Regeneration after The Damage Caused by The Nuclear Disaster — Reconstruction policies that help victims regain their dignity

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Evacuation orders are being lifted, but what is actually happening on the ground? Just the return of evacuees is not enough to rebuild lives. We need reconstruction policies that help individuals regain their dignity.

The suffering of the victims of the nuclear disaster

Often, disasters can remove their victims’ dignity. These victims lose their lives within the region up to that time, their role as members of society and as workers, their role within their family and its daily life, and many other things they have built up over time. And it is not just individuals who lose their dignity, but regions do so in the same way. Regions might lose that which makes their community have value, such as the richness of nature and daily life, or the brand on which the region prides itself.

In February 2017, the second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents took place, and the replies to this survey are notable for the number of people who filled in the “any other comments” section.¹ There were some 4,320 comments. In fact, over 40% of respondees added extra comments. A notable feature of these was the surprising variety of comments: including, the internal distress of disaster victims which they had little opportunity to talk about during their daily lives; frustration at not knowing when they could rebuild their lives; living as evacuees with no end in sight over six years after the earthquake; not being able to get used to life in their new homes; and anxiety about the future. I will share some of these.

“After the earthquake, I spent time as an evacuee in different prefectures and had to change job each time. I decided to make my life in Yamagata and build a house there, but I wasn’t able to find a job that suited me, and my income is unstable. Right now, I can live off compensation payments, but when I think about the future, I worry about how I’ll deal with money matters.” (A man in his 30s)

“When I look back at the last six years or so, it makes me depressed to see how desolate Namie has become. I have realized that I cannot return to Namie. Yet, I feel very guilty towards the people who are working hard to rebuild the town. I really am full of regret. Namie is a lovely and comfortable place

¹The second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents was an exhaustive survey covering the residents of seven towns and villages, with the exception of Hirono. These were Namie, Naraha, Tomioka, Futaba, Okuma, Kawauchi and Katsurao. A total 26,582 surveys were issued, of which 10,081 (37.9%) were completed. For more details please see the Fukushima Future Center for Regional Revitalization [http://fire.net.fukushima-u.ac.jp/blog/2017/09/12/%E5%9F%8E%E5%A4%84%EA%BC%81] report on the second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents (2017).
to live, with mountains, sea and rivers. It is absolutely mortifying.” (A man in his 60s)

“I am deeply pained by the death of my child. If it wasn’t for the accident and evacuation my son would certainly be alive. It seems like he was pushed to his death right after we started living apart. If our peaceful life in Futaba had continued nothing would have changed. I can’t tell you how much I regret that. Despite surviving the earthquake, he passed away. It was because our family lived apart that this happened. The nuclear accident destroyed our peaceful life. Was is a natural disaster? Or was is a man-made disaster?” (A woman in her 50s)

“The first couple of years after the earthquake I planned to go back to my hometown, but each time I returned I saw how it was deteriorating. Gradually, I began to realize that it would be impossible to go back. Also, our children have decided not to go back on account of our grandchildren. As parents, we are getting old, and we are worried about how we would live if we returned to our home town. In the end we decided to not return and make a home where we were evacuated in the hope that we’d have fewer things to worry about, even if only slightly. We are planning to return to our hometown occasionally for a change of mood. Or neighbors know that we are evacuees and we don’t have the same kind of relationships we did before.” (A man in his 70s)

These comments are filled with words expressing the pain of those who, due to the nuclear disaster, have lost their dignity and cannot live the lives they expected to live in their hometowns. Nor does this only apply to regions where government evacuation orders were issued. It is the same for those who voluntarily evacuated, i.e. evacuees from outside the emergency area. For example, Matsui Katsuhiro has meticulously collated ongoing interview surveys with nuclear disaster evacuees living in Niigata Prefecture. Via these personal interview surveys, he has made clear how evacuees from both outside as well as inside the emergency area have experienced a range of “loss.” As one interviewee puts it:

2 Please see “The loss of hometowns and the time required for recovery. Evacuation from the nuclear disaster to Niigata Prefecture and a sociological study of support measures.” (Matsui Katsuhiro, Toshindo, 2017.)
“Even now, five years afterwards, I don’t feel that my life has any grounding.” To borrow Matsui’s words, this expresses the pain of evacuees who continue to drift and “float around.”

