

**Discussion**

**Epilogue**

## Discussion:

Half a year has passed since the Great Hanshin Earthquake, and now...

### Participants:

**Yasuko Aikawa;** Born in 1965. Lives in Akashi. A news reporter. Her whole office collapsed. Staff of Women's Think Tank, YUI, which was founded in May, 1995.

**Taeko Inada;** Born in 1956. Lives in Tarumi Ward of Kobe. Her house partially collapsed. Part-time teacher. Founded Independence for Asian Women Project in 1994 summer, which deals with foreign women's labor issues.

**Reiko Masai** Born in 1949. Lives in Suma Ward of Kobe. Leader of Women's Net Kobe. Ran for city council in June, 1995, and unfortunately finished behind a successful candidates. Opened a House for Women in April, 1994.

**Rie Yanagawa;** Born in 1953. Lives in Himeji. Lost her aunt and cousin in the quake. Organizer of meetings on women's issues LIBERTE.

**Masako Yamazaki;** Born in 1942. Lives in Itami. A half of her house collapsed. Editor of bulletin Women's Message Board from Kobe. Co-author of a book Agricultural Chemical Hiding in the House. Advisor of a group Kansai Branch of Japan Consumer Association.

We have learned various things from the Great Hanshin Earthquake. We have a lot of things we feel strongly about and want to discuss, especially from women's points of view. Half a year has passed since the quake. Looking back on these months, we put together how we felt and what we thought. Five members of Women's Net Kobe are involved in editing this book. We got together and talked frankly.

### Unforgettable fear:

**Masai:** Six months have passed since the earthquake. The trauma has gradually healed for some, but not so much for others.

**Yamazaki:** Their trauma seems to have spread even further as shelters are being closed one after another.

**Masai:** I heard of a woman in her 40s who feels uneasy when she is alone after moving to Ibaraki in Osaka Prefecture when her apartment in Nishinomiya collapsed.

She said she was relieved when her children came home from school. Her neighbors in Ibaraki couldn't understand her trauma. They just say that they were also scared of the earthquake. They were not hit by a quake measuring seven but four on the Japanese intensity scale.

**Inada:** Even though people in Osaka and Kyoto prefectures also experienced the same disaster, we can't share the same kind of fear. It's hard to speak up about our own anxiety and fear. My life had returned to its routine only a week after the quake. Even then, we thought it was quite hard for all of us. So I am hesitant to tell my feelings to people whose damages were greater than mine. I heard a man in his 60s in a Takarazuka shelter say, "After six months, I still have burdens from the quake. My energy doesn't cooperate even though I need to redirect my lifestyle."

**Yamazaki:** This March, I talked with a woman who came to Kobe from Tokyo on business. Walking around the devastated area, she thought people in the neighborhood would struggle to survive from now on. I thought her view was different from mine because at the time I had no energy to even think that I had to survive. I wonder if this difference is the gap between people who actually experienced the quake and the ones who didn't.

**Inada:** A friend of mine in the Kanto region said to me, "You will be all right because you are an experienced hiker, so living in a tent isn't so bad for you."

**Yamazaki:** That's not right.

**Inada:** No. Our trouble here is more than just living without water, bath or limited food in camp sites. We have no physical energy at all. It was hard for me to just survive day to day. So when I heard Mrs. Masai was delivering washing machines to shelters, I thought that was great.

**Masai:** I didn't feel like doing anything at all for a while, either. It was early March when I actually started to take action. A woman who lost her house said that she still woke up at around 5 a.m.; the time when the quake hit, and felt a shake. My body, too, still remembers the fear of my house falling on me.

**Yamazaki:** When I see the full moon, I recall that day. It was also a full-moon night. When I feel tremors from the demolition work, that same fear returns to me.

**No place to go:**

**Masai:** The rainy season has come and city authorities have started to demolish damaged houses. I have been watching houses being demolished one after another everyday in my neighborhood. Shakes from the demolition frighten me

very much. Tremors also cause cracks or tiles to fall from the houses that withstood the quake.

