

COMMUNICATING DISASTER RISK – CAPACITY BUILDING BEYOND LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL BARRIERS

EDWARD Y. SUMOTO

United Nations Centre for Regional Development, Disaster Management Planning Hyogo Office

1-5-2 Wakinohama-Kaigan –Dori, Chuo-ku, Kobe 651-0073 Japan

Abstract: In an increasingly globalizing world, social structures become more complex. On the other hand, we are now blessed with the power of education, international and local media, and a record of many past disasters and lessons learnt that could be effectively used to engage complex, heterogeneous communities. With increasing issues such as economic and social disparities, immigration issues, conflict and racism, we often fail to address the needs of social and cultural minorities who might require additional language and cultural considerations and recognize the benefits of a heterogeneous society. In history, we are reminded of instances in which racial tension has led to false-rumors and even rioting and massacres targeting minorities in post-disaster situations. We must not only seek to dispel such injustice towards specific minority groups that have historically been the subject of particular social stigma, but also attend to a new group of minorities, namely immigrants and refugees who are rapidly growing in numbers. It is, however, grossly wrong to assume that minorities are simply at the receiving end of aid and special support programmes. They are, like any other inhabitants of the communities, perfectly capable in becoming equipped with disaster management skills and, moreover, able to help communicate relevant information to their peers through their own language and social networks. A well thought-out cooperative arrangement between government, non-profit organizations, and minorities in pre-disaster stages will not only allow communities to be prepared, but lead to social cohesion.

This paper presents some examples from Japan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, not only about past failures in addressing foreigners and minorities in disaster situations, but also with the focus placed on best-practices and positive examples that capacitate minorities and leading to long-term social cohesion and disaster risk reduction.

Keywords: Community based disaster management, minorities, immigration, “new comers”, language support, participatory planning, capacity building, disaster preparedness, local government, emergency management, Japan

1. Introduction

On January 17th, 1995, an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 struck the south of Hyogo Prefecture in Western Japan. In what came to be known as The Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, 6,433 people lost their lives. This was the first major earthquake to strike a major urban center in Japan that was not only densely populated but also very much multicultural and multiethnic.

1.1 History of Internationalism

Kobe city, which bore the brunt of the damages and loss of lives, was one of the first ports to open up to foreign ships following the Meiji Restoration and the end of the policy of seclusion in 1868, though its history spans centuries and Imperial ambassadors were known to sail to China from where Kobe port is now.¹ With its rich international history and its port as a centerpiece of the local economy and society, Kobe’s social and economic landscape grew with its complex relationship with people of foreign nationality or ethnic roots. In modern Kobe, most prominent ethnic groups include

Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Peruvian, Indian, and American in no particular order. The Kobe Municipal Foreign Cemetery, accounting for the deceased from the end of the 19th century and consolidated in the beginning of the 1960s, account for 20 religions, 60 nationalities, and houses the bodies of such historically significant figures including the founder of two top-level universities in western Japan, inventors and scientists and even confectionary and bakery founders whose famous businesses still continue to this day.

As such, Kobe's foreign and minority population, including those of varied ethnic origin but born on Japanese soil (with or without Japanese citizenship) have long played an intrinsic role in its society. In the latter 20th century, the Indian population had established very successful pearl, gem, and textile industries and own many properties in the city of Kobe, while Koreans and Chinese, European, North American, and even minority Jewishⁱⁱ and Muslimⁱⁱⁱ inhabitants establishing not only businesses but also places of worship and communities.

1.2 Demographic Change

In 1981, Japan signed the U.N. 1951 Conventions Relating to the Status of Refugees and in 1982, it inked the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and enacted the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law. Despite the very international history of Japan, it too has gone through famous periods of isolationism and xenophobia, with World War II contributing to a very characteristic social landscape. As shown below, the majority of registered foreigners in post-war Japan were ethnic Koreans (Zainichi Kankoku/Chosen-jin or literary "Koreans living in Japan").

Registered Aliens in Japan				
Year	Total Population	Ethnic Koreans	Percentage of Total	Notes
Dec 31, 1981	792,946	667,325	84.2%	Year before passage of Refugee Protocol
Dec 31, 1994	1,354,011	676,793	50.0%	Year before Hanshin Awaji Earthquake
Dec 31, 2007	2,152,973	593,489	27.6%	Foreign population at the end of WWII: about 2 million
		Ethnic Chinese	Percentage of Total	
		606,889	28.2%	

Source: "Statistics of Registered Foreigners at the end of 2007". Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice, Japan

Many of the Koreans had been forced to migrate to Japan for labour during the war, causing a very serious ethnic and cultural rift that continues to this day. The social stigma associated with history has spawned a class of Koreans in Japan who, despite having lived here for generations since the War, do not have Japanese citizenship and thus producing communities of very tightly knit social circles with many Koreans marrying other ethnic Koreans. To this day, there are Koreans who refer to themselves as second, third, or fourth generation Zainichi Koreans.