Following the nuclear accidents, victims of the disasters were evacuated from Fukushima to all forty-seven prefectures, while they also went to around some 1,200 (70%) of Japan’s more than 1,700 cities, wards, towns and villages. During the evacuation’s peak more than 160,000 residents of Fukushima Prefecture were evacuated. At the time of writing (December 2017) there are around 17,000 evacuees within the prefecture, and around 34,000 outside, adding up to an approximate total of 51,000 people (see figure 1). It is difficult to picture this just from the numbers, but from the above we can appreciate that these are all individual lives damaged during seven years full of pain.

**Seven years later, disaster areas are seeing significant change. Moves to lift evacuation orders.**

Seven years after the earthquake, disaster-hit areas in Fukushima Prefecture are seeing significant change. Here are some recent notable examples. (1) From the end of March 2017, with the exception of some areas where returning is difficult, the extent of areas in which evacuation orders have been issued in the Soso (Soma and Futaba) region has been significantly revised. (All of Futaba-cho and Okuma-cho, however, is designated habitation restricted areas or preparation areas for lifting of evacuation order.) (2) Provision of housing to evacuees in Fukushima from outside the evacuation area (voluntary evacuees) ceased from March 2017. (3) In the Soma and Futaba region the building of temporary facilities for storage of radioactive materials has begun in earnest, while in the areas where returning is difficult the building of physical infrastructure such as “reconstruction bases” has also started. (4) The Reconstruction Agency will cease operation in 2020, so there are now discussions as to how ministries and agencies will deal with reconstruction in Fukushima after this date.

One major change is that evacuation orders have been lifted in many regions. Previously the areas were separated into three: (1) Difficult to return area; (2) Restricted residential area, and (3) Areas...
to which evacuation orders are ready to be lifted. The ability of residents to enter these areas was greatly restricted, and even if they could enter there were significant restrictions on what they could do. Because of this, for a number of years local authorities in disaster areas were not even able to do reconstruction work.

In response to this, on June 12, 2015 the Cabinet decided to issue a revised version of its policy, “Towards accelerated recovery from the nuclear disaster in Fukushima (Guidelines for Fukushima reconstruction).” According to this, the government’s conditions for lifting evacuation orders were as follows. (1) “That the air dose rate is confirmed as less than an estimated yearly accumulated radiation dose of 20 millisieverts. (2) “That the infrastructure necessary for daily life, such as electricity, gas, water and sewer services, main transport networks, and communications, as well as related medical, caregiving, and postal services, for the most part be restored. Also, that sufficient progress be made on decontamination work, with a main focus on an environment for children to live. (3) That sufficient discussion takes places with the residents of the prefecture, cities, towns and villages. Based on this, the government coordinated with municipalities where evacuation orders had been issued, held discussion meetings for residents in various areas, and worked to create a consensus for lifting evacuation orders. In addition to the areas where evacuation orders had already been lifted, i.e. Tamura (April 2014), Naraha (September 2015), Katsurao (June 2016, partial), Kawauchi (October 2014 / June 2016), Minamisoma (July 2016, partial), they were also lifted in Namie (March 2017, partial) Kawamata (March 2017) Iitate (March 2017, partial), and Tomioka (April 2017, partial), making around 32,000 people who now live in areas where evacuation orders have been lifted (see figure 2).

When we see the rapidly changing developments in disaster areas there is a tendency to criticize what we might call a hasty focus on policy measures aimed at sending evacuees home, but the reality is not that simple. The actual situation is that most disaster area municipalities responded by carefully studying whether the conditions for lifting the evacuation orders were sufficient to ensure residents’ peace of mind. For example, in 2012 the village of Kawauchi quickly moved ahead with the return of residents, but part of the village was an area where evacuation orders had been issued, and the village was very cautious about when the order should be lifted. The village set up its own committee to study the lifting of evacuation orders and investigated the issue from the perspectives of a safe level of radiation that wouldn’t cause worry, progress on decontamination, and improvements to the living environment such as infrastructure for daily life. Since the airborne radiation measurements taken by the Ministry of the Environment were limited to three locations in residential areas, the village conducted its own measurements and took readings that were more detailed than the national airborne radiation standards. Thanks to these measurements actually conducted by the village itself, this grassroots initiative on the part of residents made it clear that there was a section of homes with more radiation, and this became the basis for requesting “follow-up decontamination.”

