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Japan – Disasters and Volunteers

Submitted by: Peace Winds



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Forum (21-23 September 2011)

Japan –Disasters and Volunteers
presented by Dr. Charles Aanenson



Volunteers in Japan -- recent natural disasters

- **Great Hanshin – January 17 1995**

- Volunteers---walked into the city, over the hill
- NGO/NPO community
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- Private sector


Volunteers numbered 1.5 million from January –January 1996.

--The Kobe earthquake is usually considered the first real start to “popular volunteering” in Japan.

-- This was the time when it was clear that local governments, for instance, were not delivering, and ordinary Japanese started moving in with what was needed.


-- NPO's factored in open volunteering as a resource that they could count on and develop.

March 19, 1998, the "Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities" (hereafter called "NPO Law") was established in Japan. Voluntary organizations have had a big influence on the legislation process.

 **Volunteers in Japan -- recent natural disasters**

- **Niigata— July 17 2007**
 - Student volunteers (summer time)
 - NGO/NPOs,
- --Prefecture set up Disaster Volunteer Center
- Now had **mass communications....**

- **Tohoku Earthquake/Tsunami March 11, 2011**
 - **Who:** Family/friends, military, Gov't, NGOs, students, employees (salary men), companies, foreign/international NGOs, and outside donors.
- --**Information/Communications:** Mass media, Internet, social media, Mixi, twitter, cell phones, charity events, campaigns, billboards.

 **Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake**

Initially volunteers restricted because of the inability to accept them at the devastated areas—chaos and no one to coordinate. Demands were great and also supplies...but no capacity to accept volunteers.

Coordination:
On March 22, 2011, Makoto Yuasa, Chief of The Cabinet Secretariat's Volunteers Coordination Office urged the people of Japan to work with the Japan National Council of Social Welfare. This organization collected information from local disaster volunteer centers, issued an **appeal stating that the disaster area is not yet ready to receive individual volunteers from the general public.**

He stated that **only** non-governmental/non-profit volunteer organizations active in the disaster area that are "self-sustaining" in that they have their own local partners and organize their food and accommodation without imposing extra burdens on the disaster area ("professional" disaster responders), as well as locals from the particular city or prefecture.

This did not mean that there was no contribution one could make as an individual. One could (1) **make monetary donations**, or (2) **donate supplies to your own prefectural government**; one could also (3) **support new arrivals in your locality**, as it is expected that an increasing number of victims currently living in shelters in the non-affected areas will move into public housing. Further, the reconstruction process is expected to take many years: (4) Even after the recovery of basic infrastructure, individual victims may have various needs that require your **long-term support.**




Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

- **Volunteers, businesses and NGOs** began partnering in Tokyo or at Headquarters. Individual volunteers came to NGO headquarters to man the telephones, to work the internet. Some volunteers wanted to go to the field but waited until access was more open.
- One example: The NPO, *Civic Force*, began working with 20 businesses--from trucking companies to food chains. Mars, IKEA, AON were just a few companies that were donating goods within the first few weeks of the disasters to be brought to the disaster sites. Within the first two months, *Civic Force* and *Peace Winds Japan* had delivered 60 tons of supplies; by August, 160 tons of supplies.
- Transport very difficult, long hours, but...numerous NGOs made the journey especially in the Sendai area; fewer to the northeast villages/cities in Iwate and Miyagi.



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

- The *Asahi Shinbun* reported: While massive institutions such as the central government and Red Cross have moved at a glacial pace demonstrating “failures of imagination” in their drives to follow established protocol, **the most imaginative and reflective response has come from agile volunteer activities in the private and nonprofit sectors.**
- Examples: Within weeks of the earthquake, commercial helicopter pilots across Japan recognized that government-ordered deliveries of food, water, medicines, and supplies would be delayed to extensive damage to roads and bridges. The private ***Helicopter Conference of Japan (HCJ)*** collected donations to cover its fuel costs and began using helicopters based in Miyagi to distribute supplies to shelters in the area. They delivered much-needed food and water to individuals who had waited for more than a month for regular supplies. The pilots also identified other communities with severe water shortages. By June, the *HCJ* had completed over 300 missions, delivering more than 40 tons of supplies.

 **Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake**

- Another imaginative volunteer: *Rabbi Binyamin Edery* of Tokyo quickly recognized that survivors waiting in cold, overcrowded temporary shelter after the disaster needed a way to reconnect to the rhythms of daily life. Rather than waiting for an invitation, Edery comered a local “yakiimo” (baked sweet potato) truck and asked the driver to head from Tokyo to shelters in Sendai. After a 12-hour drive, the driver parked his truck and activated the loudspeakers announcing his product. Hundred of people lined up to consume more than 900 pounds of fee sweet. Many cried as they received their portions, explaining that they finally felt some normalcy again. As the weather changed, Edery returned, this time with thousands of ice cream container for children and hundreds of pounds of clothing for all.
- By April 5, 2011 the **Japan National Council of Social Welfare** had set up Disaster Volunteer Centers in 63 towns in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefecture to match volunteers with needs in affected areas.