**Aikawa:** Restoration of the town has started, building new facilities and houses. On the other hand, some people lost their houses in the demolition work.

**Inada:** People say that damaged houses cause dwellers psychological stress. Many people decided to rebuild houses even though they expect to suffer from enormous debts.

**Yanagawa:** We, Japanese, have a strong tendency to own houses rather than rent them. It's because there aren't enough low-cost public houses here in Japan. Even if property prices are high, we still try to buy. Companies invest on land, and banks offer long-term mortgage plans. It's a vicious circle. People buy houses despite its difficulty. What if such a house collapsed in an earthquake? Owners must feel devastated.

**Inada:** One of my acquaintances didn't return home from the shelter for a while because she didn't feel like spending any time in her damaged house. Before the earthquake, she was so proud of her house that she would dust and polish it everyday.

**Masai:** I'm wondering if it was impossible for the administration to rent some facilities as shelters.

**Aikawa:** I had the same question. No matter how much money it would have cost the government to rent some extra space, it should have done that.

**Yanagawa:** Administration didn't do that because of the enormous number of victims, I supposed. But why did they decline offers made by some companies to use ships and golf course facilities as shelters?

**Yamazaki:** They said they couldn't accept the offers because they could have created differences among evacuees.

**Masai:** I hope the administration looks at the reality of the hardships victims have to go through. People have to sleep on the floor of the hallways in the shelters. Others have to step over them. We shouldn't call them homeless. They have lost their dwellings.

**Yanagawa:** The temporary housing units in Himeji are only half full. Most of the residents there are unemployed people or senior citizens.

**Aikawa:** More evacuees would have moved to temporary houses located farther away if the government had shown clear construction plans. For example, the two years or they could go back to their own houses.

**Inada:** A lot of people needed temporary houses even if some could stay at places offered

by their companies or relatives. There were people who had savings and could rent rooms. But if we didn't have savings, there is no place to go.

**Social strata exposed:**

**Yanagawa:** We thought that there was no social strata in Japan like in Europe. Most Japanese think they belong to the middle class. The earthquake revealed the misunderstanding.

**Masai:** After the earthquake, some people felt relieved that they were employed by large companies.

**Aikawa:** People talked about the emergency division of a certain big company that prepared relief supplies and pick-up buses only for their employees while many people waited in a long line. I hated to see their cars running around with stickers saying, "Emergency Measures" or "Reconstruction Supports." Besides, women were having a hard time at home. Men who work for big corporations had to go to the office even amidst of the confusion. Wives had to depend on their husbands' income. Because they experienced these situations, their feeling of powerlessness and a hierarchy in families became apparent.

**Masai:** I heard a middle-aged woman mutter, "I've learned from experience what mass media really are. They are broadcasting only the 'family illusion,' by which families are supposed to count on their relatives or be bound together by love. The public office was also reporting that the number of evacuees in the shelters was decreasing.

**Inada:** I was shocked when a Filipino victim said on a television program why the Japanese government only helps Japanese victims who have families or relatives but doesn't help non-Japanese who have no one to turn to. He said that family members or relatives manage to help one another in the Philippines, where people live in extended families. He said all the shelters were full of Japanese, and Filipino victims felt uncomfortable being there. "Is Japan a country that excludes foreigners who have no connection, place to go or no security for themselves?" he asked. His words awakened me.

**Japan is a developing country for social welfare and should seek for administrative countermeasures:**

**Yanagawa:** This earthquake gave some people heavy burdens. Some had no families and others had no assets. The people who work for small and medium-size firms lost their jobs because companies were unable to reconstruct their businesses. Japan

cannot quickly provide them support. I am afraid we have to consider Japan a developing country when it comes down to social welfare.

**Aikawa:** The administration should recognize that welfare is not available to specific individuals, and to certain groups.

