

Emergency Response

Evacuation

Temporary Housing

Recovery and Reconstruction

Preparedness

Integrating Gender and Diversity Perspectives into Disaster Response

The Support We Wanted!

A Collection of Good Practice in Disaster Response based on the East Japan Disaster



東日本大震災女性支援ネットワーク

Women's Network for East Japan Disaster (Rise Together)

<http://risetogetherjp.org>



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Foreword for English version

Each affected person has different needs. They might be categorized as “affected people” as a whole; however, the assistance needed differs depending on gender, sexual identity, age, disability, nationality, mother tongue, family structure and employment status, and so on. Yet, considering gender and diversity issues have been long overlooked in disaster response in Japan. They have received little attention because of a lack of understanding of how each person can be affected differently, and what actually can be done in response to their diverse needs. The link between affected people’s vulnerability and risk to disaster has not been seriously considered.

In order to increase the understanding of gender and diversity issues in disaster response, the Women’s Network for East Japan Disaster has facilitated the compilation of “Integrating Gender and Diversity Perspectives into Disaster Response; The Support We Wanted!”. The compilation is based on the many contributions from local organizations and voluntary disaster assistance organizations which operated in the affected areas. In some cases, contributors were asked to fill in a questionnaire. In other cases, we directly interviewed disaster response workers and relevant volunteers.

This publication aims to trigger more action towards inclusive disaster response and recovery. It highlights the fact that in paying respect to the diversity of people, the suffering of affected people will be reduced and disaster assistance can be more effective. It also underlines the importance of involving the participation of women and other vulnerable groups in decision-making concerning the disaster response and recovery process.

We hope this publication will help improve the current understanding of gender and diversity

issues in disaster, and generate more interest and commitment to inclusive disaster response, recovery and preparedness.

Introduction

The Women’s Network for East Japan Disaster is an organization, which has promoted the human rights of vulnerable people, particularly women, in the recovery and reconstruction process, and disaster prevention strategies, paying attention to the diversity of disaster-affected people.

Each affected person has different needs. They might be categorized as “affected people” as a whole; however, the assistance needed differs depending on gender, sexual identity, age, disability, nationality, mother tongue, family structure and employment status, and so on. When we asked, “Do you provide assistance considering differing needs?”, the disaster response workers we interviewed often replied, “We can’t do it because we do not have any experts.” Many people think supporting women is only undertaken by women’s groups, and supporting the disabled by disability organizations. However, is it true that only expert organizations are able to respond to these diverse needs?

If groups with expertise of a particular field exist in the affected area, it is possible to leave it on them; however, not every place has such organizations. Moreover, it is not expected that such organizations work properly in the unusual circumstances of disaster.

It is community-based organizations, local governments and voluntary organizations that start emergency response operation first and continue to work in the field for a long time after the recovery period. It is important that everyone be able to provide diversity-sensitive support rather than wait for specialist organizations.

“Integrating Gender and Diversity Perspectives into Disaster Response; The Support We Wanted!” collects examples of disaster response activities undertaken by

various organizations in, and after, the East Japan Disaster. It aims to provide advice for people without expertise to be able to provide effective assistance to each affected person with better consideration of diverse needs, and for disaster response workers and volunteers to be able to undertake their activities comfortably. We appreciate the cooperation from organizations and people who shared with us good practice examples.

We hope that these examples will be used, not only in the field of supporting the reconstruction following the East Japan Disaster, but also for a revision of local disaster prevention plans and/or for daily disaster prevention activities.

About the terms “Disability” and “Persons with disabilities”

The Women’s Network for East Japan Disaster uses the term “ 障害者” instead of “ 障がい者.” (障(*sho*)- 害(*gai*)- 者(*sha*))- includes *kanji* (chinese character) “ 害”, meaning “harm” for the letter “gai,” instead of using hiragana for “gai.” The reason that the organization uses “ 害” (harm) in its representation is that it is not a problem to use “ 障害” (*kanji* for *sho-gai*) based on the social model, which considers that it is society that creates disability, and a solution to the problems that persons with disabilities face can be achieved not by changing its representation but by changing society itself. In addition, changing *kanji* to hiragana for “gai” (which does not require the use of “ 害” (harm)) may replace the core of the problems that have stemmed in society with problems of how they feel. In addition, the word “ 障害者” (using *kanji* for all three letters) has been cherished as an identity position of persons with disabilities in the disability movements in Japan.

