

Chapter 15

Earthquake and Fukushima Nuclear Crisis in 2011 with Gender View

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the Great East Japan Earthquake on the 11th of March in 2011 and Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident with particular emphasis on gender aspects. The distortions of Japanese society that existed well before this disaster turned out to have a major impact on this crisis. The current situation is that women are unable to fully participate in the processes of planning for rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction, and that their human rights are not being respected. What has society learned through this disaster is that problems that exist in normal times are exacerbated under the conditions of confusion and hardship that result from a disaster. After mapping the situation, the author proceeds to policy recommendations.

THE SCALE OF DISASTER

An epigram “natural disaster visits us just when we have forgotten about the previous one” is attributed to a well-known Japanese literary man and physicist Terada Torahiko (1879-1935). This wisdom was painfully illustrated in Japan last year when the chain of events revealed all too many

blind spots that contributed to poor decisions in the Japanese society and many of the shortcomings had little to do with natural forces. It should be noted that the triple shock scenario that took place in Japan recently was something that very few people, including the government and the specialists, had seriously thought about. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to say that people

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should have known better and so many things could have been done differently. However, Japan has now illustrated that modern societies are not particularly well prepared to natural calamities and that a major natural disaster will seriously test the weaknesses of a society. In Japan, the triple shock will have a lasting impact on the way that people look at their government (both local and national) or specialists – and, of course, nuclear energy. Furthermore, the impact has already been global, especially in terms of lessons of Fukushima (which has been a major factor in debates leading to abandon nuclear energy in several European countries). However, the impact on women has not been focus of much research or media coverage and in this article I try to assess the situation with special emphasis on gender and in the end of the article will also present practical policy recommendations.

On Friday, March 11 2011, 14:46 JST, occurred a massive earthquake, magnitude 9.0 with epicenter about 70 kilometers off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. The earthquake triggered a powerful tsunami that caused merciless damage along the coast of Northeastern Japan. The earthquake and tsunami together resulted in about 20,000 people dead or missing. Since most of the damage was caused by the tsunami the cause of death in most cases was drowning and there has been an unusually large number of missing people even after one year from the disaster. After the disaster the most recent estimates have brought the number of total victims to more than 25 000 including around 16 000 dead, around 3000 missing and around 6000 injured. See the Factsheet in the end of the article. For an analysis of different sources and changing casualty figures, see Vervaeck and Daniell (2012).

After the earthquake it was quickly pointed out that the earthquake was the latest in a pattern of similar megaquakes in the region with a cycle of one thousand year. The previous earthquake had occurred in 869, the 11th year of Jōgan era, giving earthquake its modern name, the Jōgan Earthquake. Early classical Japanese sources

referred to the earthquake as the Mutsu Province Earthquake (as the Jōgan era had also other major earthquakes). It will be interesting to see how the 2011 earthquake will be called in future history writing in Japan and elsewhere. The media and public in Japan tends to use the following term: *higashi nihon daishinsai* (literally: East Japan Great Earthquake) while more serious publications often use a longer and more precise term: *Tōhoku-chihō taiheiyō oki jishin* (literally: earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tōhoku). In English, such terms as 2011 Japan earthquake and Tohoku earthquake are frequently used. However, a simple Google search reveals that "Fukushima" as one of the most popular Japanese search words generates overwhelming interest everywhere in the world. It may have joined "Hiroshima" as a symbolic word for nuclear disaster. The connection between these two Japanese events in the context of antinuclear movement has sometimes been made, especially in the foreign media (e.g., Revkin, 2012). Within the International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms (IALANA) Japan has been committing antinuclear campaign "From Hiroshima to Fukushima" to totally abolish, not only nuclear arms, but also nuclear energy. The IALANA at the Declaration of Szczecin accepted the same position with the IALANA Japan at the general meeting in June 2011 (IALANA Szczecin Declaration, 2011).

Most of the victims were Japanese as the area has relatively few foreign or foreign-born residents and visitors and the tsunami did not cause major damage to human populations outside Japan (although it caused major damage to bird populations in the Pacific Islands). The 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake with an epicenter off the coast of Sumatra killed more than ten times more people than the Japanese earthquake and made (Japanese) word *tsunami* part of vocabulary everywhere. The Indian Ocean earthquake caused damage in many different countries and many of the victims and observers were foreigners making the disaster international. On the other hand, the Japanese

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