**Inada:** The government care is needed for the people who have no families or who do not belong to any organizations.

**Masai:** The government should not rely on family ties to take care of victims. Although some families can bear the burden temporarily, not all of them can afford to. We have heard of many cases where families had no other choice but to live together. Women ended up taking on the problems of the aged. Women also have to eventually make up for the various troubles caused by the earthquake. Men took part in the early reconstruction project but the inconspicuous, troublesome work was passed down to women.

**Yamazaki:** Men go back to their usual daily routines. Prioritizing work, they can go back to being business men.

**Inada:** What about working women, then?

**Masai:** Both working women and housewives have more work than ever. As a result, some take it on their children and child-abuse cases have increased. Because of the earthquake, a lot of extra work fell on women's shoulders. In other words, the weaker got the heavier burden. The earthquake didn't affect us equally.

**Aikawa:** On the contrary, we can also say the quake happened in a place of inequality.

**Yamazaki:** The recent media reports only cover what we have to do when an intensity seven earthquake hits. But they failed to reveal that the administration has not mended what should be improved in daily situations. It is more important for the administration to review what it should do in a normal circumstance and eliminate public's anxiety.

**Yanagawa:** If the public buildings have ramps, for example, elderly or disabled citizens feel safe about using the facilities in case these buildings become emergency shelters.

**Yamazaki:** We also started to notice the problems of medical services. If patients with chronic illnesses had carried a record of their treatment or prescription, they could have avoided confusion. Patients should be informed of their illnesses in detail, but they aren't. That's the fundamental problem.

**Masai:** We needed more centers that provide at-home care services. If the centers are within elementary school districts, we feel safe evacuating there.

**Yamazaki:** As for meals, if schools used their kitchens to cook their own meals instead of

having them delivered from meal centers, evacuees could have received warmer meals more quickly. Some evacuees asked if they could cook in the school kitchen used for the home economics course.

**Inada:** The shelters didn't function properly. When victims requested the government a sink, the request was turned down. Cooking is one of the necessities in our lives.

**Aikawa:** The schools that became shelters were surrounded by fences, and nobody could easily enter from outside. Although they were supposed to give welcoming feel as shelters, the fences gave the unwelcoming, closed environment.

**Inada:** I have learned what types of houses are dangerous. I can tell which houses are likely to collapse when I see them from the train. They are in the area not hit by the earthquake. The local government can check the houses by retrofitting and inspect them properly so that people won't have to go to the shelters.

#### **Kinder society for the disabled:**

**Inada:** Don't you think we need guidelines to deal with disasters for disabled and senior citizens?

**Aikawa:** Yes, I agree. I hear that Akitsu in Shizuoka Prefecture has guidelines. Given that 50,000 of its 100,000 people had to evacuate, the city has already allocated rooms at elementary schools in each town. Even a bed time is set. I don't think a manual is always good, but it helps avoid confusion.

**Masai:** Nobody expected to live in temporary shelters for so long in Kobe. The city authorities should have set up rules, such as dividing rooms with curtains or renting hotel rooms to victims. They should have also considered the location of portable toilets. The toilets are now set up behind the shelters, where it is unsafe and it could trigger sexual assaults.

**Inada:** People who have money could evacuate to hotels in Osaka. Some companies have booked most of the hotels, but others could not stay. I've heard that many people moved out of shelters if they had a place to go. A person went to a shelter, found that there was no privacy at all, and moved to her son's house even if she didn't want to. She ended up having more problems at her son's place.

**Yanagawa:** I wish the Kobe mayor had stayed in a shelter for even one day and saw himself how miserable the conditions were.

**Masai:** Life in shelters for more than one month is awful, isn't it?

**Aikawa:** If I were in the same situation now, I would try to get out of the shelter. But I'm not sure what I would do when I'm 50 years older.

**Yamazaki:** I agree. Getting out of a shelter depends on age and energy level. I don't

know if I would have the energy to do so.