Glossaries and Application of this collection

Each good practice example indicates a “phase” of disaster cycle and a “target audience” as a guide for the application: i.e. which situations and who this should refer to.

“**Phase**” (Time duration for each phase below may change depending on situations)

Emergency Response: Immediately after the disaster to the beginning of evacuation

Evacuation: Including the period not only at evacuation centers but also in the event of ‘evacuating at home’

Temporary Housing: Period when staying in temporary housing, public residences or leased residences, which are considered as temporary housing

Recovery and Reconstruction: Periods of reconstructing livelihood, town, and housing

Preparedness: All periods. Issues continue to be considered in preparation of the next disaster

“Target Audiences”

Government/Administration: Municipalities, Prefectures and Central Government

Community-based Organizations: Civil and local citizens’ groups in affected areas, including neighbourhood association, disaster preparedness committee of the residents association and local women’s association

Voluntary Organizations: Organizations from outside of the affected areas (volunteer groups and NGOs, corporations, etc.)

Volunteers: Individual volunteers who provide activities in affected areas

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(*) Phase of disaster cycle/

A: Emergency Response, B: Evacuation, C: Temporary Housing, D: Recovery and Reconstruction, E: Preparedness

(**) Target Audience/

Ad: the Administration, CBO: Community-based Organization, VO: Voluntary Organization, FO: Funding Organization, V: Volunteer

Target Audience

☒ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☐ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Listening to women's needs

With wisdom, device and experience

Listening to women in women only meeting

It is difficult for affected people to speak out about their concerns and relief supply needs when in evacuation centers. Women and elderly people can be especially shy and may not easily voice their concerns. It is therefore not easy to always grasp their needs. There are some methodologies which make it easier to grasp their needs and concerns.

Staff members at women's grassroots groups, and public officials at the gender equality section of the local government, understood the difficulty of assessing women's needs so they first talked to leaders at the evacuation centers and ward chiefs of the area (mostly men) in order to arrange for women to meet in a separate private room for their consultation. At the beginning, these women hesitated to speak up, but after one woman broke the silence, they spoke out, one after another.

Gaining understanding from men

Sometimes there is opposition from men towards women's needs assessment; they say that men also have been experiencing a difficult time. The problem was resolved when an explanation was added by public officers. These men came to understand and were relieved when they found smiles on the women's faces after their hearing in separate rooms.

Utilizing a request checklist

It is sometimes difficult for women to speak in public about the size of their undergarments and the kind of sanitary goods that a woman uses even at normal times, not to mention during an evacuation. One women's

A female staff of NICCO assesses needs of affected women by interviewing. (Photo credit: Tsuyoshi Wada)



organization devised a request form, which only requires checking off a list of concerns and missing supplies so that women at evacuation centers can easily fill it out.

Many women filled this form out since it only required them checking a list. The forms were collected by folding the checking side inside and taping both edges like an envelope in order to maintain privacy.

Efficient and effective assistance

This method made it possible to provide assistance by responding to individual needs. Accurate assistance was possible thanks to totalling up the request lists and identifying the exact amount and size of goods required, which also reduced waste in the procurement thereof. The women's organization divided the totalled results into "missing supplies" and "needs", and submitted these to the city officials. The city mayor was surprised at this result that showed the situation of the female evacuees. This grassroots women's organization was able to gain support from the municipal office. It helped the group's activities by making it easier to rent a warehouse or to collect donations.

Target Audience

☐ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Distribution of relief supplies according to diverse needs

Thinking from a beneficiary's position

It is essential that women are in charge of distributing supplies like sanitary napkins, women's undergarments, and panty-liners. There was a voluntary assistance group that put these supplies into paper bags or boxes so that other people could not see what was in them.

Requests for supplies vary depending not only on age and gender but also on an individual needs. Women's undergarments are especially in great demand in different types and sizes. Women might find it difficult to state their undergarment sizes.