Koreans have been discriminated in various forms including stereotypes and social stigma resulting in barriers to intermarriage with Japanese or barriers to equal opportunities for employment. This has resulted in pockets of Korean communities within Japanese society that are very distinct from the rest of society. When one goes to "Korean Towns" in various areas in Japan, one is greeted with Korean signage and Korean language speakers. Some live with relatives who do not have a firm grasp on the Japanese language.

After the end of the War, Korean people organized to create societies, legal bodies, and even Korean schools, which were designated as "Foreigner's Schools (Gaikoku-jin Gakko^{iv})", some of which until recently did not have legal status as schools in Japan, further contributing to the rift by posing restrictions to entry in Japanese universities.

With this background, it is no surprise that such a significant minority group became a major issue during major disasters in Japan.

1.2.1 The Korean Population and Disasters

Because of the rapidly changing demographics, Japanese are naturally getting wary of the sudden influx of foreigners. But the question of Zainichi Koreans always holds a very sensitive place that often comes close to boiling over. Not to mention political problems between Japan and the Republic of Korea and DPRK over territorial rights, history, and mistrust on both sides regarding war-time history and later the abduction of Japanese nationals by DPRK, there have also been recent mishaps such as the current Tokyo mayor referring to “foreigners” using misleading terminology, which during the war was used to primarily designate Koreans and other Asians of non-Japanese descent, suggesting that these individuals may commit massive riots and looting following large-scale disasters^v. However, the issue is not only a mere spat of words: ethnic Koreans (and reportedly those erroneously believed to have been Korean) have, in the past, become victims of post-disaster rumors and racism.

In the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, a rumor circulated that Koreans were setting fires and poisoning wells. Militia and others went around to massacre anywhere between few hundred and 6,000 people believed to be of Korean ethnicity.^{vi} This was a period between two World Wars and people were very suspicious of foreigners. Mass media had barely taken off (the first radio broadcast by the national broadcasting corporation took place in 1925) and newspapers were the only way to spread the news. Cut off from the sort of photos and video footage that we have today, xenophobic rumors seemed to spread more easily in areas that were away from the disaster struck areas – only to circulate back to these areas via the papers, heightening the anxiety and wariness of the survivors. Some examples of such articles based on rumors printed on major newspapers are currently available online (copyright expired) as shown on the right.



Asahi Newspaper Osaka reports that Koreans set fire to an ammunition depot. In Tokyo Sept. 3, 1923

It is to be noted that this was a time of wide-spread panic. The dead and missing from the earthquake reportedly numbered over 100 thousand. A massive firestorm was ignited and wooden houses were decimated, causing the majority of the deaths and resulting in over 1.9 million internally displaced.^{vii} While this information does nothing to justify the assault on ethnic Koreans, it is important to note that measures should be taken to ensure that such rumors do not circulate and that ethnic minorities and immigrants are protected, ensuring that proper media and legislative tools are in place before disasters strike. As with gender, environment, and many other crosscutting issues that are deeply related to disaster management, such considerations should be explicitly made in pre-disaster times.

The good news is that, we have learnt from such past tragedies – and even back then, there were those who were part of law enforcement during the immediate aftermath of the Kanto Earthquake disaster who drove away the vigilante mobs and protected Korean refugees^{viii}. It must also be further noted that the Zainichi Koreans themselves were more anxious that history may repeat itself after the earthquake in Kobe – but no such event transpired, perhaps a testament to the lessons that we have learnt since the Kanto earthquake and the degree to which Korean residents have come to be part of Japanese society with less fear and discrimination.

1.2.2 The Vietnamese and other Foreign Residents in the Hanshin Region: The “New Comers”

Permanent residents in Japan who retain foreign nationality have mostly lived in this country for over 20 years and many of them have attained fluency in Japanese. On the other hand, there are those who arrived after the 1982 adoption

of the Refugee Protocol. Since 1982, the Chinese population has continued to increase and in 2007, they overtook the Koreans as the biggest percentage of registered foreign residents in Japan. There are also other significant groups such as the Brazilians (15% of total registered foreigners in Japan) and the Philipinos (4.7%), and Peruvians (approximately 3%) [Figures from the Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice, Japan as of Dec. 31, 2007].