**Inada:** Concerned about Kobe, people all over Japan have offered to let people stay in their houses. But only a few people have accepted the offer. It's largely because senior citizens or children have refused to go to unfamiliar places.

**Masai:** It's also because people worry about their jobs and want to stay in their own neighborhood. People are uneasy about going to unfamiliar places.

**Yamazaki:** Tell us about the situation in temporary housing, with social workers helping evacuees.

**Masai:** In Ashiya, one social worker is allocated per 15 households to take care of the disabled family seven days a week, 24 hours a day. In Amagasaki, one worker attended to 12 elderly people on three shifts a day. But Kobe is providing only one social worker to service 50 households from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. One person has already died in Higashi-Nada Ward because of a lack of trained volunteers and better services and facilities.

**Inada:** It is really difficult to visit and attend to all 50 displaced families.

**Masai:** No matter how much workers want to help, it is impossible to visit and take care of everyone. They can function only as supervisors. According to city officials, only independent disabled citizens can live in these housing units.

**Inada:** The city is too large to address these problems.

**Yamazaki:** The size of each ward in Kobe is almost the same as some cities. Each ward should tackle problems on its own.

**Inada:** Even if we request assistance from ward offices, they always refer to the city government.

**Yamazaki:** Some senior citizens had been dead for days before they were discovered. It is very sad and horrifying to hear such news.

**Yanagawa:** To resolve and act on these problems, the city government seeks help from local women's clubs and volunteers.

**Masai:** Because social welfare commissioners know elderly people who live alone, they can be asked to take care of the elderly. But if commissioners were the victims of the quake as well, where do we take elderly citizens? The welfare office is trying to decide who to look after the elderly citizens in the future. But it's a matter of strong conscience. They can't appoint just one group of people to take care of the elderly. What we have learned from the quake is that there are many women living alone. Women whom we met in the shelters seemed to put up with the miserable conditions. They may have become accustomed to the circumstances.

**Aikawa:** It was difficult for women because they had to go to work from shelters, while

men continued to live in other cities away from their families. I noticed some other problems. Volunteers were limited to those who fulfilled the requirements. They had dress codes too. There was a kind of uneasiness about being forced to act like victims.

**Yanagawa:** Is this the same self-discipline people had to exercise during war times in Japan?

**Masai:** There was an elderly woman who didn't know what was happening around her because she had lost her hearing aid. Despite enough information about free hearing aids on television, she didn't know about it at all.

**Yamazaki:** It is difficult to reach and inform the elderly through mass media. We have to tell them necessary information ourselves.

**Masai:** When you live in the shelters, you can't read papers or watch television. You can't get necessary information.

**Yanagawa:** As part of our project, we visited shelters and put up notices and information about senior homes in Osaka.

**Inada:** Only certain age group could get information through newspapers. The city function was totally damaged, and we couldn't rely on our local government, so we had to do everything on our own. One significant lesson we have learned from this crisis is that we need our social structure that is helpful to people with certain disadvantages in society.

Infants, elderly and disabled people have difficulties living alone. The social structure is still immature because it needs women to take care of the weaker even though women are hardly financially independent.

We would like to try building an affluent society; a society where anyone could safely live alone; a society where every individual, not in a family unit, could receive official services; a society where everyone can be happy. Married or unmarried, with or without children, disabled or not, young or old, people can live in such a society without anxiety.

In an unexpected catastrophe, there is no other society more fragile than a gender-discriminating society, which imposes social problems upon women in the name of love.

Let us not forget but apply the experiences and lessons from this catastrophe to the way Japanese societies should be. That is what we can do.

## Epilogue

### ~ 10 years after the Great Hanshin Earthquake ~

By Reiko Masai, Women's Net Kobe

#### **Disasters Serious Impacts on Women**

##### ● Women's Poverty

Few Japanese know the fact that 1,000 more women were killed in the Great Hanshin Earthquake. As of May 8, 1995, the death toll of women (3,294) was higher than that of men (2,199). Women in their 70s were the highest, followed by women in their 60s, women in their 80s, and 50s, in this order. Eighty percent of those killed were either crushed to death or suffocated in the collapse of their houses.

