



From Experience of Fukushima: To Enhance Local Resilience

DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON RECONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN FUKUSHIMA: FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF LOCAL RESILIENCE

Objectives

Natural disasters pose a considerable and growing risk to human security, and therefore to sustainable development as well. The Asia-Pacific region has faced multiple natural disasters in recent years, including the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), Sichuan earthquake (2008), Pakistan floods (2010), and the triple-disaster (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear accident) in Japan (2011). In addition, there are strong indications that the frequency and severity of extreme weather events will increase as a result of climate change. The Fukushima Global Communication Programme (FGC) developed by the UNU Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) will take a human security approach, which moves away from the traditional prioritisation of state security to instead place primary focus on the individual. In addition to analysing the human consequences of Japan's March 2011 triple-disaster, the project will provide a platform for consolidating and disseminating information and fostering collaboration between Japanese and international experts.

The session served to introduce the Fukushima Global Communication Programme (FGC), a major new initiative developed by the UNU Institute of Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP), and to discuss current activities and the future direction of the programme. A keynote speech provided a broad overview of the FGC Programme and described the main elements of the programme as well as the seven areas of human security described by the 1994 UNDP Human Development report, namely economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. Subsequently, panelists went into greater detail on (1) how gender is a cross-cutting issue for all seven areas of human security, (2) mental health impacts from disasters, (3) the enabling role the government can play in overcoming challenges and incentivising post-disaster development.

List of Speakers

[Moderator]

Kazuhiko Takemoto, Programme Director, United Nations University, Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) / Senior Advisor to Minister of the Environment / Policy Advisor for Global Change Research, University of Tokyo, Integrated Research System for Sustainability Science (IR3S)

[Keynote Speaker]

Kazuhiko Takeuchi, Senior Vice-Rector, United Nations University (UNU) / Director and Professor, Integrated Research System for Sustainability Science (IR3S) The University of Tokyo

[Panellists]

Satoru Tanaka, Professor, Department of Nuclear Engineering and Management, School of Engineering, The University of Tokyo

Atsuro Tsutsumi, Research Fellow, United Nations University International Institute for Global Health

Madoka Futamura, Academic Programme Officer, Institute for Sustainability and Peace, United Nations University (UNU-ISP)

Key Messages

- **Effective communication, a human security approach and enhanced collaboration with academic institutions and organisations are all crucial for reconstruction activities and enhancing resilience in Fukushima.**
- **UNU is well-positioned to act as a catalyst to support the creation of networks and facilitate sharing of knowledge between international and Japanese experts and researchers.**
- **Knowledge and lessons generated by research under the FGC Programme will be useful not only in the Fukushima context, but can also contribute to enhancing resilience in communities around the world.**

Summary of the Session

The keynote presentation was delivered by Prof. Kazuhiko Takeuchi who introduced the Fukushima Global Communication Programme (FGC), which will seek among other things to establish an environmental framework for understanding the triple-disaster of March 2011 (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear accident), with particular emphasis on human security. This approach will focus specifically on individuals rather than taking a more traditional state-centric approach. The FGC programme will focus primarily on three main areas: (1) compiling information and undertaking research; (2) creating networks and fostering collaboration between Japanese and international experts; (3) communicating information and findings with the international community. To address existing miscommunication and to foster research and collaboration, the programme will convene lectures and international conferences including both Japanese and international experts. In addition, Prof. Takeuchi noted that there has been some level of international distrust regarding information about what is happening in Japan related to the triple-disaster, and that UNU is particularly well-positioned to catalyse effective and precise dissemination of information. A website for this purpose is currently under development, and will also publicly share records from the conferences and lectures planned under the FGC Programme.

Dr. Madoka Futamura explained the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into understanding human security, specifically in relation to sustainable development and the impact of natural disasters. After introducing the seven areas of human security identified by UNDP, Dr. Futamura highlighted how each area connects to a woman's experience and needs during disasters. In addition, she underscored the distinction between 'protection', which implies a top-down approach, and 'empowerment', which corresponds with a more bottom-up approach.

Dr. Atsuro Tsutsumi provided insight into how mental health is impacted by disasters, and its importance for establishing sustainable and resilient communities. Among other things, he emphasised the psychological effects triggered by disasters, and introduced statistics from past disasters in Japan, including the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. In addition, he explained how mental health issues can be associated with many different disaster-related situations, including the loss of infrastructure (making it difficult to deliver needed pharmaceuticals) and loss of telecommunications (hindering contact with families and friends).

Prof. Satoru Tanaka spoke about many of the infrastructural challenges facing people in the area affected by the nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan. In addition, farmland has been left uncultivated in some areas leading to reduced soil fertility, while populations of animals like wild boar and deer continue to expand unchecked. While recognising the diverse challenges, Prof. Tanaka emphasised the positive role that the government can play in incentivising development and helping people to return home.

The active discussion session began with a journalist's question about the role of the media and the potential mental health effects that negative reporting can carry. Dr. Tsutsumi emphasised the importance of a free press, but also underscored the need for communicating practical information that is immediately useful to those dealing with the disaster. A researcher in the audience referred to the positive role that women can play in disaster recovery, which Dr. Futamura agreed with, while also emphasising the need to respect the different roles that women play in different communities and countries. Prof. Takeuchi responded to an audience question regarding the potential for increased resilience caused by people returning to areas affected by the disasters. Referring to areas where decontamination is still needed, he said that such discussions will need to come at a later stage, but that this was an important point for other tsunami-affected areas. Dr. Tanaka added that incentives should be created for people who are volunteering to return to the disaster-affected areas. In a final round of closing statements, the panellists reflected on current and future collaboration between Japan and the international community. Prof. Tanaka underscored the need for increased cooperation towards overseas dissemination of knowledge and experiences gained in Japan. Adding to this point, Dr. Tsutsumi explained that substantial disaster-related research is being done in Japan, but increased collaborative efforts are needed to effectively disseminate and report these outcomes in English overseas. In closing, Prof. Takeuchi underscored the role UNU can play as a catalyst for promoting such international collaboration, and expressed his hope that lessons learned from Fukushima can provide a useful perspective for other countries facing natural disasters.