

DISASTER REDUCTION FORUM 2004:

---TRANSFER LIVE LESSONS OF CATASTROPHIC DISASTERS---

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Chairman's Summary

With support from members of the DRA and Forum participants

The Disaster Reduction Alliance (DRA), consisting of 12 organizations active internationally on disaster reduction issues and situated in HAT Kobe (New Eastern City Center), together with the Hyogo Prefectural Government held the Disaster Reduction Forum 2004, with the theme of "Transfer Live Lessons of Catastrophic Disasters," on February 8 at the International Conference Center in Kobe with an audience of approximately 250. The participants of the forum and the DRA member organizations jointly summarized the result of this forum as follows.

1. Why "Transfer Live Lessons"?

In the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, the people in the affected areas went through a tremendous amount of very strong feelings of anger, fear, sadness, pain, and guilt -- not to mention the acute final suffering of those who died, which cannot be known even to the survivors. In the process of response, relief, recovery and reconstruction the people had many deep regrets about the lack of preparedness, lack of mitigation, and wrong choices that they had to make in unclear situations. And yet, the people were unexpectedly introduced to the human warmth of their communal living, the goodness in people, and a renewed appreciation for the value of life.

Since the 1995 Earthquake significant improvements in many areas have been made to disaster reduction systems in Japan, from the community level to the top policy level. It is indeed their strong feelings that made people feel greatly motivated and highly responsible for taking concrete steps forward. The passion was shared even by policy makers in the capital. The disaster had a major impact in stimulating the growth of the volunteer movement and the establishment of the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector throughout Japan.

In implementing risk management and disaster reduction policies and activities, it is extremely important and effective to maintain such strong feelings. If live experiences and lessons of severe disasters are appropriately demonstrated and transferred, these lessons can be a very effective way

by which individuals, communities, and other stakeholders can be personally motivated to take concrete actions in implementing disaster prevention and reduction policies. These passionate feelings can actively fuel disaster reduction.

On the other hand, such feelings tend to fade rapidly. It is natural that many ordinary citizens wish to forget their harsh experiences and feelings so their lives can return to normal. Thus, special efforts are needed to preserve the strong feelings after mega-size disasters to continue disaster reduction progress, individually as well as collectively. It is in this context that the importance and effectiveness of “Transfer Live Lessons” was discussed in this Forum.

2. Key Points on How to Effectively “Transfer Live Lessons”

The following key points were taken from Forum case studies, discussions, and comments based on experiences in Japan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Italy, and on a broad international level.

- People have to be motivated to hear the message from those who have disaster experience and knowledge. Transfer of live lessons must capture the feelings of those experiences so that those who hear will be motivated to act.
- Monuments and commemorative places can be useful but are insufficient in themselves. The message must also be actively transferred and disseminated. One of the least costly ways is to reach school children by finding ways to draw them in through cartoons, videos, music, pictures, photos and stories. In this way they may actively influence family members and the community.
- Society has a responsibility for developing a culture of safety, especially within governments, institutions, and communities. Such a culture of safety within society will motivate people to avoid human error and negligence and promote progressive improvement of the safety level of buildings. For example, unsafe housing should be progressively replaced or strengthened as soon as possible because no matter how well prepared people might be, if their house falls down they cannot survive. The culture of safety should also include preparedness measures such as broad-based public education, household non-structural safety measures, and insurance.
- It is essential to build the capacity of individuals and organizations within local communities to exercise collective responsibility by working together, from the individual up to the decision-maker, to save lives, reduce injuries, and minimize losses. Government must initiate, promote, and support such community activities.
- It is important to examine disasters of the past to understand more clearly the lessons that are still relevant today so that knowledge can be transferred accurately to effectively meet current

needs.