Many of these immigrant populations have lower level Japanese skills and before 1995, there was very little activity in terms of multilingual support and disaster management information on the part of both government and NGO. In the case of Kobe, one of the most affected groups of foreign minorities was the Vietnamese. At that time, numbering approximately 1531^{ix} in the whole of Hyogo Prefecture, about half lived in Kobe city. 500 of that number lived in Nagata Ward, the worst hit area in the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. Many were first generation refugees who fled the war and their Japanese skills are, to this day, quite basic. Many worked in the “chemical [synthetic] shoes” factories, which was the backbone of the Nagata Ward industry. Most of these factories burnt down along with the homes of the Vietnamese, who did not yet have firmly established communities in Kobe.

In comparison, many westerners and tourists took refuge at the airport or simply moved out. Others took refuge at an international school on Rokko Island, a man-made island off the coast of Kobe that is home to a significant white-collar foreign population. The Indian population sought refuge outside of the city and the Muslim population, although they faced significant hardship due to their dietary requirements – the 1995 earthquake coincided with Ramadan – had support from Muslim communities in and out of Japan.

The Vietnamese, on the other hand, had to move to parks and other evacuation points which they had to share with Japanese locals. At a tent camp in Nagata Ward, it was reported that tempers flared from time to time and there was even a chain link fence erected to separate each other. Lack of trust and misunderstanding also led to fights for relief supplies that were intended for the Vietnamese community.^x A report published as part of a 10 year commemoration by Kobe Newspaper also illustrated an occasion in which Japanese accused the Vietnamese for stealing food from local supermarkets when they started cooking food that they salvaged from their homes. Because the Vietnamese could not speak Japanese, they could not explain how they got the food – the accusation remained and the camp’s atmosphere remained tense.^{xi}

While the ethnic Koreans who also lived in Nagata and also worked in the shoes industry greatly outnumbered the Vietnamese (approximately totaling 10,000 in Nagata alone^{xii}), this number also refers to Zainichi Koreans who are registered aliens – in other words those who had not attained Japanese citizenship at that time, but possibly part of a long line of Zainichi families with adequate Japanese skills. The sheer number of various social organizations and institutions established by the Korean community also provided a big support base for the Koreans. Vietnamese residents were quite lost in comparison and faced communication hardships. It is thus very important to consider the needs of those who do not have sufficient language ability to avoid confusion and confrontation with the local community.

Such considerations require language ability and social awareness on the part of the city planner and social workers. In other words, it necessitates a lot of preparation and such considerations are too complex to deal with in the midst of a disaster. Thus the best way to avoid such a situation is to establish cooperative structures and arrangements from before the disaster. In the case of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, people were simply caught unaware, especially about the magnitude of problems that may arise from racial and cultural tension, which could still hold true to future disasters around the world in mega-cities with highly international and complex social structures with both established and “new comer” minorities.

2 Responses by Community and Government Leading to Participatory Planning and Action

We now shift the focus to examples from other parts of the world and how in the aftermath of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, serious and successful efforts were made to respond to the needs of these minorities by Japanese community members, local government, academia, and also the minorities themselves.

2.1 The Response of Local Public Authorities

The disaster caught all communities unaware, regardless of race or language ability. Though there were reports of ill-willed rumors and post disaster internet chatter that had racial overtones, no major confrontation transpired. Much of this was due to the advance of journalism and the use of the media, but also because of the prompt response by local authorities. Despite the destruction of major communication and lifeline infrastructures, information was relayed to citizens in a variety of methods and central evacuation locations such as school gymnasiums were utilized as information points.

The police also set up a response department to relay information in some of the languages used by minority groups in the disaster area. Also, exceptions were made to allow illegal immigrants and those who had stayed on beyond their visa expiration (overstay) to receive medical care and financial assistance. They were also allowed to apply to go home to their respective country without a fine or criminal persecution for their illegal status, on the condition that they do not come back to Japan for at least five years. Such leniency allowed such foreign workers without legal status to receive proper care and attention without the fear of persecution.

Public institutions had also invested a notable amount of resources to divulge detailed information on affected foreign communities and residents with comprehensive studies and statistical compilations released as early as two months after the disaster struck.

