



Title	Tsunami Disaster and Multi-layered Assistance Networks in Japan: The Iwate Sanriku Area Case
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Citation	DISASTER, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIETY: Learning from the 2011 Earthquake in Japan = 災害・基盤・社会 東日本大震災から考える(3): 27-33
Issue Date	2012-12
Type	Journal Article
Text Version	publisher
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10086/25362
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Tsunami Disaster and Multi-layered Assistance Networks in Japan: The Iwate Sanriku Area Case

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DISASTER RELIEF AND MULTI-LAYERED ASSISTANCE NETWORKS

This study describes the formation of broad scale and multi-layered assistance networks in the Sanriku tsunami stricken area, Iwate prefecture, after the March 2011 earthquake.

Since the 1970s, the northeast Japan industrial structure and distributive system to mitigate collective risk has changed greatly. The inland northeast expressway and Shinkansen (bullet train) were constructed, along which new types of industrial centers, such as Kitakami, have risen with national industrial policy support. In contrast, traditional industrial cities such as Kamaishi along the Pacific coast have markedly declined, and northeast region population has decreased simultaneously with an over-concentration of economic activity in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

Responding to this situation, the central government has cut back ineffective public enterprises that functioned as a distributive system rather than a weak welfare state during post-war Japan and has strongly supported a merger policy among municipal governments beginning in the 1990s. Together, these regional policies weakened municipal areas' self-sufficiency and subsumed them into the framework of larger-scale governance systems and global market mechanisms.

We address this situation to redefine "the local" in such contexts. Locally based activism must bridge

and mobilize in a multi-scaled manner, from local to global, agents and service providing systems to reconstruct bases for people's subsistence. In this sense, the disaster stricken area of the Great East Japan Earthquake can be viewed as the epitome of the "articulation" (Leitner, Peck, & Shepperd 2007) processes of the post-neoliberal situation.

This study addresses the following questions. How did people connect multi-layered networks of assistance and embed them into the tsunami stricken local area? To what degree will these networks be sustainable and exhibit the potential to enhance the democratic governance in reconstruction politics?

OUTLINE OF THE TSUNAMI DISASTER THE IN IWATE SANRIKU AREA

On March 11, 2011 at 14:46 hours, an M9 earthquake struck off the coast of northeast Japan, causing a large scale tsunami, severely damaging the Pacific coast region.

The Iwate Sanriku coast was one of most seriously damaged areas. According to National Police Agency, a total of 15,873 people died, 2,744 were missing, and 6,114 were injured (National Police Agency, 2012)¹.

The Iwate Sanriku Area's 12 cities, towns, and villages reported 4,671 dead, 1,188 missing, and 71 injured (Iwate Prefectural Police, 2012)². Thus, the Iwate Sanriku Area suffered roughly a third of the total dead and 40% of the total missing.

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The Sanriku coast's geography features rias (sawtooth coastline), composed of numerous cliffs and small bays. Many fishing villages and more urbanized areas on mid-sized bays with harbor facilities were thoroughly destroyed. Because many areas of level ground are small and villages or urbanized areas occupy narrow valleys, tsunami waves became very high and reached interior bay regions through the rivers.

The Japan Meteorological Agency reported tsunami wave height of 8.6 m in Kuji, 7.3 m in Miyako, 9.3 m in Kamaishi, and 11.8 m in Ofunato in the Iwate Sanriku area (2011)³, reaching 3rd or 4th floor of buildings.

ORGANIZING ASSISTANCE NETWORKS

The Cabinet and the Japan Civil Network (JCN)

One feature of the response to this disaster was the emergence of broad scale and organized assistance networks.

“Broad scale” means networks formed beyond the local scale, comprising municipal, prefectural, and national to global scales. “Organized” means networks composed not only of NPOs/NGOs but also governmental/quasi-governmental organizations.

