Great East Japan Earthquake—A message from Japan I

Human Security Approaches for Disaster Recovery and Resilience

JMAJ 54(5): 338–341, 2011

Masamine JIMBA,[*1] Susan HUBBARD,[*2] Eriko SASE,[*1]
Tomoko SUZUKI,[*2] Keiko OTSUKA[*1]

11 March 2011

Disasters have never stopped. In particular, natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and extreme weather conditions, continue to cause death in many parts of the world. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), a total of 385 natural disasters resulted in approximately 300,000 deaths worldwide and caused more than US$ 120 billion of economic damages in 2010 alone.[1]

In 2011, this wave did not change. Large-scale earthquakes have hit Japan, Turkey and Peru. The largest one with the magnitude 9.0 took place in northeastern Japan on 11 March, and caused a tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster. Reportedly, it killed approximately 16,000 people and 4,000 are still missing as of 26 October 2011. Although it took place in northeastern Japan, it has had significant economic and psychological impact on the whole of Japan and 71,358 evacuees are still spread across all 47 prefectures.[2] Moreover, it was responsible for major supply chain interruptions around the world in the early weeks following the disaster. This massive disaster has influenced other countries, in particular in their decisions whether to keep existing or build new nuclear power plants. In other words, its influence has gone beyond Japan's national borders.

When such disasters take place, existing in-country systems are generally not fully prepared to protect people's physical and psychological wellbeing within the country's borders, exposing them to other, less direct threats, including physical and mental health challenges. During the immediate post-disaster stage, community empowerment is also a hard task and often postponed in the interest of getting assistance to those who need it as quickly as possible. External assistance often comes into the country to complement domestic responses. While external assistance is critical because domestic actors are generally not able to deal with the magnitude of suffering on their own, it can have the effect of further alienating those who are being helped and further contribute to their sense of helplessness. Therefore, as immediate needs are being met through emergency, humanitarian support, it is important to remember that such responses may not be enough. A more comprehensive and longer-term approach that focuses on community empowerment and building community resilience to multiple indirect threats even during the chaotic post-disaster period—in other words a human security approach—has the potential to overcome such threats to individuals and communities.

Evolution of Human Security Concept

The concept of "human security" is characterized by an emphasis on the security of individuals and communities that has moved beyond traditional national security, with the ultimate goal of the latter being the security of national borders. The concept has evolved since the UNDP first began to

*1 The Department of Community and Global Health, Graduate School of Medicine, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan (mjimba@m.u-tokyo.ac.jp).
*2 Japan Center for International Exchange, Tokyo, Japan.
This series is being published from Volume 54, No. 5 (2011), in which members of the JMA Global Health Committee wrote about experiences and lessons learned in the Great East Japan Earthquake.

popularize the term in the 1994 *Human Development Report*, which described seven categories of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.[3] Almost a decade later, The Commission on Human Security went on to say that human security should focus on addressing "critical and pervasive threats" to the "vital core of all human lives" and added the freedom to live in dignity to the UNDP's dual freedoms from fear and from want.[4]

The Commission on Human Security also defined the importance of five elements of human security : (1) it is people-centered; (2) it is integrated with human development and human rights; (3) it deals with a comprehensive set of threats; (4) it engages actors beyond the government; and (5) it proposes a bi-modal strategy of protection from above and empowerment from below.[4]

In the early years of discussion of human security within the UN, lines were often blurred between human security and the concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P), which led some countries to perceive human security as a justification for intervention. The UN secretary general's 2010 report on human security[5] draws a clear distinction between these two concepts. While R2P is similar to human security in that its focus is on protecting people rather than protecting national borders, it deals primarily with violent threats, thereby focusing on the freedom from fear and excluding the other two freedoms. In addition, R2P still requires state-based and supranational responses. In contrast, human security engages multiple stakeholders, from individuals and their families to NGOs, to all levels of government, to the international community. Human security also can be more effective at dealing with many of the key challenges facing the world today, particularly those relating to health, because of its reliance on community empowerment and engagement as the mechanism for ensuring security and its focus on building resilience to multiple interconnected threats.

Resilience in Human Security

Although use of the concept of resilience is becoming more common and is increasingly used in academic studies, in this article, we simply follow the dictionary definition: an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. With this, the importance of building resilience in human security was once emphasized by focusing on HIV/AIDS in Asia and Africa.[6] During and after emergencies and disasters, 'building resilience' can be far more important as these events affect both human and material resources. We cannot prevent all new threats resulting from emergencies or disasters from happening, so our focus should be on building communities' resilience to such existing and potential threats so that the negative impact on their lives, livelihoods, and dignity is reduced. At a more practical level, we can observe that some countries and communities are able to successfully limit death tolls and human suffering caused by natural disasters and other crises while others—even those with very similar socio-economic and geographic conditions—are not. Why are those places more resilient to disasters? One explanation is that areas that have been more successful are those whose communities are already mobilized and engaged in their own protection.

Action for Resilience in Haiti: The experience of a health NGO

The activities of the Haitian Group for the Study of Kaposi's Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infections (GHESKIO), a Haitian health NGO, demonstrated that their efforts to create a resilient HIV/AIDS service system in Haiti indeed were very effective in coping with the earthquake disaster in early 2010.[7–9] In this sense, having at least one local organization that has gained the trust of a community in dealing with one threat and empowered that community with a focus on building their "resilience to a particular threat" is crucial for human security.