Information was not only collected for residents but also for non-registered illegal residents, foreign exchange students, tourists, and other minorities. Though the number of such studies are still small compared to the total number of literature available on the study of the effects of the Hanshin Earthquake, it is quite notable that public institutions have invested resource for the study of such topics at such an early stage after the disaster. This perhaps reflects the international nature of Kobe city, but also probably the understanding that its lessons and effects would be replicated and magnified in other international cities around Japan, especially in industrial centers and metropolitan Tokyo. We can perhaps make a conjecture here that this in turn also recognition that the foreign population here in Japan makes up a significant percentage of our society and the sustainability of our relationship with them and preparedness to respond to their needs during disasters will greatly influence economic and social recovery.

2.2 The Response of Korean Communities

In the aftermath of the disaster, Korean communities found an opportunity to reach out to the communities around them to promote understanding and cooperation. For example, many Korean schools opened up their doors as evacuation sites and rented out their school buses to help with the evacuation. Although these Korean schools had existed for several decades, most Japanese had no previous interaction with ethnic Koreans, let alone any occasion for them to enter school grounds. In the aftermath of the disaster, suspicion quickly faded and a new atmosphere of cooperation was created as both Japanese and Korean community members started to work with each other towards reconstruction.^{xiii} The Korean communities would also later reach out to help the Vietnamese community, of which many worked alongside them at the chemical shoes factories in Nagata.

2.3 The Buraku Example

Similar events reportedly transpired in Ashiya where members of the Buraku social caste (ethnic Japanese who have been historically designated untouchable and discriminated against) opened up the doors of their newly constructed community centre and shared rations with the evacuees. Social stigma against the Buraku was so strong that synonyms for describing these groups of people included “eta” (less than people) or hinin (non-human) and not only were their discrimination for marriage and employment, but there have been historic practice for city planners to designate Buraku communities in areas most vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters.

Thanks to a shift in national policy and a move to repatriate centuries of discrimination, some Buraku had just been moved from their old wooden buildings to new apartments, and community centers had been erected in a particular Buraku community in Ashiya city. This coincidence allowed Buraku people to largely escape harm from the earthquake. Like responsible citizens, the Buraku opened up their doors and helped with the reconstruction effort, effectively working towards the dispelling of myths, stereotypes, and discrimination.^{xiv}

As such, disasters are terrible tragedies but sometimes it is an opportunity to realize the potential of all communities working together, and the benefits that arise from adequate capacity building and awareness-raising. If all communities work together, the impact of disasters can be reduced and such cooperative frameworks could contribute to social cohesion and the understanding of society that minority groups have equal potential and capacity for working together.

2.4 The Vietnamese Communities

As mentioned before, the Vietnamese communities suffered misunderstanding and some confrontation occurred with Japanese communities. However, a group of responsible Japanese and Vietnamese individuals got together to work towards mutual understanding and prevent confrontation. The situation immediately improved and two groups began to work together towards recovery. The groups also began to produce Vietnamese publications to help disseminate timely information free of charge and assisted Vietnamese people help themselves and work together with the Japanese. Faculty members from foreigners schools and Japanese volunteers also got together to organize joint dinners and group volunteer activities to improve the understanding and cooperation within the communities.^{xv}

Also, further action in the form of community organization and the production of radio and publications in Vietnamese was spurred by support from ethnic Korean communities, who saw in the Vietnamese experience the experience of their elders and first generation Zainichi residents who suffered similar experiences do to lack of language ability and knowledge about local customs and law.

2.5 The Response of the Media and Non-Profit Organizations

The media did not ignore the plight of the foreign population. Many newspapers reported stories of foreign residents who were confused and lost and in many cases provided information in several languages. Local FM stations such as KISS-FM Kobe and FM CoCoLo were one of the first to launch multi-lingual support.

The nationally distributed Asahi newspaper ran a series of stories within a week of the disaster about the problem of lack of information for foreigners. In one example, the problem was introduced on the morning edition of the paper on the 24th of January and in response, an article about multilingual support via telephone and support groups were introduced in the evening edition of the same newspaper. As the newspaper continued to introduce the voice of foreign residents, it also introduced an article on the 26th, which reported existing rumors about foreigners, particularly about

marauding Chinese and Iranian individuals who were supposedly checking out neighborhoods to loot and steal or set fires to businesses. The article effectively reflected uneasiness and suspicion held by disaster struck communities while also helping ease such rumors by cautioning against rash action and stereotyping by reminding readers about the tragedy that transpired against ethnic Korean in the wake of the Kanto earthquake.^{xvi}