Also, when it comes to building consensus, there are examples of municipalities offering a firm response to the government’s efforts to rapidly lift evacuation orders. Initially, the town of Tomioka was presented with the “January 2017 plan to lift evacuation orders.” But the town considered the government’s policy of quickly lifting evacuation orders to be “premature,” and refused to accept the plan. Later, the government conveyed a plan to lift evacuation orders on March 31, 2017, but the town
hall and town assembly agreed to lift the orders on April 1, 2017. As we can see here, municipalities in disaster-hit areas did not respond by unquestioningly accepting the government’s policy to lift evacuation orders. Instead, they considered the actual situation, paid attention to the views of local residents and made careful decisions.

So, how many residents have now returned since the lifting of evacuation orders? Table 1 shows population change in the twelve disaster-hit cities, towns and villages where evacuation orders were issued. We can see a trend where the resident return ratio is higher the earlier evacuation orders were lifted for a municipality. Since (at the time of writing) only a few months have passed since evacuation orders were lifted for Namie and Iitate (March 2017) and Tomioka (April 1, 2017) we need to keep an eye on how things develop, but all three municipalities contain areas where returning is difficult, so

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3 It is not easy to evaluate the resident return ratio. It is usual to make the population the denominator, but this does not take into account ordinary population fluctuations. For this reason, when we take into account fluctuations caused by natural population decrease the calculation of the return ratio differs. See “The current situation and future issues for municipalities after the lifting of evacuation orders” by Kabuki Masao (Web version, Kenchikutouron, Vol. 13, Autumn 2017) for detailed information on later population changes based on interview surveys with municipalities [http://touron.aij.or.jp/2017/08/4361, Japanese only].
progress should not necessarily be considered slow. However, there is another story here, too. Even when the government’s three conditions for lifting of evacuation orders have been met, there are many situations where the actual conditions for returning to everyday life in the regions are not in place. Figure 3 shows how (according to the current housing situation as recorded by the second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents) several years after the disaster few households are able to say that they “can live without problems.” Rather, 50% to 60% of those surveyed are either “in a situation where they need to make home repairs to live” or “are in a situation where they need to rebuild their homes to live.”

![Figure 3: Housing situation at the time of the earthquake (by region)](image)

Figure 3: Housing situation at the time of the earthquake (by region)

In disaster-affected areas, it is common to hear people lament the fact that returnees are mainly elderly. Yet, while it is true that overall the general trend is that returnees are mainly elderly, when we look at the situation in detail that is not the only issue. Based on surveys of disaster-hit areas, Yokemoto and others (2015) discuss the “unequal recovery” that followed from the nuclear disaster. They point out that, even in the village of Kawauchi, which has been described as a “front runner for

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4 See “Why did the nuclear disasters result in unequal recovery? ‘Human recovery’ after the Fukushima accident. Towards regional revival.” Yokemoto Masafumi, Watanabe Toshihiko. (Minerva Shobo, 2015.)
reconstruction,” returnees are mainly in their late fifties, while for those in their early 90s and older more have remained evacuees than have returned. They describe the situation on p. 14 of their book. “The typical image of returnees to Kawauchi is of an older person who has work in the village or who has already retired, who is not very worried about their health, and who can drive.” The dispersal of family members has worsened due to the disasters and there is little hope of the support from relations that has kept villages going to date. Those that need nursing care or assistance (even elderly people) have no choice but to remain where they have been evacuated. The reality is that returnees are mainly independent elderly, but it is not necessarily true that all elderly people are returning.

The same applies to the younger generations. If as evacuees they have made progress in putting down solid roots, say via work or their children’s schooling, they won’t necessarily choose to immediately return. This isn’t just a case of wanting or not wanting to return home. Rather, we could say that they are making careful decisions in accordance with their own life plans.

The difficult-to-see path to rebuilding lives, and the worsening “recovery gap”

One of the most significant and distinct features of this nuclear accident is the extreme difficulty of setting out a plan to rebuild residents’ lives. Even several years after the disasters, damage is continuing and getting worse. Looking at the current situation, meanwhile, over the last few years the situations facing victims have diverged, and a “gap” has arisen among victims themselves. We can say that the nuclear accident has caused extensive loss and confusion, and it is not a disaster after which it is easy for people to rebuild their former lives. I would like to touch on some facts related to this.