The Cabinet responded quickly to mobilize civil society organizations (CSOs). The Cabinet appointed Kiyomi Tsujimoto, a representative, as a Special Advisor to the Prime Minister to promote voluntary disaster relief activities on March 13, and Makoto Yuasa as the Head of the Cabinet Secretariat's Volunteer Coordination Office on March 16⁴.

Tsujimoto is a founder of the famous NGO “Peace Boat” established in 1983 to travel to nations the Japanese military had invaded and learn how to construct world peace directly from war victims'

voices. The Peace Boat operation had broadened, and it engaged in emergency relief after the great Kobe earthquake in 1995, during which she played an important role⁵.

Tsujimoto first became a representative for the Social Democratic Party in 1996 and played an important role in establishing the 1998 NPO Act. She switched her alliance to the Democratic Party of Japan on September 10, 2011 (press release date)⁶.

Yuasa is a member of the Independent Life Support Center “Moyai (もやい)” (a ship mooring rope), an important NPO engaged in the Tokyo anti-poverty movement beginning in the late 1990s. He became famous for being the “village mayor” in the “Haken-Mura (派遣村)” (Temps' Village) created in Hibiya Park in Tokyo as an interim shelter for temporary office workers dismissed suddenly after the Lehman Brothers Shock in 2008 (Independent Life Support Center Moyai, 2012)⁷.

The NPO/NGO sector also formed broad scale networks. For example, the Japan Civil Network for Disaster Relief in East Japan (JCN) was founded on March 30, 2011, and has grown to comprise 780 groups throughout Japan (November 17, 2012). Its office is in Tokyo, and its primary activities support CSOs engaged in disaster relief and coordinate needs among CSOs and the central government. Certain government bureaucrats participate in every meeting and positively support CSO activities⁸.

Historical Background: Institutionalization of Volunteerism

Why did assistance networks form so quickly and widely? One factor is the maturation of the disaster relief volunteer system since the late 1990s.

After the 1995 Kobe earthquake, many people from all regions of Japan went to Kobe for relief activities, and some volunteer groups became permanent organizations after Kobe's reconstruction. The 1998

NPO Act promoted this trend (Yamashita & Suga, 2002; Nishiyama, 2005).

The Central Community Chest of Japan initiated investigative meetings on the functions and issues of volunteer centers after the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu earthquake, with the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), Japan National Council of Social Welfare, and NPOs. In 2007, this informal group became a national scale assistance network (Joint Committee for Coordinating and Supporting Voluntary Disaster Relief Activities) to collect donations from the Community Chest or companies through Keidanren and to organize and manage volunteer centers in disaster stricken areas⁹. Japan's National Council of Social Welfare continued to train staff as volunteer coordinators in local-level Councils of Social Welfare.

The Cabinet Office created the Investigative Commission for Voluntary Disaster Prevention Activities in 2005, and a close relationship developed among governmental agencies and NPOs/NGOs engaged in disaster relief activities (Suga, Yamashita, & Atsumi ed., 2008)¹⁰.

Through such national policies and increased networking, assistance groups have grown widely in the Japanese society, and the volunteer system became institutionalized in both central and local governments.

A LOCAL NETWORK: OFUNATO

Ofunato Action Network

Ofunato was one of the most seriously damaged areas in Iwate Prefecture on the Sanriku Coast. Immediately after the earthquake and tsunami, many NPO/NGOs were engaged in relief activities in Iwate Prefecture (Yamamoto 2012). Disaster victims who lost their houses were originally scattered among more than 60 shelters. On March 25, 2011, construction of

temporary housing began, and on April 25, those displaced began moving from emergency shelters into temporary housing built in 37 sites around Ofunato¹¹. During the phase of emergency relief, each separate group could sufficiently assist victims. The phase of rebuilding the basis of residents' ordinary life, however, presented more complex problems necessitating shared information and coordination among diverse assistance groups.

