

## Event Report

### **Human and Social Impacts of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster: What has been Learned and What Remains to be Learned**

Date: 16 February 2016

Organizer: Fukushima Global Communication (FGC) Programme, United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)

Venue: Corasse Fukushima, Fukushima City, Japan

The symposium was opened by Prof. Kazuhiko Takeuchi (Senior Vice-Rector, United Nations University), who introduced the Fukushima Global Communication Programme (FGC), a three-year research and dissemination initiative that UNU-IAS has been implementing since 2013. Following the opening address, Mr. Masao Uchibori (Governor, Fukushima Prefecture) welcomed the audience and delivered a presentation on progress towards reconstructing Fukushima since the March 2011 disasters.

The opening remarks were followed by presentations by two FGC researchers. Dr. Ana Mosneaga (Research Associate, UNU-IAS) introduced research outcomes related to displacement and restoration of livelihoods, and Dr. Akiko Sato (Research Associate, UNU-IAS) shared results of research on risk communication.

**Dr. Ana Mosneaga** started her presentation by reflecting on human and social implications of the complex issues inherent to recovering from Fukushima's nuclear disaster, including the protracted displacement, loss of livelihoods and disruption of communities. She emphasised the importance of recognising the case of Fukushima's evacuees as an example of an internal displacement situation in need of durable solutions. Based on the findings of field research conducted through interviews and focus group discussions with the affected people and communities, she explained how the conditions under which the evacuees from the mandatory evacuation zones and those from outside these zones seek to restore their livelihoods and restart their lives are growing increasingly diverse. In conclusion, she highlighted the need for recovery policies to be based on a thorough analysis of the evacuees' changing situations and for targeted support measures enabling people to find workable solutions to their situations until return, local integration in the place of evacuation or relocation would become viable options.

**Dr. Akiko Sato** explained that providing information and communicating risk are vital processes within the current context, with the lifting of evacuation orders expected to speed up. Based on her field research in Fukushima and outcomes of a UNU-IAS workshop on risk communication, she pointed to some issues in the current risk communication practices: (1) the need for comprehensive information and measurements about radioactive contamination and exposure that directly link to people's daily lives, (2) uncertainty in the radiological sciences, (3) diverse perceptions of radiation risks, (4) diverse information needs for the recovery of affected communities and individual lives, (5) risk of information disparities causing information to not reach certain parts of the population. She underscored the need for social support mechanisms to assist the affected people in utilizing radiation data in their daily lives and understanding the points of disagreements among experts in the radiological sciences, as well as to address information disparities.

During the subsequent discussion, four panellists made interventions drawing on their respective fields of expertise and experience.

**Mr. Hiroshi Mano (Project Researcher, Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization, Fukushima University)** discussed the need for charting a non-linear roadmap for implementing recovery projects based on anticipated changes in the evacuees' situations. Explaining that there is a relationship between the intention of evacuees to return home and the conditions in their communities, he echoed the importance of respecting the preferences of the displaced populations. In this process, the time required for each person to regain stability should be considered as the planning period, and there is a need to ensure that public services are provided during this period by using diverse administrative arrangements.

**Mr. Tadashi Inoue (Honorary Research Advisor, Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry)** highlighted recovery measures that should be implemented along with decontamination. These include creating new industries based on the strengths of the affected areas that would secure jobs for those who choose to return, and making it possible to compare the risks of returning versus not returning by drawing on scientifically sound information. He also emphasised the importance of ensuring different forms of public involvement in the recovery activities. Considering the current decontamination and waste disposal issues, he pointed to the existence of various proposals such as the use of less contaminated waste as a material for constructing seawalls.

**Mr. Katsumi Miyaguchi (Vice-Mayor, Namie Town, Fukushima Prefecture)** introduced the status of recovery and reconstruction activities in Namie Town. He explained that many issues still need to be resolved before the town can promote return of its residents namely: (1) the fact that an agreement on what dose level is safe has not yet been reached among the stakeholders involved in discussing the return of residents, and the existence of diverse risk perceptions among residents, (2) the lack of a concrete plan concerning final disposal of radioactive waste, and (3) delayed disposal processes due to differences in how waste is generated, categorised and handled.

**Ms. Hiromi Sato (Reconstruction Coordinator, Fukushima Cooperative Reconstruction Center)** stated that those who have evacuated to outside Fukushima Prefecture often find it difficult to obtain local information about Fukushima, and emphasized that networks of civil society organizations supporting displaced people in different prefectures have proven to be an effective way to address this issue. She also pointed out that the degree to which host communities support the displaced people varies depending on factors such as their respective histories and administrative environments. She concluded that sharing information among civil society organizations would create learning opportunities for new approaches that match the situations faced by each community.

During the discussion session with the audience, various questions were raised including: (1) whether the current measures were appropriate for dealing with displacement in Fukushima as an internal displacement issue; (2) what kinds of approaches were best for risk communication with children; and (3) whether any shifts in residents' preferences were identified over the course of research undertaken by the FGC. Furthermore, opinions were voiced that "positive communication" should be used as a keyword for describing risk communication for disaster risk reduction. Others noted that, although the nuclear disaster occurred in Fukushima, it was important to communicate and build on this experience globally.

Noting that there are different definitions of risk communication and that affected communities face a variety of conditions, Dr. Akiko Sato mentioned that the phrase “positive communication” should be used with caution. Dr. Ana Mosneaga said that the case of Fukushima’s nuclear evacuees meet the UN definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, because there is a tendency among developed countries to regard IDPs as a concern exclusively associated with the developing world, she explained that many countries often lack appropriate policy and legal frameworks to address this issue. Considering that the likelihood of hazards that could trigger large-scale compound disasters is likely to increase as a result of climate change, she pointed out that developed countries also need to improve their understanding of disaster-induced displacement issues and develop appropriate policies to deal with them. Mr. Katsumi Miyaguchi and Ms. Hiromi Sato also introduced several examples of risk communication initiatives targeting children in schools.

The panel discussion ended with a round of concluding remarks from the panellists, who mentioned the importance of providing accurate information, understanding that risk perception is ultimately a matter of individual subjectivity, the need for support measures until affected people feel safe, awareness that there is no shortcut and that recovery and reconstruction takes time, an emphasis on public involvement throughout the process, and the value of continuing to analyse the situation and sharing the findings from Fukushima in order to ensure that lessons from the nuclear disaster are learned in Japan as well as internationally.