



Asia Pacific Bulletin

US-Japan Cooperation in Disaster Recovery and Regional Development

BY MAMPEI HAYASHI

In 2017, three category 4 hurricanes — Harvey, Wilma, and Maria — made landfall in the continental United States and Puerto Rico within a matter of weeks, reminding us once again what Mother Nature is capable of and what a serious, ongoing threat large-scale disasters pose for civil society. This is a threat that Japan knows all too well, having endured major earthquakes and a Tsunami in recent years as well as major flooding and landslides caused by typhoons and heavy rains.

In recent years, the United States and Japan have expanded their alliance to cooperate in the emergency response and early recovery phases following a number of disasters in the Asia Pacific. In the case of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan, for example, US forces and Japan's Self-Defense Forces worked in close collaboration to assist survivors. The countries' development agencies, JICA and USAID, and nonprofit sectors have also worked together to play a significant role in the early recovery phases.

Recently, increasing attention is being paid in the field to the long-term recovery phase. As social vulnerabilities (e.g. poverty, unemployment, stagnant economy) can significantly hamper survivors' ability to recover their way of life, reducing existing vulnerabilities through economic development is a vital strategy to support survivors. However, the long-term recovery phase to date has not been a priority in US-Japan cooperative efforts.

Two examples highlight the importance of long-term recovery through economic development. In the first case — the 1995 Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake in Japan — demographic and industrial shifts meant that a quick-fix strategy of restoring structures and property could not guarantee the revitalization of the affected society and economy. In light of that concern, local governments put forward a basic philosophy of disaster recovery policy called "fukko" — recovery and development — and created a 10-year master plan. Unfortunately, the so-called "Phoenix Plan" failed to incorporate effective policy measures for economic development and focused on restoration only. Local initiatives, including a strong proposal by local governments and intellectuals to adopt an ambitious economic zone, were rejected by central government bureaucrats and Diet members without a serious policy debate. As a result, the area's economy remains stagnant today, two decades after the earthquake.

A similarly difficult recovery process can be seen in the United States following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The Data Center (an NGO) points out that the recovery process is still underway more than a decade later. The population of New Orleans has not returned to pre-Katrina levels, and per capita GDP has been stagnant except for a few years after the hurricane. The one emerging industry after Katrina has been the tourism sector, as New Orleans has seen a soaring number of visitors. However, that alone has been insufficient to drive recovery at either the individual or the regional levels since the productivity of tourism-related jobs is generally low. The region needs to

Mampei Hayashi, Associate Professor at the Kansai University of International Relations, explains that "the United States and Japan have expanded their alliance to cooperate in the emergency response and early recovery phases following a number of disasters in the Asia Pacific."

The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the US Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options.

Asia Pacific Bulletin | January 3, 2018

“Finding ways to integrate regional economic development plans into disaster recovery policy would greatly improve the long-term impact of US-Japan bilateral cooperation.”

generate productive industries that can supply quality jobs in order to support long-term recovery.

Thus, the United States and Japan each have clear cases demonstrating how critical economic development is in the long-term recovery phase. On top of that, recent empirical studies have shown interesting evidence with regard to disaster mitigation: they found that developed countries with higher income levels, education levels, and institutional quality seem to experience less human damage from natural disasters. This may reflect the fact that as the economy develops, capital stocks (including resilient infrastructure) will be accumulated and higher security standards (building codes and evacuation strategies) will be adopted. This finding suggests that pursuing regional development not only supports individual and regional recovery but also enhances the resilience of the affected society.

Both Japan and the United States are subject to frequent, large-scale natural disasters, and thus have a natural incentive to identify more effective approaches to disaster recovery and mitigation as a way to assist both their own populations and the broader international community.

To date, the two countries have undertaken joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) efforts in the context of their alliance, which is committed to ensuring the stability and security of the Asia-Pacific region — one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. But as noted above, the long-term recovery phase has garnered much less attention in bilateral efforts. More specifically, the role of regional economic development in the context of the long-term recovery and mitigation phases has yet to be recognized adequately. Finding ways to integrate regional economic development plans into disaster recovery policy would therefore greatly improve the long-term impact of US-Japan bilateral cooperation.

There are three approaches that could usefully be considered within the US-Japan cooperation framework. First, assistance measures through the early recovery phase should be implemented in such a way as to establish a fundamental basis for the subsequent long-term recovery and mitigation phases. In that respect, the US and Japanese together, in close consultation with HA/DR and public planning experts from the two countries, representatives from local governments that have dealt with disaster recovery, corporations, and nonprofits, to develop a “master plan”—a general template that informs the recovery process—and then situate their own cooperative contribution within the context of that plan.

Second, when applying the master plan to a specific disaster, local initiatives toward “fukko” action should be respected by both governments. Making use of local expertise should be given priority since any recovery plan that fails to reflect local voices and circumstances is likely to be ineffective, resulting in a stagnant recovery of the society and economy.

Third, both governments need to establish long-term mechanisms within the alliance framework for monitoring and supporting affected areas. As seen in the Kobe and New Orleans cases, it takes much longer than most people expect to achieve a full recovery after a devastating disaster. And as noted above, mitigating the impact of future disasters requires not just recovery but ongoing economic development. Lessons and findings on long-term recovery should be accumulated and shared in and between Japan and the United States to enhance and refine measures for disaster response and mitigation policy.

Mampei Hayashi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Administration at Kansai University of International Studies. He can be contacted at Mampei312@gmail.com.

The *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (APB) series is produced by the East-West Center in Washington.

APB Series Editor: Dr. Satu Limaye
APB Series Coordinator: Peter Valente

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the East-West Center or any organization with which the author is affiliated.