

## **Common Traits in Earthquake-related Disasters and Difficulties in Reconstruction Activities**

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Through a series of discussions held at the University of Tokyo, certain common traits were found in problems experienced by damage-stricken regions, which were compelled to evacuate because of two completely different events: the tsunami and the explosions at the nuclear power plant in the Fukushima Prefecture. Such traits became particularly eminent in the process of mapping schemes for the future reconstruction efforts debated in each region.

Here two issues are briefly discussed. One concerns the phenomena that are physically occurring in these regions. Local government heads and administrative functionaries are working on creating reconstruction schemes in regions that have lost civic functions and public facilities because of the tsunami and are being forced to evacuate because of radioactive contamination. However, the people supposed to undertake and be involved in these reconstruction activities cannot be found in both regions because they were forced to evacuate to other regions and are unable to return or because they have already started a new life and are resuming their business elsewhere. In addition, there are people who assume that they have to discard their old lifestyles and jobs that have a strong root in the locality and history. As differences have become apparent between the administration and local inhabitants, it seems difficult to find and map out a clear path to reconstruction.

The other issue is related to this difference existing between the administration and inhabitants. For instance, in the Iitate village in Fukushima Prefecture, villagers evacuated because of a high level of

radioactive contamination. During internal meetings at the village office that focused on formulating the reconstruction scheme, mainly junior officials and experts developed arguments reflecting criticism of governmental policies made by local inhabitants. However, what was emphasized at public meetings (held at about 20 venues between October and December) was to define decontamination activities as a prioritized national policy, and to work on them as main priorities, so that the evacuees could return to the village at an early date. They explained that compensations and relocations for the purpose of reconstructing lifestyles and business — an idea proposed by local residents on almost every occasion — were dismissed because the national government would not allow them. As far as we could tell based on the interviews we have done, although, at the aforementioned internal meetings, there were arguments that may be labeled as “sociologicalization of engineering (including decontamination activities) and policy making” or “humanistic perspectives,” on engineering, “policy making,” or “thinking on humanistic perspectives,” they all got overwritten by the words “prioritized national policies.”

Considering such a state of affairs, it is vital to decipher and understand the complex interaction of three different issues — policy making for reconstructing damaged regions, civil engineering as a tool, and inherited lifestyles in those areas — from perspectives inside and outside damaged areas.

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