

# Disaster and Biodiversity from the Perspective of Gender

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Disasters affect every person and every living thing. Disasters do not discriminate between the sick and the elderly, infants, livestock such as horses and cows, and even wild animals. Care must be taken to make sure that in the relief and reconstruction discrimination and exclusion do not take place. Here we think about the gender perspective and the environment, especially the preservation and restoration of biodiversity.

## **To Begin**

In the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011, people, houses, schools, and fields were washed away in an instant. At the same time, natural grass and forests, plants and animals such as deer and birds, and the ocean's fish and seaweed, all hit together with the earthquake, greatly damaging biodiversity in the area. On top of this radiation from the accident at the Fukushima # 1 nuclear reactor has had more than a little impact on the environment, causing more concern.

On April 11<sup>th</sup> the government formed the Reconstruction Design Council and on May 10<sup>th</sup> the "7 Principles for Recovery" were published. However, the recovery plan focused on economic recovery, and policies covering environmental concerns, such as the conservation and restoration of biodiversity, were not included. The gender perspective was also not included. In this article I want to think about the gender perspective, the environment, and especially the conservation and restoration of biodiversity, during disasters.

## **International Awareness of Environmental Concerns after Disasters**

Chapter 10 of the IUCN publication "Conservation for a New Era" is "Confronting Disaster: Ecosystem Considerations for Post-Disaster Recovery". Its two main points are that 1. It is important to develop new policies with strategies developed from lessons learnt during past recovery efforts and 2. Environmental needs must be a priority in all stages of a typical recovery after a disaster.

Japan is following the guidelines set up by the IUCN, right? What I mainly want to look at is if the policies for reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake have environmental policies based on lessons learned from the reconstruction after the Great Hanshin Earthquake and Niigata-Chuetsu Earthquake, and if environmental needs have been made a priority in all stages of the recovery.

### Convention on Biological Diversity and the Gender Perspective, Women's Participation

Paragraph 13 of the Convention on Biological Diversity states that "It is recognized that women's role in the conservation of biodiversity is indispensable, and that it women's participation is necessary in every phase of planning and executing policies for the conservation of biodiversity." Of course we must place great importance on this during peaceful times, but especially during times of disaster.

It is hard to say this has always been proactively put into effect domestically and internationally since the treaty has gone into effect, but at the COP9 meeting in Germany in May of 2008, the Gender Plan of Action was adopted. The IUCN then put together the "National Biodiversity Strategy" and "Guidelines for the Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan". The stated purpose was to "the goals of promoting equality between the genders and conserving biodiversity reinforce each other. adopt a systematic and consistent approach which realize the course settled on in the action plan instead of simply deciding on important topics at a theoretical level". The fitness of achieving a multiplier effect through policies that incorporate both the gender and biodiversity points of view

was shown and a deeper, more concrete plan was put forth. It is now expected that this will be put into effect during both times of peace and times of disaster.

### **A Recovery Plan Requires Multiple Viewpoints a Comprehensive Debate**

If we are aiming for a true guarantee of safety, an overall design for a recovery plan that includes not only economic recovery, but the conservation of biodiversity, environmental recovery, and the recovery of other fields that affect everyday life such as health, welfare, and education. However, at the Reconstruction Design Council economic recovery was put as a priority before a more comprehensive recovery. In order to respond to various needs the gender perspective is necessary, but out of 15 members of the council there was only one woman. Women's participation in the decision making processes for the disaster plans of various levels of government throughout the country, such as the Reconstruction Design Council, is extremely low.

### **The Perspectives Needed in a Recovery Plan**

Disasters involve every person and every living thing. Factories, fishing boats, and farms are hit by disaster, but so are hospitals and houses, patients and the elderly, students, infants, livestock, and even wild animals. There must not be any discrimination or exclusion in relief and reconstruction plans, they must cover everything.

Women have an especially large role to play because they are often more involved with education, diet, and home life.

Women are sensitive to the environment and aware of the blessings we receive from the forests are rivers, the vegetables we harvest from the fields, and other ecosystem services. We lose diversity of viewpoints when participation by women in the decision making process is limited. Equal participation by both genders in disaster planning is an indispensable necessity.