The most remarkable community example was that of FM YY, a community radio station in Nagata ward, where a large fire broke out and Korean and Vietnamese populations were most affected. The two “Y’s” stand for Yoboseo (“Hello” [specifically, the way one calls out on the phone] in Korean) and Yeu Men (“I love you” in Vietnamese), names of two unofficial community radio broadcasting schemes that started immediately after the earthquake to provide information and peace of mind to the respective communities in their native language. The two united to form FM YY with the help of the local Catholic church and several Japanese community leaders and became the first legally recognized foreign language community radio station, exactly one year after the earthquake on 17 January, 1996. It also signed an agreement with the Kobe Municipal Government to provide multilingual emergency broadcasts, setting a blueprint for responding to future disasters.

FM YY quickly blossomed into a radio station that broadcasts information in a total of 11 languages with a variety of programming, from those that explain the Japanese constitution to on-air discussions and those that introduce music from various countries. Providing not only information, but also music from various countries provided peace of mind to confused and tired victims, who were not only isolated as disaster victims but cut off from their own culture. This example is all the more remarkable because it put the power of communication in the hands of all stakeholders in the community – community leaders from each ethnic minority group, children, elders, researchers, local government representatives – and established a model for participatory planning and action in multi-ethnic, heterogeneous communities. To this day, they continue to be a leader in such social initiatives and they have helped start up similar initiatives in various other prefectures and also a Japan-wide multilingual disaster information network. They have also produced a downloadable compilation of disaster information sound files in multiple languages, which can be used by the media or local government officials for broadcasting or announcing emergency information.

By promoting participatory planning, the voices of minorities and ethnic minorities can be heard and in turn, appropriate information can be relayed to these groups by local government and also in times of disasters. It is reported that in some cases, foreign residents with little Japanese ability thought that the earthquake was actually a coup d’etat as military helicopters began to descend on Kobe. Such misunderstanding could contribute to a very chaotic situation. Proper information can save lives and help various communities work together in a more orderly fashion during emergencies.

Such initiatives also contribute to mutual understanding in daily life as Japanese community members can also directly hear the voices and understand the culture of the minorities, with whom they usually have no chance to interact with. FM YY and the Takatori Catholic Church has kept their door open for use as a community centre and both Japanese and minorities interact with each other on a daily basis, leading to the humanization of each group in each others’ eyes and the understanding of each others’ issues and opinions.

2.6 Evaluation of the Response by the Central Government

The Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan has produced a compilation of lessons from the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. This document, which sites a wide variety of sources and reports produced since the disaster, has a specific section regarding problems that were observed or reported in regards to foreigners in the disaster area, including

short-term to medium-term issues. Experiences and issues related to foreigners were also found in a section dedicated to socially vulnerable groups including the elderly, disabled, and other minorities. The central government promoted such studies and the categorically compiled the lessons learnt so that practitioners and local government can refer to this source for future disaster management planning. The central government and ministries also allowed for waivers and special permission for foreigners with overstay or illegal entry status to receive equal benefits or to leave the country.^{xvii}

3 Examples from Other Countries

Some experiences from other countries were provided by reports from after the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster and also on the World Disaster Report 2007 published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent.

3.1.1 The Tsunami Disaster: Thailand

First, during the Tsunami, a large number of foreigners lost their lives. Many were tourists, but it also included residents, both legal and illegal/unrecognized. Sweden, a distant European country by any standards, suffered the loss of 543 citizens due to the Tsunami.^{xviii} This was Sweden's worst catastrophe in modern history. As UN/ ISDR mentions as the 11th Action Example in the "Lessons for a Safer Future" report, "Globalisation and the growing inter-connectedness of society through trade, finance, travel and migration have increased the potential for hazard events to affect lives and livelihoods across the globe."

The same section in the UN/ISDR report mentions a well-known example in which the knowledge of a young foreign resident helped save the lives of hundreds of potential Tsunami victims. The ten year old school girl, who was on vacation in Thailand with her family, had learnt about the signs of Tsunami formation and effectively helped warn the people to flee to higher ground. She had gained such knowledge in her school lessons. This was a good example of how disaster management information possessed by foreigners and even tourists can serve as great resource in times of disasters. A good way to share information can lead to cooperation and the saving of lives.