 **Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake**

- By late April volunteers increased as transportation was accessible.
- **Volunteer Surge ---Golden Week (end of April-beginning of May)**
Example: During Golden Week, *All Hands’ Project Tohoku* and *Habitat for Humanity*, had 117 volunteers from 11 economies in an all-out surge to muck and gut more homes, clean up more businesses, and rehabilitate more public spaces in Ofunato (Iwate Prefecture.)
- Some companies encouraged their employees to volunteer. Some companies let them go during the work days, but basically people went to Tohoku over the weekend. Students far outnumber the company salary men.
- Again transportation, food, fuel, water, accommodation and information were not available at the initial stages, discouraging volunteers going to the field. By May, there were “volunteer buses” that transported volunteers for a day trip from Tokyo.
- **Data at the end of August: volunteers numbered at 700,000.**



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

- **Corporate or salary-men volunteers**
Corporations were quick in assisting. Their assistance was more marked in donating daily commodities including food, clothes, medicines, and of course money.
- Many corporations have CSR offices. Out of the Keidanren (large businesses federation), 74 percent of the member corporations have contact with NGOs, suggesting that they are helping those NGOs financially or encouraging their employees to volunteer.
- One example is *Fuji Xerox* which has been sending their employees as volunteers in coordination with the NGO *Civic Force*. Their employees are given “volunteer holiday” and financially assisted if necessary. They were sent to Kesenuma for cleaning debris for a week. One group consisted of 30 employees. The company has stated it continue this *scheme* until March 2012.



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

- According to a late August CSR activity survey of the Japan’s top 100 listed corporations:
- 84% of the corporations sent money;
- 35% donated between \$1-2.5 million;
- 10% donated more than \$12 million;
- Donations were often to NGOs and municipal governments.
- 29% sent employees to Tohoku;
- 55% sent foods and daily commodities;
- Like *Toshiba*, many corporations sent their own products.
- *MS & AD Insurance Group Holdings* sent 10 employees every week for recovering rice fields.



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

- **Volunteer-helping attitude**
Most Japanese perceived Japan as an economy of “middle class”, where 90 percent of the population thought they belong to the middle class, meaning that there were not so many people who needed help from others. The Kobe earthquake began to change that perception.
- The local community has always helped each other, but now reaching beyond the immediate community.
- In mid ‘90s to early 2000, Japan was the largest contributor to assistance overseas, with many volunteers building schools, wells, clinics. Japan is still one of the largest assistance providers.
- *In the Tohoku disaster, the key word has been “bonded”. Many people are realizing that they are mutually dependent, and cannot live alone. People are commenting now about the importance of family. (Interesting that articles are saying that young people are motivated to marry because of this sentiment.)*



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

Volunteering requires new mechanisms

Example: *amazon.co.jp* has initiated a project to match the needs of those living in evacuation shelters with contributors across the economy. Individual shelters send wish lists and contributors can buy them through the website to be delivered directly to the shelter. *Volunteer Platform* launched a similar two-way communication system, linking the needs of families and individuals in devastated areas with individual who hope to help.

- The *Tono Magokoro (“real hearts”) Network* serves as a focal point for recruiting volunteers and collecting commodities and foods nationwide to deliver those to the devastated areas. The project aims to create a sustainable community platform where local people work together to preserve their customs, lifestyles, and histories.
- In August/September, *NetWalker* set up the *Tohoku Volunteer Yellow Pages* which let potential volunteers seek work by clicking on calendar dates and then refining their search by location and by type of labor
- At *TripAdvisor* or other similar word-of-mouth travel websites, participants have uploaded photos and detailed accounts of their experiences



Volunteers in Japan – The Great East Japan Earthquake

Changes


MOD/SDF was applauded by all Japan. The Self Defense Forces made remarkable contributions, rescuing people, burying the dead, reconstructing infrastructure, removing debris, preparing foods and baths, etc. Prime Minister Kan sent initially 50,000 SDF members, and later increased SDF to 100,000. The existence of SDF was given new meaning with strong relevance to people in general.

1995 is said to be the “Beginning Year of Volunteerism” in Japan. Because of so many volunteers that went into Kobe, on foot from the neighboring areas, Japanese society became aware of importance of “volunteers” and “non-government organizations”.