The first is the surge in earthquake-related deaths in Fukushima Prefecture (disaster-related deaths). Figure 4 shows the number of earthquake-related deaths in three affected prefectures following the Great East Japan Earthquake. When we compare the three prefectures, the large number of deaths in Fukushima Prefecture stands out. Incidentally, the number of directly related deaths in Fukushima Prefecture is 1,605 (as of January 15, 2018), so we can see that the number of earthquake-related deaths is higher. When we consider that earthquake-related deaths in Miyagi Prefecture and Iwate Prefecture are around one tenth the number of directly related deaths, the large number of earthquake-related deaths in Fukushima Prefecture stands out.
out even more. Viewing this data chronologically, we can more fully understand the characteristics of this phenomenon. **Figure 5** chronologically plots earthquake-related deaths in the three prefectures affected by the earthquake. We can see that while earthquake-related deaths in Miyagi Prefecture and Iwate Prefecture are concentrated in approximately the first six months after the earthquake, in the case of Fukushima Prefecture, after six months the number of earthquake-related deaths is still increasing, and even after one or two years the high number of earthquake-related deaths continues.

Incidentally, earthquake-related deaths are tied to the issuance of disaster condolence payments, and cities, towns, and villages set up examining committees to confirm these. In the case of earthquake-related deaths in recent disasters, the so-called “Nagaoka standard” (based on the 2004 Chuetsu Earthquake in Niigata Prefecture) has often been referred to. This standard relates to the time that has passed between the disaster and a death. In the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake too, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare issued the Nagaoka standard as reference information to those responsible for managing disaster condolence payments in various prefectures. As explained above, however, even six months after the Great East Japan Earthquake damage was still occurring.

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5 There are also cases where prefectures set up disaster condolence payment investigation committees at the request of cities, towns and villages.

6 The Nagaoka standard uses the time of death as one criterion, and divides deaths into the following categories: (1) Deaths within one week of the earthquake are presumed to be earthquake-related; (2) Deaths within one month are presumed highly likely to be earthquake-related; (3) Deaths that occur over one month after the earthquake are presumed unlikely to be earthquake-related; (4) Deaths that occur six months or more after the earthquake are presumed not to be earthquake-related.

People were still dying, so it was necessary to revise the standard.

In the case of unprecedented and huge disasters such as the nuclear accident, and particularly in Fukushima Prefecture, deaths can be now be confirmed as earthquake-related deaths even after six months or more. Furthermore, following the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake, the City of Kumamoto did not use these Nagaoka standard time categories.\(^8\) In this way, just by looking at earthquake-related deaths we can see the huge scale of damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear accident, as well as how it continues and gets worse. In 2014, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations proposed that the government lay down new standards for confirming earthquake-related deaths, requesting revision on the grounds that ascertaining these deaths on the basis of time of death related factors such as the Nagaoka standard was “extremely restrictive.”\(^9\)

Secondly, as time goes on, issues related to “work” have become a factor in the expanding “recovery gap.” The results of the second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents mentioned above also demonstrate this. In answers to a question about “work” before and after the earthquake, 31.9% of respondees in the working age population (15 to 64) were “unemployed” after the earthquake. This is three times as high as before the earthquake (10.3%). The problem is even more severe for those aged 65 and above: unemployment increased from 44.1% before the earthquake to 76% after. From this too, it is apparent that insufficient progress has been made towards rebuilding people’s lives (see figure 6).