3.1.2 Migrant Workers and Indigenous Peoples in Thailand

The "Tsunami Thailand: One Year After" report published by the government specifically recounts the hardship suffered by migrant workers and indigenous peoples. Many migrant workers and refugees from Myanmar are in the northwestern areas of Thailand. According to the Thai Ministry of Interior Registration Figure for Migrants (July 2004), the areas hit by the Tsunami was home to at least 127,282 migrant workers. This does not include the up to thousands of non-registered alien workers, many who did not even have proper papers from Myanmar due to fear of persecution or lack of legal means to receive such papers in their home country. The report thus approximated that at least 200,000 migrant workers were affected. The report was excellent in identifying not only the physical damage suffered by these communities, but also identified psychological stress and impact on family livelihood due to the loss of family members and dubious legal standing which compromised their post-disaster situation including the receiving aid.

To support migrant workers, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) made clothes and medicines available for distribution amongst migrant communities with help from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other international NGO's. The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) also launched aid programmes. Furthermore, several Thai NGOs and Myanmar community based organizations setup a coalition to help migrant communities through a group called the Tsunami Action Group (TAG). The Ministry of Labour, along with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and (IOM) and local businesses, labour groups and NGOS also launched a process for the re-registration of migrant workers so they could apply work permits.

In a later visit to one of the local Burmese migrant worker support groups, the author of this paper was notified that in this process, there were still pending problems as not enough materials were available in Burmese and many of the refugees still did not have legal status and did not exist legally within Thailand. Local businesses were afraid to report their presence and employment and some local Thai communities held suspicion against the Burmese for possible looting and other potential crimes.

For countries with a large population of migrant workers and others of illegal or unclear legal status, it is important to consider the impact on these people in times of disasters well in advance of a pending emergency to consider their basic humanitarian needs and resources that would become necessary to avert social crises and secondary disasters.

Thailand had experience with coastal-dwelling ethnic groups such as the Moken, Moklen, Urak and Lawoi, who had different languages and cultural practices, which could not immediately be taken into account at the onset of the disasters. Likewise, such issues should be identified before disasters to avoid secondary disasters and impact.

3.2 Indonesia

In Indonesia, particularly in Banda Aceh, different languages are spoken. In response to the widespread panic and damage caused by the 2004 Tsunami, community radio stations were set up to broadcast timely information in both Bahasa Indonesia and the Aceh Language. There are a total of 650 licensed community radio stations in Indonesia and all of these help spread news and disaster management information as well as religious information, helping such information sources become ingrained in daily life and also promoting community participation.

3.3 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka suffered greatly from the Tsunami. As a result, there are many community based initiatives to build community capacity and raise awareness. One of these is the street drama. The Prathana Child Club in Tallala, Matara, a southern district, has gone around the district performing "Tsunami Plays" that reflect the need for cooperation beyond social class and gender and also to listen to disaster management information given by knowledgeable sources including foreign NGOs. Their skit does take a jab at the sometimes one sided and forceful education method of foreign NGOs, which reminds us to take care to learn with the community and not simply enforce values and "knowledge" upon them. Another Colombo based community group has also been employing street dramas for the past few years, from before the tsunami to communicate various lessons such as considerations to keep the community clean and avoid malaria outbreak. The group conducts a community survey and identifies problems the day before their performance and utilize a lot of comedy and music that transcend social caste (such as drum beating, usually done by the lowest caste) and reach out to all ages to deliver timely and useful information. Such community based initiatives understand and incorporate local customs and knowledge very well.

4 Conclusions: Other Needs and Future Considerations

As a last word, these examples affirm once again the need to attend to important social issues that pertains to ethnic minorities and migrants, who have special needs that must be attended to, especially to help smooth out the recovery process and avoid needless misunderstanding, rumors, and confrontation. This is a very important issue that must be examined immediately in all the cities and nations around the world which are increasingly international or those which are home to ethnic minorities. Tourists also must be taken into consideration as their temporary status in the country may make identification and support very difficult tasks.

While UN/ISDR has mentioned some of these issues into the “Lessons” report, it was not even mentioned in any of the passages within the Hyogo Framework of Action and Hyogo Declaration. It is hoped that amendments will be made in the near future to reaffirm the need to attend to this important social issue and encourage nations around the world to attend to it. It would be especially prudent to note that these communities and individuals are just as able a human resource as the majority residents and that their voices, knowledge, and commitment can prove to be very useful in reducing disaster risks and damages, together, as one nation.

Author:

Edward Yutaka Sumoto

Research Assistant for the Gender in CBDM project at the UNCRD Disaster Management Planning Hyogo Office. Has extensive experience in community based development and multicultural societies with prior job experience and study in sustainable development and renewable energy technology in the United States, Paris, New Zealand, and China.

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