Sanitary goods can be placed on the shelf erected in the women's toilet in advance. Undergarments can be chosen freely by women in a separate room.



A set of donated goods. The bag can be used as a laundry bag. (Photo credit: Miyagi Jo-net)

Various difficulties in evacuation centers

Requesting through female leaders

In many cases, it was men who were the chairman or main committee members of local residents associations (*jichikai*) or voluntary disaster prevention associations (*jishu bousai soshiki*) that worked as leaders at evacuation centers. Many people approached for a consultation with them as life was returning to normal. The concerns included a lot of issues, such as rules at evacuation center, relationships with other evacuees, the environment surrounding the evacuation centers and concerns pertaining to families and children.

A *jichikai* is an organisation whose members carry out independent activities to help one another and improve the living environment, development of an area and promote mutual friendships in the neighbourhood which usually covers up to several thousand families. Ninety-six percent of the chairman of *jichikais* were men in 2012.

In one evacuation center in Miyagi Prefecture, five or six women, who were in charge of an electric appliance which evacuees jointly used, became female leaders and put women's concerns together. If only one woman goes to the male leader for consultation of women specific concerns, it might be considered as a personal concern and leaders find it hard to deal with. These concerns became well addressed after these women started putting them together. Not only women, but also children and elderly people, felt that it was easier to consult with female leaders about their concerns. Involving women as leaders in the management of evacuation centers makes every evacuee feel more comfortable living there.



A female leader at Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture

Sorting out and managing relief supplies

Methods of distributing relief supplies

Relief supplies are not distributed efficiently if they are left piled up; it is hard to ascertain where everything is. It is necessary to sort them out first systematically. In one area in Miyagi prefecture, a women's leader at a local disaster prevention association went to the evacuation centers and asked women for help in sorting out the goods. When clothes were sorted out into female, male and different sizes, it became easier for people to receive what they wanted without any difficulty.

At the beginning, when relief supplies started arriving, only men tended to be assigned to the distribution post for reasons of managing and maintaining order for distribution. However, this made it difficult for women to access the supplies.

It is important that residents discuss the idea of having both men and women in charge of managing relief supplies. Voluntary organizations should explain and advise the evacuees on the benefits of having women in that position. It is also important that men and women cooperate with each other to avoid the burden centers only on some people for managing supplies and sorting out goods.



Goods collected by donation. (Photo credit: Miyagi Jo-net)

Target Audience

☐ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Making life as evacuee comfortable

Making temporary toilets accessible

In the facilities used as evacuation centers, temporary toilets are set up because toilets are often broken during disasters or there is a shortage of the number of toilets. However, most of the temporary toilets are of the Japanese style (that require the user to squat over the toilet) and have steps from the door, so that they are not entirely accessible. With the widespread use of Western-style toilets, there are now certain numbers of people who are not able to use Japanese-style toilets. Some children, particularly, do not know how to use them and make a mess when attempting to use them. It annoys not only the children themselves but also other people who are living within the same evacuation center.



Workshop: How to use the Japanese-style toilets
(Photo credit: Save the Children Japan)

There is one organization, which taught children at evacuation centers, how to use the Japanese-style toilets with a demonstration using a dummy. In order to make temporary toilets comfortable, it is also useful to request the relief supplies to include Western-style toilet seats, which can be attached to the Japanese-style toilets and small sized assistant steps to make it easier to go up the steps for the toilets.

There are other useful ideas, such as making night lights brighter around toilets, extending the distance between men's and women's toilets, and setting up unisex toilets for persons with disabilities which anyone can use when other toilets are fully occupied.

Target Audience

☒ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

A private space for women

Indispensable at evacuation centers

Providing a space for feeling secure and relaxed

In one of the evacuation centers, which utilized a large convention hall, around 2,500 people were living. At the beginning of their evacuation, there were no partitions available, even when they slept, so that it was difficult to protect privacy. Women had many concerns; for example, women were not able to sleep safely, some women were harassed by men while sleeping, and mothers felt distressed because their babies were crying at night disturbing other evacuees.

Officers at the prefecture government picked up these women's concerns and opened "a private space for women" using one of the rooms available in the facility. This space was run and supported jointly by several groups; a local women's organization, which set up "a café" for women at the center, another local women's organization, and a center for gender equality, and volunteers.