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- 1995 was also the year of Non-Profit Organizations/Non-Government Organizations. Many realized that the public and private sectors could not meet all the needs of the people, as demonstrated by the Great Hanshin Earthquake. The 1998 Non-Profit Organization (NPO) law was legislated because of this awareness of the public and the politicians.
- Unfortunately for many, volunteerism and NPOs/NGOs were seen as nearly synonymous.
- NPOs have often been led by a charismatic leader who could draw volunteers, but could pay few staff. Many NPOs had not had strong “managers”, as the NPO was not a “career”, nor a “career ladder” with little career exchange between NGOs and Government, nor NGOs and the private sector.
- The Tax Regulations for NPOs have remained very rigid and complicated, with few NPOs able to employ strong staff. The July 7, 2011 *Economist* reported “Qualifying for favorable tax treatment, for example, which is almost guaranteed for charities in the West is nearly impossible in Japan. Of 90,000 NPOs in Japan, only 223 have a special tax status. That compares with 160,000 in Britain and 1.8 million in the U.S.”

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Changes (continued)

- In April, 2011, the NPO or NGO tax regulations were eased for the NGOs working in Tohoku disaster, so that contributions were given to the Japanese NGOs, without the Ministry of Finance National Tax Office causing the usual fear and confusion.
- The Diet passed on June 22, 2011 a *new NPO/NGO law*, which will go into force in two stages, on June 30 and April 2012. the law will significantly ease the process of getting favorable tax status. Certification will be done by municipal authorities rather than the national tax agency, which has tended to see every NPO as a net loss to the economy's coffers. An excessive “public support test” that hampered eligibility before will be scrapped. Contributions will be almost 50% tax-deductible, compared with less than 10% now”
- Seventy percent of NPOs are expected to get the new tax status. This change may help create a culture of philanthropy in Japan.

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Changes (continued)

- Officials are slowly coming to accept NPOs. Tax receipts have been falling far years as the populations shrinks, yet the growing ranks of the elderly are demanding more services. “This could lead to a flowering of Japanese public-interest groups,” says Akira Matsubara of an NPO lobby groups. “The government has no other choice but to cut social services and shift responsibility on to the NPOs”

The Hatoyama Government during the former PM's campaign and term of office promised to work toward this legislation. With the Tohoku disaster, the Kan Government, the DPJ and LDP Diet members, approved and passed the “**Specific Non-Profit Cooperative Law**”.



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Changes (continued)

The Japanese NGOs were very quick to reach the public, asking for donations and for volunteers. Several NGO leaders were frequently on television, Billboards, on the internet, asking for people to make a difference.

The Red Cross, which has for years been one of the only sources for people's contributions, was now only one of the conduits for assistance. Many expressed that the Red Cross has tarnished its reputation. The Red Cross was perceived as slow in delivering money to the victims, the rationale being that they (the Red Cross) was prioritizing "fairness" or "fair distribution". Many in the public expressed that there should have been other ways to ensure both speed and fairness, but Red Cross only chanted fairness at the sacrifice of speed.

The NGOs took quick advantage of this public perception, with strong campaigns.



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Changes (continued)

- Another marked difference this time was that celebrities and well-known people were not shy in telling the public through mass media or charity events about their personal donations and their assistance, even physical labor. In the past, Japanese people did not want to have their names recognized as donors, probably because they would fear more and more would be asked. But this time, people are not afraid of showing their names as contributors, and that has been a strong influence to the public and to benefiting NGOs.



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Changes -- Government and large-scale organizations:

- The *Asahi Shinbun* OpEd of August 9, 2011 reported that “*Smaller is better—Private and individual philanthropy after 3/11 disasters*”. “The response by government agencies and large-scale organizations to the Tohoku disaster has been an exercise in ineffectiveness. Institutional ham-handedness continue to prevail. The national Diet remains gridlocked on bills that could benefit victims, while, according to one Japanese newspaper, only 30 percent of the \$2.2 billion donated to the Red Cross has actually made it to potential recipients by mid-July.”
- *The Economist* (August 7-13th) reported that hundreds of volunteers have been measuring radiation at key locations and uploading data to Safecast.org, a non-profit group. The report went on: “. . .This grass-roots monitoring reflects a loss of trust in the authorities.”



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In conclusion:

- NGOs and their volunteers have made and are making a difference.
- Companies and their volunteers are making a difference.
- The **partnership** between companies and NGOs makes a difference.
- Politicians are making a difference promoting volunteerism and NGOs.
- Celebrities supporting NGOs and volunteerism are making a difference.
- Mass media and the internet make the difference.

- The National Government has enacted a new law to strengthen the NGO community at the local level, which will continue to make a difference.
- The Ministry of Defense/SDF has made a significant difference. Working with the NGOs is being strengthened.
- The economic/social milieu of Japan is resulting in more young and old wanting to impact their families, communities, and others. **This results in more outreach and volunteerism, especially through NGOs especially partnering with businesses.**