Moreover, many victims who were trapped under collapsed houses were burned to death. These people would have been safe if only their houses had been more resistant to seismic forces. Since most collapsed houses comprised aged housing in the inner city, damage from the earthquake was deeply related to the problem of poverty. This fact eventually spotlighted socially vulnerable people, including the elderly, challenged, foreign workers and women. The average wage of women was (and still is) about half what it is for men. In addition to impoverishing women, the low wage made many women, particularly elderly women, extremely vulnerable to the disaster.

Specifically, many such poor women lived in old wooden apartments with only a shared toilet. According to a report from the Ministry of Welfare at that time in 1995, the average income of fatherless families was only 30% of the national average, while that of motherless families was 70% of the national average. Even in non-disaster situations, fatherless families are extremely unstable and vulnerable, economically, socially and psychologically. In addition to elderly women, many mothers and children of fatherless families also became victims of the disaster since they also lived in aged, fragile apartments or houses. This is partly because many such mothers were unable to pay the high rent. It was also because many real estate brokers refused renting decent apartments to fatherless families. I learned that after the disaster some such mothers were obliged to remarry just so they could sustain their livelihood. Of the various post-disaster reconstruction programs, therefore, priority should be placed on helping mothers of fatherless families find houses and jobs, to replace the ones lost due to the disaster.

Three and half years after the earthquake, the Japanese government began

providing victims with subsidies to help them regain economic independence. Since these subsidies were provided for victimized households, or more precisely given to the head of such households, who were generally men rather than women, the majority of women victims who married (remarried) were not eligible. Demanding a remedy for the subsidy system, which was, allegedly, based on gender discrimination, some women filed a lawsuit and won the case. In Japan, many subsidy systems consider households rather than individuals as the benefit recipients. This in turn has had a negative impact on women in the field of disaster-relief service.

#### ● Mass Dismissal of Part-timers

Immediately after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, roughly 100,000 workers, many of whom were female part-timers, were dismissed in the affected areas. These dismissed workers included many mothers of fatherless families; women who had to support their elderly parents and pregnant women. Many dismissed part-timers were not covered by employment insurance, which was a violation of relevant laws. This situation was not revealed until the mass dismissals after the earthquake.

According to the Kobe Workers Union, which provided labor-related consultation services, the number of cases it handled, reached over 1,700 in the six months after the disaster (until June 1995). Amid the ongoing prolonged recession, enterprises dismissed many employees with the excuse that the company's performance declined due to the disaster. Some enterprises fired full-time employees and replaced them with part-timers.

Immediately after the earthquake, Hyogo Prefecture Women and Youth Office; Hyogo Prefecture Women's Center and the Labor Standards Bureau of the Ministry of Welfare opened consultation counters for workers in the affected area. In the half month after opening, more than 1,000 cases of workers' complaints, according to the Sankei Shimbun of February 9, 1995 were handled at these counters. Among fired women workers were mothers with young children, who were unable to go to work partly because of the closure of childcare centers.

This was also partly because they were unable to leave small children at home for fear of another accident. As a result, many mothers were fired. To sustain women's economic stability even in the event of disasters, it is therefore essential to establish a legal system that bans dismissal in the event of disaster. A system which allows victimized workers to take disaster leave is also necessary.

Moreover, the Japanese government should promptly take initiatives to redress the wage gap between men and women- a gap which is being exceptionally wide

for advanced countries. At the same time, the government should also establish a financial support system to reinforce the seismic resistance of aged housing.

