

Rebuilding Trust after Fukushima

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Human Security and Japan's Triple Disaster

Responding to the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and
Fukushima nuclear crisis

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Key Points

- Communication failures during the Fukushima crisis → breakdown in trust
 - Lack of trust has made rebuilding much more difficult
 - Trust especially important for nuclear issues
- Trust can only be rebuilt through time and engagement
 - Greater transparency and accountability required
- Need to focus more on social dimensions of recovery
 - Radiation is a social issue, not just about ‘facts’
- Fukushima accident representative of the kind of complex disasters societies will increasingly face



Learning from Fukushima

- ‘Triple disaster’ of 11 March 2011 unprecedented, and Japan did much right, but need to learn from shortcomings
- Transition to recovery has been very slow and uneven
 - Still more than 118,000 evacuees from the nuclear accident
 - Future of many evacuees and residents remains unclear
- Fear about the future
 - Uncertain, ongoing nature of nuclear accident
 - Worried about future health issues
 - Mental health problems – stress, anxiety, PTSD, stigma
- Fukushima demonstrated deficiencies in preparedness for responding to nuclear accidents
 - Japan is returning to nuclear power, need to be better prepared
 - Globally, use of nuclear power is likely to expand because of demands for low carbon energy sources



An inadequate response

- Institutional framework for dealing with a nuclear accident broke down during crisis
- Problems with information flow
 - Between TEPCO and central government
 - Between different levels of government
 - Between TEPCO, government and public
 - Between Japan and international community
- Problems with evacuations
 - Inadequate planning for nuclear accident
 - Insufficient provision of information to affected people and local governments



A breakdown in trust

- Problems with communication during the crisis have made rebuilding more difficult
- 4 years later, distrust persists
 - Continued failure by TEPCO to be transparent and disclose information
 - Feeling that LDP government pushing to return to nuclear power and forgetting Fukushima accident
 - Decline in press freedom
 - 22nd → 53rd in 2013 Press Freedom Index because of restrictions in reporting on Fukushima
 - Lack of accountability for nuclear accident
 - Naoto Kan and DPJ only actors held responsible to date



Why accountability matters

- Independent investigations into Fukushima nuclear accident have identified major failings by TEPCO and government
 - To date, no criminal liability and very limited consequences for those responsible
- Not simply about punishment
 - 4 years later still strong feelings of anger and frustration
 - Feeling that burden being placed on victims
- Accountability makes actors responsible for behaviour and decisions
 - 2015 Global Assessment Report on DRR identifies importance of accountability
 - Danger of moral hazard
- Return to nuclear power but concern lessons not being learned
- Accountability a necessary step in rebuilding trust



Rebuilding without trust

- Radiation is not just a technical problem, it is a social issue
- Challenges with communicating information about the nuclear accident
 - Radiation elicits an unusually high level of fear among the general public
 - Highly scientific and technical nature of knowledge
 - Contestation over science surrounding radiation
 - Discrediting of nuclear expertise in Japan because of links with ‘nuclear village’ and ‘nuclear safety myth’
 - Non-experts commenting on technical matters
- Trust plays very important role in dealing with nuclear issues
- Problems with misinformation, rumours, confusion and difficulties in understanding severity of risks



Moving forward

- The Fukushima that existed on 10 March 2011 is lost forever
 - Challenge is how we can improve the lives of those affected
- Necessary step is rebuilding trust
 - More transparency from TEPCO and government
 - Greater accountability for nuclear accident
 - More engagement with concerns of local communities
 - Continued education about radiation
- Take lessons from previous nuclear accidents
 - Biggest impacts social and psychological
 - Some parts of population acutely vulnerable: women with young children, clean up workers



Preparing for 'na-tech' disasters

- Fukushima nuclear accident example of increasingly common risk
 - 'Na-tech' disaster: natural hazard triggering technological disaster
- Climate change increases 'na-tech' disaster risks
 - Extreme weather events becoming more severe and more common
 - Existing technological infrastructure not designed for this 'new normal'
 - Not just nuclear plants that are at risk: next time it could be a chemical factory or oil refinery
- Lessons from Fukushima go beyond nuclear power



Conclusions

- More emphasis needs to be placed on the social dimensions of rebuilding
- No easy solution for rebuilding trust
 - Takes time and engagement
 - Need to demonstrate lessons have been learned
 - Requires transparency and accountability
- Risk communication and education plays a central role
 - Experts and public figures should be more careful about how they communicate information and intervene
- Experiences of Fukushima relevant for DRR
 - Information provision during a disaster relevant not only for immediate response phase, also impacts rebuilding efforts
 - Need to avoid replacing ‘nuclear safety myth’ with ‘perfect safety myth’