

From earthquakes and TSUNAMI to volcanic eruptions and typhoons, natural disasters have been a regular occurrence throughout Japan's long history. This experience of disaster has molded our society and continually taught us fresh lessons about how to respond. Today, in the spirit of *kaizen* – our word for “continuous improvement” – we continue to learn. And in the spirit of global cooperation we are eager to share what we have learned.

From our most recent tragedy, the disaster of 3/11, 2011 known in Japan as “The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami,” we have gained important new insights into the relationship between gender equality and disaster risk reduction.

In 2013, Japan's government adopted “*Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective*,” as a blueprint for all national and local authorities involved in disaster preparedness, response and reconstruction.

This document offers an overview of the new guidelines, and the thinking behind them, in hopes that this can be of use to others around the world facing

similar challenges.

The starting point is to recognize that as disaster affects men and women in different ways, it is critical to have the concerns and voices of both genders reflected in disaster planning, response and reconstruction. Further, it is recognized that to build a society with robust disaster resilience, gender equality must be a fundamental value in good times or bad. Toward that end, women must share leadership roles in all aspects of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) process.

We are pleased to share these guidelines with the global community in the year leading up to at the 3rd U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015. At the conference, the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) will be revised to create the framework for its successor, “HFA-2.” In these discussions, gender will be one of the key items on the DRR agenda. By sharing these guidelines with the global community prior to the conference, Japan hopes to stimulate the adoption of gender perspectives in all facets of disaster-related planning.



Guidelines for disaster planning, response and reconstruction from a gender-equal perspective

These guidelines drawn up by the government of Japan represent knowledge gained from the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami and prior large-scale disasters. We hope they can serve as a reference for other countries as they evolve their own DRR policies.

Basic Concepts

1. Promoting gender equality during normal times

Building a strong base for disaster planning, response and reconstruction is essential. In times of disaster, existing social issues become even more acute. Efforts must be made to evolve society so as to involve both sexes in the planning process for DRR.

2. Assigning women to leadership roles

In the wake of disaster, women typically play key roles in helping communities and individuals cope with the effects. Commensurate with the importance of these roles, women must be promoted to positions where they can exercise leadership and be involved in meaningful decisions.

3. Realizing how men and women are affected differently by disasters

It is important to understand the differences in the way men and women are affected by disasters and consider these issues when creating measures for dealing with seniors, disabled people, expectant mothers, newborns and other vulnerable groups. The participation of women is also important in the operation of evacuation facilities, for example in providing assistance to disaster victims and other activities.

4. Providing a secure environment for disaster victims

Evacuees must have access to safe, secure facilities. These shelters must offer adequate privacy and maintain security measures to protect women and children from violence.

5. Promoting gender equality through close cooperation among various organizations

In time of disaster, close cooperation between all organizations – in both the public and private sectors – is crucial. To ensure that, it is important to build links of communication and trust in normal times. Local

gender-related authorities and Gender Equality Centers* should be deeply involved with local disaster preparedness authorities in various aspects of the DRR process.

*Japan's 350 Gender Equality Centers, which are organized by local authorities, provide counseling, training programs and data related to gender equality issues and other services. They are also venues for voluntary activities by women's groups.



In an NPO in Iwate, women played key roles in the disaster planning and relief.

Necessary Initiatives for Disaster Preparation and Response

The Preparation Stage

In Japan's local communities, women's limited participation in meaningful decision-making has led to a wide variety of problems in times of disaster. To remedy this, it is important to adopt disaster-preparedness measures with a gender-equal perspective.

1. An increased number of women should be appointed to local public bodies responsible for disaster preparedness, and to committees that formulate local disaster plans.
2. Fire- and disaster-preparedness groups operated by local residents should foster a gender-equal environment and include more women in leadership positions.
3. When formulating plans, it may be necessary to hold women-only meetings in order to gain women's perspectives on issues that might be difficult to discuss in front of men.
4. When planning the storage of provisions, the special needs of women and families with children must be considered so as to include female sanitary supplies, items for infants and other goods to meet specific needs.
5. Disaster preparedness drills should cover a wider variety of scenarios, such as different times or days of the week. Drills should include participation by all ages and genders.
6. A universal design should be implemented to identify facilities meant to serve as evacuation centers in time of disaster.