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8 Mainichi shimbun, June 14, 2016.
9 See “Statement towards restoring the basic human rights of disaster victims and other victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, and realization of de-nuclearization,” a resolution passed at a general meeting of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations (May 30, 2014).
This situation is clear from other surveys. The Fukushima Soso Reconstruction Corporation (Fukushima Soso Government and Private Sector Reconstruction Team) is a body created following the earthquake to assist businesses in twelve cities, towns and villages affected by the disaster restart operations. This organization conducted a survey involving interviews with around 8,000 businesses in twelve cities, towns and villages hit by the disasters, and collected information on topics such as their intention to restart operations. Although there were considerable differences between the municipalities depending whether evacuation orders had been lifted or not, overall 28% said they had “already completed restart of operations in [their] hometown, or [were] continuing unbroken operations,” while 25% said they had “completed restart of operations in [their] evacuation location.” Meanwhile, 40% were “closed” and 5% “will not restart operations (cessation of business)”; so nearly half had not restarted their business operations (see table 2). The organization also surveyed whether farmers intended to restart their agricultural operations, finding that only 22% had “completed restart” while almost 80% had “not restarted” (see figure 7). Among those who had “not restarted” (those with “no intention of restarting” or “not sure if intending to restart”) the most common reasons were “aging population and lack of local workforce” (43%) and “will not return home” (37%) (see table 3). From this, we can perceive a situation during the long period living as evacuees in which there is little sign that those who were expected to one day take over farms will return home, and in which the current farmers have little prospect of restarting agricultural operations themselves.

### Table 2: Fukushima Prefecture: Intention to restart business operations by disaster area city, town and village (as of January 31, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Already completed restart of operations in hometown or continuing unbroken operations</th>
<th>Completed restart of operations in evacuation location</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Will not restart operations (cessation of business)</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total (number of business owners visited)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kashima-ku, Minamisoma City</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haramachi-ku, Minamisoma City</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odaka-ku, Minamisoma City</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirano Town</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamura City</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawauchi Village</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naraha Town</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawamata Town</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katsurao Village</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itate Village</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomioka Town</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namie Town</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okuma Town</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futaba Town</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4,698</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Created by the author based on documents from the Fukushima Soso Government and Private Sector Reconstruction Team
The third issue is “housing.” The second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents also investigates the current housing situation. The results of this survey showed that 57.4% of people in Futaba had “bought or rebuilt [their] own house (including apartments),” while the figures for Okuma were 55.4%, Namie 46.8% and Tomioka 46.6%. For the majority of municipalities located in areas where returning is difficult, around half of residents had bought a new house in their evacuation location during the long period of time living as evacuees (see figure 8). Incidentally, this survey took place from February to March 2017. For that reason, evacuation orders had not yet been lifted in Namie and Tomioka and we can assume that those who “bought or rebuilt [their] own house (including apartments)” did so in the evacuation locations rather than their hometowns. From this we can see how, due to the length of time spent living in their evacuation locations, evacuees have continued to lay down roots by buying homes.

![Figure 7: Current situation and intentions regarding agricultural operations by farmers in twelve cities, towns and villages affected by the disasters](image)

Source: “Summary of results from door-to-door visits to farmers in twelve cities, towns and villages affected by the nuclear disaster”: Fukushima Soso Government and Private Sector Reconstruction Team.
### Table 3: No intention to restart / reasons for uncertainty (each farmer could give a maximum three reasons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues (reasons)</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>percentage *1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aging population and lack of local workforce</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not return home</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient provision of equipment or facilities</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with securing farming land</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with securing sales channels (low prices, reputational damage due to disasters etc.)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other *2</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 This percentage corresponds to 600 farmers who had no intention to restart operations, or were undecided as to whether they would restart operations.

*2 The 309 farmers in the other category are those with no intention to restart operations or who are undecided as to whether they will restart operations, but who gave no reason.

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![Figure 8: Current housing by region](image)

**Source:** Second survey into the situation affecting Futaba residents

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**Multiple path recovery and the restoration of “dignity”**

An important issue for recovery and regeneration following the nuclear disaster is enabling those who have lived as evacuees from the nuclear disaster for long periods to recover their dignity, become part
of the regions where they live and to fulfill a role in society. Yet, there is more than one way for people to rebuild their lives. Guaranteeing multiple paths to recovery is an important perspective on the issue. In these cases, even if the paths taken to rebuilding lives are all different, the ultimate goal is that everyone should recover their dignity.

Internationally, IDPs (internally displaced persons), i.e. those who move either domestically or internationally to flee the social impact of wars, disasters and other events, have become a major issue. IDPs are defined as “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” According to a survey by the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), as of the end of 2014 there were 38 million people who had been displaced due to war and violence.