NPOs/NGOs engaged in relief activities in Ofunato area established the Ofunato Action Network on June 30, 2011, to respond to the needs of such new stage of recovery. Ofunato municipal government staff members also participated in this network's meetings. It became an important place for both governmental organizations and NPOs/NGOs to mutually exchange information and share roles in assistance activities¹². In this sense, the Ofunato Action Network initiated not only the epoch of horizontal networking among NPOs/NGOs but also of "governance" connecting municipal administrative organizations with the NPO/NGO sector.

One key person in this network was Terukazu Ozeki, a staff member of the Independent Life Support Center Moyai and the Foundation for Cooperative Community Creation. The NPO Moyai is the same group as the anti-poverty movement that Yuasa Makoto, Head of the Cabinet Secretariat's Volunteer Coordination Office, belongs to. The Foundation for Cooperative Community Creation was another assistance group established on April 15, 2011, by the National Homeless Support Network, Green Co-op, and the Seikatsu Club Consumers Cooperative (Yamamoto, 2012)¹³. Its chief director, Tomoshi Okuda is a clergyman of the Higashiyahata church in Kitakyusyu and a key person in national social inclusion policies as a member of the Social Security Council of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Yamazaki, Okuda, Inazuki, Fujimura, & Morimatsu,

2006)¹⁴.

First, Ozeki went to Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture, the largest city in the northeast region, and assisted victims with One Family Sendai¹⁵, a sister group of Moyai.

Next he contacted Tono Magokoro Net established on March 27, 2011, in Tono, a city roughly 40km inside the stricken Sanriku area and halfway between the coast and several cities along the Tohoku expressway or Shinkansen. It takes approximately an hour to drive into Sanriku's most heavily damaged towns and cities such as Otsuchi, Kamaishi, Ofunato, and Rikuzentakata. Tono Magokoro Net was founded as a network among local and outside groups engaged in assistance activities (59 groups as of December 19, 2011) and played an important role in linking the stricken area's needs with diverse assistance networks.¹⁶ Because of its location, Tono has become a major gathering spot for various assistance groups (Yamamoto, 2012).

Ozeki established his base camp in Tono and has continued to assist Ofunato. The Tono connection provides indispensable infrastructure for managing his activities and those of local networks among the NPO/NGO and municipal sectors in Ofunato.

Career and Life History of Ozeki, a Key Person

Ozeki first participated in disaster relief activities for the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Then, he became deeply engaged in the 2004 Chuetsu (central Niigata Prefecture) earthquake, and now plays a major role in the current tsunami disaster relief project.

After the 2008 financial crisis, he also participated in the anti-poverty movement¹⁷.

His personal history reveals a developing network and social skills in volunteer activities and social inclusion movement against disruptive shocks during Japan's transition to a post-industrial society.

One factor in the speed and broad scale with which organized networks formed is that, through the disruptive events during and after the 1990s, many talented individuals in the Japanese society have developed such necessary social skills.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND INTERVENTION POLITICS THROUGH INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS

Roles of Intermediary Groups

Several national scale intermediary groups participated in the Ofunato Action Network. Such groups have many connections with assistance groups in the NGO/NGO sector, corporations, and governmental organizations. They collected a high volume of donations and funded assistance activities in stricken areas.

For example, the Japan Platform is an NPO established to collect funds from corporations and government agencies and distribute them primarily to international NGOs. From March 11–31, 2012, it collected donations totaling 6,872,507,064 yen and distributed roughly 83% of it to 57 activities of member groups and 70 activities of others (Japan Platform, 2012)¹⁸. It played a noteworthy role in sustaining emergency assistance.

Participation in and communication with local-level networks in stricken areas is necessary for effectively matching donations with activities. Such national scale intermediary NPOs also coordinated efforts among governmental agencies and the stricken area's needs. The central government has provided many options for assistance and reconstruction, and local assistance networks can function as a place where intermediary NPOs provide information about policy options to local assistance groups.