### **Health and the Prevention of Domestic/Sexual Violence**

A 1990 report reviewed the impact of the Loma Prieta Earthquake in California on Women. This report entitled “Influence of the Earthquake on Violence against Women” concluded that violence against women can worsen after any large disaster. It also concluded that any relief and restoration programs should include measures to prevent and control violent acts against women and children. Regrettably, Japanese organizations did not have a copy of this report by the time of the Great Hanshin Earthquake.

#### **• The Impact of Shelter Life on Women’s Health**

According to the results of a survey conducted in December 1995 by the Earthquake Victims’ Association 11 months after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, more women than men experienced worsened health problems. While staying in shelters, where no privacy was secured, women victims had to do most of the household chores and take care of their children and sick/elderly family members. In the post-disaster situation, greater burdens were imposed on women than on men, due to persistent stereotypes about gender roles.

At the women’s meetings held in May 1995, I heard many women complain about the absence of privacy at shelters. I particularly remember a remark by a young woman who was sheltering at an elementary school building. Sobbing bitterly, she said, “Whenever I came back to the shelter at night, I felt anger at seeing so many male strangers in the same room with me.” At that shelter, both men and women had to use the same toilet. There was nowhere to change clothing, free from men’s eyes. Depriving women of the right to privacy is an infringement of human rights. Long-term stays in surroundings without any privacy were extremely stressful, particularly, for women.

Moreover, many women experienced great anxiety and fear. Mothers were forced to soothe their crying babies in the cold outdoors to prevent their crying children from disturbing other victims. As there were no nursing rooms, mothers also breastfed their babies outdoors. Moreover, many mothers decided not to live in shelters because of such a harsh environment. Since many women were suffering from menstrual disorders, cystitis and vaginitis, I wished there were clinics for women, preferably with midwives. If this was impossible, at least, a woman leader should have been appointed in each shelter. I now believe that in post-disaster situations women should participate in the

operation of shelters and layout of living spaces within shelters. In preparing relief plans for disaster victims, gender-sensitive viewpoints should be incorporated in both shelter operation and designs as well the stockpiling of relief materials.

● **Insufficient Support for Pregnant Women and Mothers with Infants**

Because of the shattered transport infrastructure, many companies accommodated their workers in nearby hotels, while their wives had to remain in the affected areas. As a result, many wives were left alone, some with their infants and others with their elderly parents, while their husbands moved to hotels near their workplaces. Reportedly, due to their fear of aftershocks that frequently hit the affected area, many panicked women abused their children.

Pregnant women and women immediately after delivery who continued staying in their own houses were particularly vulnerable. Without easy access to professional help, daily necessities and information, many women developed fatigue, anxiety and a sense of loneliness, particularly, when their husbands were either far away or not cooperative. It is truly deplorable that women who absolutely needed care were regarded and treated as care providers instead of care recipients.

● **Disasters and Violent Actions against Women**

Women's Net Kobe established a women's hotline immediately after the earthquake. Of the consultations we offered to women victims, 60% concerned domestic violence against women.

One woman caller stated "My house collapsed completely, yet we have to continue paying the housing loan for ten more years. My husband beat me even in the presence of our three-year-old daughter." Another woman said, "I am eight months pregnant. Yet, my husband beats me, shouting that he doesn't want any more children." As an increasing numbers of women learned about the hotline, we received more and more calls.

For several months after the earthquake, Kobe's streets had no electricity. On dark streets with so many empty, collapsed buildings, many women were raped. In July 1995, we held an assembly with the slogan "We will never forgive sexual violence." To this assembly, we invited women lawyers and public nurses who served at many shelters. Many women victims were forced to stay silent because they had no other option but to remain where they were (such as shelters or temporary housing). Given such an emergency situation, many communities tended to pretend that there were no rapes or any other sexual crimes.

During the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on Beijing+10 held in New York, February 2005, participants sought solutions to infringements of women's human rights, particularly sexual violence, in areas hit by disaster or involved in conflict. In Japan, we must also seek effective solutions by incorporating post-disaster programs gender-sensitive viewpoints, especially measures to prevent violence against women. At the same time in non-emergencies, we should work to develop measures for the prevention of domestic violence and the creation of systems to support women victims. Above all, we must foster an environment where the victims of sexual violence can easily report the criminal acts without risk.