### **The Expansion of Lobbying for an Out-and-out Gender Perspective**

We called on prominent women and various women's groups and formed an executive committee to lobby the government to thoroughly include the gender perspective in the disaster relief plans. We also held the "Disaster/Restoration and Gender-Equality 6.11 Symposium" on June 11<sup>th</sup>, exactly 3 months after the March 11<sup>th</sup> disaster.

Since then, we have continuously built up our lobbying activities, with the participation of women from all 47 prefectures in Japan, and demanded the government and National Diet "put perspective of gender equality in disaster prevention and restoration measures" and "actively promote women's participation in the decision making".

As a result, the phrases "As we work towards reconstruction, we must build an inclusive society that does not leave anyone out by being mindful of those who are not able to easily voice their views, and we must promote various measures based on this principle" and "it is important that... women who have difficulty voicing their opinions, use this great disaster as an opportunity to proactively participate in local regional development. Above all, we must always maintain the viewpoint of gender equality" were included in the "Towards Reconstruction: Hope beyond the Disaster" document presented by the Reconstruction Design Council to the Prime Minister on June 25<sup>th</sup>. Also, under "Community Development", "when collecting the opinions of residents, due attention needs to be paid to ensure the opinions of women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and foreign residents, among others, are appropriately reflected and that the process considers future generations also" was written.

Whenever the topic is “women, children, elderly, and the disabled”, women are always bundled in with the “vulnerable”. At the June 11<sup>th</sup> Disaster/Restoration and Gender-Equality 6.11 Symposium we argued against the government not writing women in as having an active role in their reconstruction plan and again demanded again that they do so.

The results of our work were than one month later in section 1 of the Reconstruction Agencies document “Basic Guidelines for Reconstruction in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake” under “Basic Concept for Reconstruction”, it states that “from the standpoint of gender equality, women’s participation will be promoted in all reconstruction process. Furthermore, society of harmonious coexistence where all people including children and disabled persons would be realized.”

### **The Environmental Conservation Viewpoint and Policies missing from the Proposal**

The proposal shows an awareness that “the environment is an issue that the whole world shares”, and states that “we must revive nature and restore the links between the forests, oceans, villages and nature based disaster prevention capabilities in order to take advantage of wonderful scenery as a tourism resource and realize an economical society in a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. Then, the wisdom of symbiosis with nature that will take root in the area will have great meaning.” However, nothing is written about any concrete policies. In other words, the proposal lacks the perspectives written below.

♠ The importance of conserving and reviving biodiversity, such as animal life, vegetation and microbes that function in the water cycle, formation of the soil, the energy flow, that the local and the farm society depend on.

♢ To have thoroughgoing environmental assessment in the revival process. (The regulation tends to be relaxed, and unintended harmful side effects may occur.)

♣ The recognition of the importance of and a practical plan for investigating the actual situation of damaged ecosystems.

### **Obligations as the Chair Country of COP10**

Japan is the chair country of COP10 and is supposed to carry out society in harmony with the environment, the long-term goal of COP10. It was also Japan’s job as chair country to, even in time of disaster, to make “the maintenance of ecological services through the assessment, conservation, restoration, and wise use of biodiversity” a priority as adopted by COP10.

During reconstruction great importance should be attached to the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets [Target 1] By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.

[Target 5] By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.

[Target 14] By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.

The targets above cannot be taken out of the reconstruction process, and various countries around the world are watching Japan to see how it responds as the chair country.

### **The Reconstruction Design Council’s Proposal and Conservation of the Natural Environment and Biodiversity**

What the Reconstruction Design Council and every single person should realize is that we are basically dependent on the supply of ecosystem services. The September 2000 UN Millennium

Summit declared that changes in the ecosystem influence the basic commodities, food supply, housing, health, medical care, and the welfare of mankind.

In the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment humans are a part of the ecosystem, and between humans and the ecosystem a dynamic reciprocal relationship exists. We must make an effort to revive nature and reduce the vulnerability caused by the destruction to biodiversity. Effort to revive the nature which provides continuous ecosystem services along with the large scale infrastructure reconstruction is needed. That is the “Life in harmony, into the future” long term goal that Japan called for at COP10.