- The affected areas should be responsible to tell their own unique stories. The greatest danger is for such lessons to be forgotten and lost to future generations at risk. The transfer of these lessons should be considered as vital for future disaster mitigation and prevention which is one of the most important elements in managing risk.
- The reality of disasters is in each individual life lost, not in the statistics.
- Establishing a system for identifying, capturing, transferring and using live lessons from catastrophic disasters is important to promote within communities, regions, and nations, as well as on an international level, using appropriate methodologies and technologies.
- There is a universal risk perception gap where those at risk have little concern about disasters because they are not part of their experience and they believe it cannot happen soon to them. In reaching them with live lessons, it is important to use communications which emphasize more commonly understood ideas such as “safety” and “security” through accessible media such as films, cartoons, cultural events, and multi-media informational Web sites.
- Thinking ahead is greatly needed as to how to take care of highly vulnerable social groups such as the elderly, disabled, children, ethnic minorities, and the poor. Plans should be developed for what their needs might be after a disaster and networks should be created to coordinate self-help, mutual help, and public help activities.
- In Japan various kinds of initiatives for transferring live lessons have been conducted by many citizens of Kobe and neighboring communities. One such initiative is the establishment of the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI) by the Hyogo Prefectural Government. An audio-visual presentation of what really happened in the 1995 Earthquake is provided as well as photos, video clips, remains of debris, writings and memorabilia of individuals are displayed. Story-tellers are invited to speak and to share their experiences directly and personally with visitors.
- The DRI facility is of a commemorative nature but also functions as a very effective means to help disaster victims remember and non-victims share the very strong feelings at the onset of the 1995 Earthquake so that people are motivated to make the living environment and society more disaster-resilient for a better future.

3. Recommendations to the International Community

Until now there has been no comprehensive disaster reduction policy from the standpoint of local communities and individuals. However, the 1995 Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake has taught us the importance of the victims' perspective. By "transferring live lessons of catastrophic disasters" we will help to ensure that future victim numbers are minimized. Through such transfer activities we hope that many people around the world will be spared the tragedy of catastrophic disasters.

To this end:

1. Governments and the people of each disaster stricken area should begin to organize in their respective ways to "transfer live lessons of catastrophic disasters," in particular to their citizens and communities. Through such activities, the same level of tragedy may be prevented.
2. There are many ways and many methods for transferring these lessons such as museum facilities, story-tellings in systematic ways, films, cartoons, music, cultural events and many other educational activities. Major benefits can be gained without incurring a great deal of cost. Each government and supporting organization should recognize the importance of transferring live lessons and start supporting such activities.
3. The result of today's discussion should be made available to the international community, in particular to the UN Secretariat of ISDR for further consideration. It is hoped that today's results will be favorably reflected in the forthcoming discussions concerning disaster prevention to be held in each country and within the international community during the process of preparing for the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction 2005 to be held in Kobe, Hyogo.
4. In particular, the possibility should be explored of organizing a specific half-day World Conference session along the theme of this paper, linking it to a tour of DRI, and extending invitations to international participants to transfer their live lessons of catastrophic disasters, in cooperation with the Disaster Reduction Alliance.

Forum Participants and DRA Member Organizations:

<Forum Participants>

- Mr. Toshizo IDO, Governor of Hyogo Prefecture
- Mr. John Harding, ISDR
- Mr. Masakiyo Murai, Steering Committee for the Citizens towards Overseas Disaster Emergency (CODE)
- Mr. Kanichi Kanegae, Honorary Director, Mt. Unzen Disaster Memorial Hall
- Mr. Muhammad Saidur Rahman, Director, Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre
- Dr. Ahmet Mete Isikara, Professor, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
- Dr. Alessandro Pasuto, Managing Director of Geo-Risk joint Lab, Italy-Japan Joint Laboratory on Hydrogeological Risks in Italy
- Ms. Keiko Hirano (Narrator, Catalyst, Broadcaster)
- Mr. Kohichi Sumida, NHK Broadcaster
- Dr. Ian Davis, Professor, Cranfield University, UK
- Dr. Yoshiaki Kawata, Chairman, DRA
- Mr. Shuhei Kazusa, Director for Earthquake and Volcano Management, Cabinet Office
- Ms. Hiroko Kuroda, President, Shimin-Kikin KOBE
- Dr. Yoshiteru Murosaki, Senior Researcher, DRI

<Disaster Reduction Alliance (DRA)>

Member organizations

- ? Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN)
- ? Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC)
- ? International EMECS Center (EMECS)
- ? Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Hyogo International Center
- ? United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Kobe
- ? United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)
- ? Earthquake Disaster Mitigation Research Center (EDM)
- ? World Health Organization (WHO) Centre for Health Development
- ? Institute of Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) Kansai Research Center
- ? Japanese Red Cross Society Hyogo Prefectural Chapter
- ? Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI)
- ? Hyogo Emergency Medical Center

Observers

Cabinet Office of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hyogo Prefecture,
Hyogo International Association, Hyogo College of Nursing Art and Science