While GHESKIO's primary focus since its founding in 1982 has been dealing with AIDS and opportunistic infections, it already had strong connections with the local community (and is made up almost entirely of Haitians). This meant that it understood the needs in the community as well as the opportunities for mobilization through local, national, regional, and international collaborations.[10] Furthermore, very importantly, it had the trust of the communities in Port-au-Prince that were most in need of health services after the devastating earthquake on 12 January. Since people knew and trusted GHESKIO, they came to the organization, not

only for health services but also for food, water, and shelter, and GHESKIO was able to leverage its community orientation to link those in need with those who were coming from outside to provide various forms of support.

Action for Resilience in Japan: The experience of school children

Everyone has the potential to build resilience to the threats they face, even the most vulnerable populations. During and after the 3.11 disaster in Japan, children took action to protect themselves and others from the tsunami. While many adults were irresolute about evacuation after the earthquake, many children evacuated to higher ground just after the tremor, faithfully following what they had learned in school. Even though about 60% of the school children lost some of their family members in Kamaishi city, almost 100% of them survived and many of them helped younger children and elderly to evacuate.[11]

School children also took action to overcome the emotional impact of the massive loss of lives and property. After a week living in a shelter—a school gymnasium—a seven years old girl started to publish a unique newspaper.[12] Her idea was "I want to cheer everybody in the shelter up, because people seems to be discouraged here." Different from the real newspapers filled with serious sad stories, she decided to pick up only happy stories and published as a daily wall newspaper named "Fight" with the new friends she had made in the shelter. In the first issue, the children wrote, "You (adults) are now living in unfavorable circumstances but let's fight for future! We will also do our best." They vividly expressed their joy in daily life in the shelter, such as reporting that a volunteer team from Osaka made a hot poke miso-soup that was very tasty, everybody got wonderful doughnuts for snack, and they had found pretty tulips blooming, etc. The children continued to publish 50 issues until 3 July when most of the people moved to temporary housing. The girl who started the wall newspaper says "Because the people who read the newspaper talked to me with a smile, I was also encouraged."

Conclusion

The above two stories do not explain the whole aspect of human security, but they do start to demonstrate the importance of the elements of human security outlined above in building physical and emotional resilience in the face of natural disasters.

The critical importance of one often overlooked element—being people-centered—is illustrated by activities to build resilience in Haiti and Japan . In human security discourse 'people-centered' usually refers to 'the more vulnerable' people. In Haiti, a local NGO that had been so vulnerable in its early years that it could not even name the disease it was fighting against—HIV/AIDS—had gained the power and the confidence of the government and the community through its efforts to deal with HIV/AIDS, and this experience allowed them to fight against a new threat when disaster struck. In Japan, seemingly helpless school children under 10 years old mobilized to encourage people living in a shelter with almost no cost. They are the people who are aware of the value of human security, though they may not know much about three freedoms: freedom from fear and want and to live in dignity. The existence of such people with high level of conscientization (or critical consciousness), as advocated by Paulo Freire, drove them to motivate people around them to create resilient communities. We do not know if such people can be trained or if it is a gift people are born with. However, where it exists, empowerment starts, and once it starts, it must be protected by the government and global society. As a previous study recommends,[6] integration of empowerment and protection is a key pathway to achieving human security. To know more about the dynamics of the empowerment-protection synergy, we need to undertake more case studies in different settings.

References:

1. Guha-Sapir D, Vos F, Below R. Ponserre S. Annual Statistical Review: Numbers and Trends 2010. Brussels: CRED; 2011. http://www.undp.org.cu/crmi/docs/cred-annualdisstats2010-rt-2011-en.pdf. Accessed November 22, 2011.
2. The Reconstruction Headquarters in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, "The Number of Evacuees." October

20, 2011. http://www.reconstruction.go.jp/topics/hinansyasu.pdf. Accessed October 30, 2011.
3. United Nations Development Programme. Human development report, 1994. New York: United Nations Development Programme; 1994.
4. Commission on Human Security. Human security now: protecting and empowering people. New York: Commission on Human Security; 2003.
5. Human security: Report of the UN Secretary-General on 8 March, 2010. http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/human%20security%20report%20april%206%202010.pdf. Accessed October 30, 2011.
6. Hubbard S, Suzuki T. Building Resilience—Human Security Approaches to AIDS in Africa and Asia. Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange; 2008.
7. Pape JW, Johnson WD Jr, Fitzgerald DW. The earthquake in Haiti—dispatch from Port-au-Prince. N Engl J Med. 2010;362:575–577. Epub 2010.
8. Pape JW, Deschamps MM, Ford H, Joseph P, Johnson WD Jr, Fitzgerald DW. The GHESKIO refugee camp after the earthquake in Haiti—dispatch 2 from Port-au-Prince. N Engl J Med. 2010;362:e27. Epub 2010.
9. Pape JW, Rouzier V, Ford H, Joseph P, Johnson WD Jr, Fitzgerald DW. The GHESKIO field hospital and clinics after the earthquake in Haiti—dispatch 3 from Port-au-Prince. N Engl J Med. 2010;362:e34. Epub 2010.
10. GHESKIO. "Collaborations." http://www.gheskio.org/collaborations.html. Accessed October 30, 2011.
11. Kamaishi no Kiseki (A Miracle in Kamaishi). Sankei Shimbun. August 11, 2011. http://sankei.jp.msn.com/life/news/110811/trd11081114380015-n1.htm. Accessed October 30, 2011.
12. Faito Shimbun Sha. Miyagi Ken Kesennuma Hatsu, Faito Shimbun. Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha; 2011.