In 1998 the United Nations issued its Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to respond to this issue. Since the English version of these guiding principles were issued in 1998, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and others have translated them into fifty-three different languages, including Japanese (as of 2014). According to Hataka Kei, “through its work, the UN has distributed the guidelines all over the world; and one might say they have become a “bible” for the protection of human rights during international efforts to deal with IDPs.” He praises the proactive role the guidelines play, in particular that: “The guiding principles have become a foundation, and related legal frameworks have been established in various countries that deal with IDPs. Although they are not legally binding, the guiding principles have gained the voluntary endorsement of various governments and function in a similar way to a treaty” (p. 60).

The guiding principles also state that, “Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence” (Principle 6). As well as forbidding arbitrary forced displacement due to changes to ethnic, religious or racial composition of the population, military conflict, unjust large-scale development works, and disaster evacuation that is not necessary to ensure the safety and health of those affected, it is required that, “Prior to any decision requiring the displacement of persons, the authorities concerned shall ensure that all feasible alternatives are explored in order to avoid displacement altogether” (Principle 7). In cases when displacement does occur, the second clause of this principle requires that, “The authorities undertaking such displacement shall ensure, to the greatest practicable extent, that proper accommodation is provided to the displaced persons, that such displacements are effected in satisfactory conditions of safety, nutrition, health and hygiene, and that members of the same family are not separated.”

So, what happens after displacement actually occurs? The guiding principles state the following, under the heading: “Principles relating to return, resettlement and reintegration.”

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10 For a detailed discussion of the IDP issues, please see Hataka Kei’s “International protection of IDPs — the possibilities and limits of cross-border humanitarian activities.” (Keiso Shobo, 2015.)
Principle 28

1. Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.

2. Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of internally displaced persons in the planning, management, and implementation of their return or resettlement and reintegration.

In depending on these internationally discussed guiding principles, we certainly should not imagine that they only apply to the “return” of residents. Rather, they require that authorities (such as nations or regional governments) work to allow “internally displaced persons [to] resettle voluntarily in another part of the country” or to “reintegrate.” We can appreciate that there is certainly not only one path to rebuilding peoples’ lives. The guidelines approve diverse options such as returning home or resettlement and reintegration into another area. They also indicate that efforts should be made to ensure the “full participation” of the actual victims in the drawing up, management and implementation of plans for reconstruction or reintegration into the areas where they are living.

Incidentally, the guidelines set a precondition for the planned return, resettlement or social reintegration of IDPs, which is to “allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity.” In other words, it indicates that the wishes of individuals should be respected, that efforts should be made to ensure safety, and that “dignity” should be guaranteed. In order to rebuild lives, “return” is not the ultimate goal. Irrespective of where they live, people must to be able to live full lives as residents of those regions.

In 2014, I was involved in the drafting of “Recommendations on the reconstruction of livelihood and housing for long-term evacuees as the result of the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident” (September 30, 2014), published by the Science Council of Japan’s Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Support Committee Fukushima Reconstruction Support Subcommittee. Instead of a single path to reconstruction, this proposed “multiple paths to recovery,” in which the rebuilding of victims’ lives would be the absolute priority, and in which they could choose between return or resettlement (see figure 9).11

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11 Please see: “Proposals regarding the life circumstances and rebuilding of housing for long-term evacuees from the Tokyo Electric Power Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station accident.” (Science Council of Japan, 2014.)
It is desirable that disaster victims and evacuees feel that they are rebuilding their lives, that through their own choices they achieve social participation in the societies where they live, and that their civic rights are protected. In order to achieve this, it is essential that they can participate in planning, management and implementation of the reconstruction plans that affect them. They should not be treated as “victims” but as individuals and their dignity preserved even when a disaster occurs. Meanwhile, the very process of recovering the dignity that is lost due to a disaster is “true reconstruction.” We need reconstruction policies that help recover this dignity.

Translated from “Tokushu 1 Fukuichi higai, sonogo — ‘Kokoro no josen’ ni aragau / Genshiryoku saigai kara no saisei — ‘Songen’ wo kaifukusurukoto ga dekiru fukko seisak wo (Special Feature 1 Special feature 1: Damage caused by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, and fight for “spiritual decontamination” that came next / Regeneration after the damage caused by the nuclear disaster. Reconstruction policies that help victims regain their dignity),” THE TOSHI MONDAI (Municipal Problems), March 2018, pp. 8-20. (Courtesy of The Tokyo Institute for Municipal Research) [March 2018]

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