Inside that space, there was another small room where women could change clothes or have a nap without worrying about other people, a table where women could gather to have tea and sweets in order to be relaxed, and a corner with a mirror where women could use hair dryers and put make-up on. Women came to this space to change clothes, chat with others and drop by with a crying baby at night.

Assistance needs a base place

In this women only space, women participated in art workshops, made doorplates to hang on curtains which protected their living space in the center, and



"A space for women only" at the evacuation center: Big Pallet Fukushima (Photo credit: Fukushima Gender Equality Center)

filled out request forms and receive personal items such as brassieres. Some women did not even have a brassiere until early summer when it becomes indispensable. The space became a hub where women felt safe. In this difficult group living environment, evacuated women depended upon this space. Effective support from outside also became possible thanks to this private space.

It is clear that living in evacuation centers forces women to face many difficulties. It is necessary to stipulate setting up "a space for women only" as a mandatory item in a management manual of evacuation centers.

Needs that only women official can hear

Why did necessities not reach everyone?

Only male officers were dispatched to research needs at evacuation centers at the initial stage

After the disaster, necessary relief supplies often did not reach evacuation centers even though many goods were sent from all over Japan. One reason was that they lacked a system to understand affected people's needs. One of the local governments in Miyagi dispatched officials into the field, assessed the needs of people in evacuation centers and distributed necessities. Because of the anticipated danger in the field, as well as the fact that there was a general understanding that "field officers are men" and "women should not go on site," all dispatched officials were male.

Women and children who hesitate to speak about their needs

Sometimes necessary relief goods were not available, especially for women and children, at evacuation centers. A female officer who worked at the department close to the citizens thought that women were reluctant to tell their needs to the men, and proposed going into the field. At first, her proposal was declined because "there was no precedence of sending women into the field and it was dangerous," but later female officers began to be dispatched as she persuaded persons in charge, one by one, and made a consensus that it was the role of the department, which protects citizens' lives, to conduct hearings of concerns and needs at evacuation centers.

Dispatching female officers helps in the field

It is important to protect the security of officials who are dispatched to the site in a disaster when it is difficult to grasp the situation. However, it is a responsibility for the organization to take safety measures for its staff, be they women or men. A female officer said, "It is natural to go out to the field as a public officer. It will have a harmful influence if female officers do not participate in early needs assessment." This female officer's experience illustrates the importance of their roles.



Being heard at an evacuation center



Diverse needs can be picked up through workshops, such as hand massage sessions

Respite for evacuees

Respite Days

Many affected people are tired both physically and mentally. Especially, women with children in an evacuation situation can be burdened with undue stress. For instance when mothers and their children evacuated from their normal place of residence in order to avoid radiation caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident, mothers had to take care of their children only by themselves in an unfamiliar place without the support of their spouse because they often stayed behind in the affected areas. "Respite Days" is an opportunity to give such mothers and children a brief break.

During Respite Days, they looked so relaxed that they did not look like evacuees from the disaster and the nuclear accident. However, unsolved problems piled up, e.g. considering the facts of raising children apart from families, moving to different places for evacuation, and relationships with families staying in Fukushima. Consultations with lawyers were available at this place of respite.

Participants can do anything they like. Mothers enjoyed having aromatherapy and massage, making Christmas wreaths and learning art of self-defence. Children played volleyball, made dragon crafts and Origami (the traditional Japanese art of paper-folding), drawing and reading picture books. Girls in the upper grades gathered in a small group to play games and chat. Little children created their own play by themselves. Taking part in various programs, the Respite Days give evacuees a relaxed feeling.



Self-administered chiropractory

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Target Audience
☐ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Overlooked High School Students' Needs

Distribution of personal protection alarms

Local boards of education coordinated certain level of assistance to elementary and junior high school students under compulsory education periods. However, high school students, especially those who work during the daytime and go to school at night, did not receive enough support. In the early stages of evacuation, personal protection alarms were provided to children, but these alarms were not provided to students at night school even though they came home later than regular high school students, while streetlights were not yet fixed.