In this manner, assistance provides a tactical realm

for intervention politics to provide post-disaster governance across NPOs/NGOs and government agencies.

Continuity and Discontinuity

From different perspectives, both continuity and discontinuity exist between the Kobe and the Great East Japan Earthquakes.

Historically, the Kobe disaster became one starting point of the institutionalization of volunteerism and the methods of the intermediaries system of network governance, which has become the “new public” policy of the government of the Democratic Party of Japan after the 2009 regime change.

From this perspective, networks formed in the Great East Japan Earthquake can be viewed as the maturation of volunteerism growing since the Kobe earthquake.

However, the March 2011 disaster occurred during a financial crisis and caused a disruptive shock to the privatized system of local governance. The privatization of social services and municipality mergers beginning in the 1990s decreased administrative power to provide resources that disaster victims and assistance groups urgently needed.

The 2011 disaster differed from Kobe earthquake in that the emergence of the anti-poverty movement beginning in the 2000s and the Democratic Party government’s subsequent social policy reorganization supported assistance activities and network formation.

CONCLUSION: FROM NETWORK TO GOVERNANCE

In the Great East Japan Earthquake, beyond the local level, broad scale and multi-layered networks formed across both the disaster stricken area and the society as a whole.

From the example of Iwate Sanriku, especially Ofunato, we can identify the factors of network formation from the perspectives of associating two types of assistance activity linkage systems.

On one hand, the linkage exists mainly in Tokyo, between the government sector and volunteerism that matured and became institutionalized through epochal disasters beginning in the 1990s, such as the 1995 Kobe earthquake and the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu earthquake.

Intermediating practices to distribute public funds by national scale NPOs played a leading role in disseminating governmental policy options in disaster stricken regions. It was a characteristic point in the 2011 disaster that many international NGOs have also participated in and sustained such activities.

On the other hand, a grassroots linkage has grown, largely in disaster stricken areas among local and wider multi-scale activities. In Ofunato, construction of temporary housing was such a movement to establish an NPO/NGO network, the Ofunato Action Network, in June 2011. It consists of NPOs/NGOs and several agencies of the Ofunato municipal government. Thus, it seems to have the potential to create governance in a context different from that of the institutionalization of volunteerism after the Kobe earthquake.

Beginning in the 1990s, the central government’s forced merger policy and involvement in the global economy eroded municipal government power, and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami shocked the resultant condition of local society. From the last period of the Liberal Democratic Party regime ended, the central government attempted to partly reorganize social policies to respond to the negative effects of global economism, and some projects became governmental policies after the 2009 regime change to the Democratic Party of Japan. In this background, the anti-poverty movement and support activities for

social inclusion have grown to a national scale as a different social sector from NPO-based volunteerism, and it became important for assistance to not only mobilize emergency relief activities but also support longer-term rebuilding of victims' daily lives and communities on the local scale.

Networks in Ofunato have exhibited mixed features of volunteerism activated beginning in the 1990s and such reorganized social sector as the anti-poverty movement and independent support activities for marginalized persons formed during the 2000s.

Another finding of this case study illustrates the issue of the scale of connected assistance activities. Tono Magokoro Net in Tono city provided an indispensable social infrastructure for assistance activities in the tsunami stricken Sanriku area. Prefectural sized networks served as the primary intermediating scale among disaster stricken areas and national scale resource mobilization systems.

Thus, we must ask whether such practices as networking activities or vertical governance relationships for recovery from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami will provide a new model of democratic governance from local side? We must also explore how to open governance to various types of activities and utilize their potential capabilities in a more fluidly changing post-disaster society. This research suggests these concerns for further study.

Notes

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- 3 Japan Meteorological Agency HP, retrieved 20 November 2012 (<http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/press/1104/05a/tsunami20110405.pdf>) (= 気象庁 HP,

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17 Interview with Terukazu Ozeki 5 November, 2011.

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