### **Women's Participation in Disaster Reduction and Post-Disaster Reconstruction**

At the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR), held in Kobe in January 2005, the Japanese government announced its Initiatives for Disaster Reduction. The Initiatives' basic policies are to promote gender-sensitive perspectives. Specifically, the Initiative stipulates as follows: "Women are more vulnerable to disasters than men are because of existing gender-related imbalance in various aspects, including the levels of participation in policymaking and economic activities, along with access to information.

It is therefore essential to support women in every aspect of disaster reduction from gender-sensitive perspectives." In July 2005, the Japanese government revised the Basic Disaster Prevention Planning to incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives. A Cabinet Office taskforce to study the "Basic Plan for Gender Equality" will also initiate studies of gender equality within the context of disaster reduction and post-disaster reconstruction.

#### **• Operation of Shelters immediately after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake**

Of the 310,000 victims, whose houses collapsed or were damaged by the earthquake, 180,000 took shelter at school buildings. Although various surveys have been conducted regarding the roles of shelter leaders. Few of these surveys reported on the gender ratio of the same leaders.

According to the only extant record, which was prepared by Ashiya, only two female leaders out of a total of 25 leaders for 25 shelters in Ashiya. This kind of gender imbalance is partly attributable to the automatic selection of men, who are community and or local volunteer group leaders, as shelter representatives. Another factor involves the majority of women not being able to fulfill a leader's responsibilities due to their

family obligations.

Although many study reports were prepared on disaster and post-disaster situations, few such reports contain gender-based data or analyses.

Although natural disasters hit everyone at the same time, the damage men and women they receive and the speed at which they recover respectively is different. When a tsunami attacked the coast of Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004, it again proved this point.

#### • **Participation of Women in Disaster Reduction and Post-disaster Reconstruction Planning**

The image of women as only victims or vulnerable people is also biased. Immediately after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, I saw many women running to collapsed houses with hand saws to rescue victims trapped under the houses; exerting leadership by cooking hot meals to share with other victims; and organizing volunteer groups dedicated to washing laundry. Such women were amazingly powerful and energetic.

They knew exactly what other victims needed and allocated limited resources adequately by organizing groups and networks with great flexibility. Women's knowledge and abilities are essential for various post-disaster programs.

The earthquake destroyed a lot of communities. This situation still impacts heavily on our daily lives and discourages recovery from mental stress. Presently, mostly women support daily life in these local communities. However, men in their prime engage in reconstruction programs which emphasize the rebirth of big cities above local communities. If women participated in local reconstruction programs, how important the rebirth of local communities is would be emphasized.

In this context, I believe that the national and local governments must execute the following measures: (1)select women as members responsible for decision-making regarding disaster reduction and post-disaster reconstruction planning; employ women as leaders of reconstruction programs, (2) adopt concrete measures to ensure women's participation in decision-making by clearly publicizing numerical targets and the target period, (3)seek and use women's knowledge and expertise accumulated through their participation in community and NPO activities, (4)provide training on gender issues for staff members who will be dispatched for rescue and relief activities as well as to post-disaster reconstruction; and (5)dispatch women to disaster sites when this is deemed as appropriate.

Disaster reduction is deeply related to daily efforts. Residents should

constantly review whether or not the town they live in has advanced welfare programs; whether or not the town authority is actively promoting gender-equality; and people in their society respect human rights. A society where women are overly “protected” in the name of “respect of femininity” is a society where inequality between men and women is deeply embedded. Moreover, such a society is extremely vulnerable to disasters. Although in Japan most social services are currently provided to households, rather than to individuals, this system should also be revised so that both single and married women can access such services. Every woman has a right to lead an independent and secure life even if she is not married or does not have children.

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