One group provided alarms to these high school students after a girl who went to night school voiced her security concerns about travelling to and from school. The group not only provided alarms but also gave her information regarding consultation services for sexual assaults to alleviate her anxiety.

High school students looked tired because they, like other young people, were asked to undertake many different tasks, such as carrying goods at evacuation centers. After they moved into temporary housing, they did not receive many support programs from outside compared with children and elderly people, due to the small number of high school students in temporary housing community. There were some communities where adults thought it was not right if only junior high and high school students gathered at the community center of the temporary housing site. It is necessary to listen more carefully to the voices of high school students who are neither children nor adults.

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Target Audience
☒ the Administration ☐ Community-based Organization ☐ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Concerns of those who have to go to work during post-disaster period

Who takes care of families during emergency situations?

Some of the local government officials and lifeline corporate employees have an obligation to go to work when disasters happen. Preparing for these situations, it is important to discuss with other family members, relatives or neighbours in advance to decide who picks up, ensures the security of, protects and takes care of children or family members who need the care of others during times of emergency.

In the case where officials were also affected and had to go to work from an evacuation center, they could not leave their children so that they often brought their children to work. One local government officer in Miyagi prefecture, and her husband who was also a local government officer, were at work when the disaster happened and they could not leave the office for over a month. They already asked their relative to pick up their children from a nursery and take them to their parents' home if a big disaster were to occur. The arrangement mitigated their worries about taking care of children except for their feelings of missing their children.

A female officer at a local government in Iwate prefecture survived the tsunami although her home was swept away. After the disaster, she shared a saloon room of a hotel with colleagues which they used as their accommodation, and devoted herself to emergency response work. Once she went to an evacuation center, but she felt that it was not a place for single women. While families often felt that it was difficult to live there, as a single woman, she felt it much stronger.

She managed to set herself up in temporary

housing, but she could not receive domestic electrical appliances which were distributed to every family who moved in since they were supposed to be distributed during daytime when she was not at home. As the cold season approached, she could not take receipt of these appliances. She finally picked them up at a different time because she could tell a dealer, "I cannot pick up these appliances during the daytime since I am a public officer and am not allowed to have a break during the daytime." Single people who are not public officers might have hesitated to ask for this special arrangement.

Like people who have to take care of families, single people also tend to have a difficult time since they have to do everything on their own and it seems that they are more reluctant to ask for help. As single-headed households increase in Japan, a system that allows friends or acquaintances to act on behalf of single people is necessary.

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Target Audience
☐ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☐ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Creating personal time by rotating duty

Liberation from heavy burden of stereotypical gendered division of labour

In evacuation centers, there are many cases where only women are in charge of preparing food. A long-term evacuation life can often make them exhausted. In one evacuation center, female leaders from a disaster prevention association started preparing every meal with other women. They rotated their duties to give their bodies a rest and go to see their own houses. Their burden became less as they only had to take a turn once every three days.

Even when stereotypical gender division of labour cannot be avoided immediately after a disaster; it is important to create a situation, which reduces the burden on particular people by changing systems, increasing help from youth, children and men, and utilizing volunteers.

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Target Audience
☐ the Administration ☒ Community-based Organization ☒ Voluntary Organization
☒ Funding Organization ☐ Volunteer

Making free time for mothers

Sharing childcare duties

In one evacuation center, about 100 affected people were divided into four groups and each group went to clean streets and collapsed houses, procure food and prepare meals, in turn. They also rotated childcare duties in order for the mothers with young children to have more time.

In the case of disaster, the burdens and worries of mothers with babies and little children increase dramatically. This situation continues even after the confusion calms down, and people start cleaning and reconstructing their houses and going through various procedures. Since temporary housing is often built far away from the center of the town, problems arise as to where to find a place to leave children and/or it takes longer to take children to and from school.

A system to support families

There is an example of a local child-care support NPO (non-profit organization), together with a disaster volunteer center, offered day care services for children. It is necessary to set up a mechanism to support families with children with the cooperation of residents, volunteers and government. The introduction of “hoiku mama system”, in which a so-called “child-minder” takes two or three children into her home, should be introduced in an area where a nursery is not available.



A study space at an evacuation center in Soma, Fukushima