people with disabilities in the development of reconstruction plans.



Although revisions were made to the Basic Plan for Disaster Prevention, mentions of gender equality are missing from several important chapters. Although Chapter 2 states that 30 percent of national and local government disaster reduction panels should consist of women, this has not been achieved.

Yoriko Meguro

Chair, NGO Gender Action Platform

Gender Action Platform compiled a report based on an assessment, conducted using several methods, of assistance provided to expectant mothers by JOICEP.

Gender Action Platform and Oxfam jointly made a policy recommendation pertaining to gender perspectives in disaster mitigation. At the World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Tohoku in July 2012, the Gender Action Platform became the only organization to hold a session focusing on gender. The session discussed lack of assistance for expectant and nursing mothers, lack of consideration for needs specific to women in the distribution of relief supplies - often initiated by men - and gender inequality in access to economic support.



Tamiyo Kondo

Associate Professor, Kobe University; Research Fellow, Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI)

I participated in relief activities with university students and Kobe municipal employees. During the experience, female students impressed me as having relatively higher ability to communicate smoothly with local people. I place particular emphasis on involving young people, especially local high school students, in our activities.



Yoko Saito

Researcher, Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI)

I am conducting research on the operation and management of evacuation shelters at affected localities. My studies have found that 1) Sharing of responsibilities and 2) External perspectives play important roles. I look forward to deepening my studies in the future.



Keiko Takegawa

Deputy Director-General for Gender Equality, Cabinet Office

I would like to tell my email newsletter readers about the UN Secretary-General's message for the 2012 International Day for Disaster Reduction.

Japan holds the dismal ranking of 98th among 135 countries in the Gender Gap Index ranking; this inequality is a major obstacle to disaster reduction and disaster response.

In the future I would like to compile the lessons gained from the Great East Japan Earthquake into a manual, and disseminate the manual widely among municipalities. I also intend to work toward increasing women members on disaster-prevention panels of municipalities.



Comment by Ms. Wahlström

The session provided an opportunity to listen to people with varied perspectives. I hope participants will take active part in future international discussions on the subject. In particular, I hope they will make further progress in research that will prove, through Japan's experience, that women are not vulnerable, but are capable of participating in decision-making and planning. Such work will be much appreciated, since it will further demonstrate to the international community the roles and capabilities of women.

