Leadership and Social Innovation initiatives at the Grassroots during Crises

Maria M. IKEDA, Miharu MATSUMARU

ABSTRACT
Empathy breeds social innovation and good leadership. This brief note is an initial exploration of the enablers of social innovation at the grassroots level where it matters most in a crisis. We focus on the need for individuals or groups who can implement plans of action that help whole communities respond and recover from a crisis. The distinguishing features of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake are compared with profiles of the leaders commended for their selfless acts in crisis response and management.

KEYWORDS: Crisis response, Social innovation, Leadership, Empathy, Selflessness, Grassroots initiatives

1 INTRODUCTION
In a crisis, many people are faced with extraordinary problems that prevent them from continuing their normal daily activities. This causes disruption in the community and society in general, thus, the need for socially innovative ideas and activities to help improve the situation. Most people believe that social innovation is irrelevant to ordinary folks like us and is mostly the task for the government or large organizations. But after the March 11 earthquake last year, we learned about the essence of social innovation. In our class, we discussed the questions: “What does empathy mean?” and “What can we do for those affected by the Tohoku Earthquake?” Learning to be aware and to empathize with the troubles of others can start the wheels of social innovation to turn.

In crisis situations, most social systems will stop functioning or fall into confusion. At the same time, the weaknesses of the systems will be exposed. It is when our society grapples with a difficult crisis that we get the chance to change the system to effectively adapt to a crisis situation. And to make the changes work, we need people who can make decisions quickly during a crisis and perform the role of a leader.

2 WHAT IS LEADERSHIP? WHO CAN BECOME A TRUE LEADER?
There is no doubt that a great leader is one who has the ability to influence people to take action.

Maria M. Ikeda is Associate Professor at the Institute for Policy Analysis and Social Innovation and the University of Hyogo School of Economics.

Miharu Matsumaru is a second year student enrolled at the University of Hyogo School of Economics in Japan.

But in order to take good command of people, what skills does a leader need? What do members of a community look for in their leader? In our opinion, there are some qualifications which are needed to be a true leader. First, a good leader is a person who has experienced the hard knocks of life. The tougher the experiences, the more aware and sensitive he or she becomes to other people's pain. Second, a good leader becomes a better leader when he knows when and how to follow others. People who always want to be on top are likely to be arrogant, and consequently his followers will turn away from him in time. Third, a good leader is a person who does not fear being disliked. A leader has to be strong-willed in executing a plan of action to change the system. Inevitably, a leader is likely to be disliked to some extent. This should be the chance for the leader to listen and learn from other people’s opinions. Fourth, a good leader is a person who knows the importance of process. He does not keep a one-track mind fixed simply on getting results but he maintains a balance by paying attention to the needs of the people in his community. Finally, a good leader is a person who always puts himself second after others, that is to say, one who is selfless. The leader who can make sacrifices motivates others to follow his example and to trust him more.

The following are two stellar examples of selflessness shown during the Tohoku earthquake. A selfless act was done by Miki Endo on March 11th 2011. In a town called Minamisanriku, a fishing port close to the epicenter of the 9.0 earthquake, she used a loudspeaker to warn residents of the imminent tsunami and to urge them to evacuate to higher ground. By relentlessly doing this, she eventually drowned. She was only 24 years old. The Economist magazine reports: “Television footage shows the rising sea approaching, with her haunting voice echoing over the waves.”

The second example is the Fukushima 50, a group of people who decided to stay and work in the Fukushima nuclear power plant at the height of the nuclear explosion crisis putting their lives at great risk. Most of them are veterans who have worked in the nuclear industry for decades and they believed their mission was to do their jobs well to lead Japan away from a worsening crisis. In our minds, they exhibited leadership by putting the greater good before their own personal fears or concerns.

3 A DIFFERENT TIME, A DIFFERENT PLACE

The March 11 earthquake reminded many people of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. The table that follows compares the two earthquake disasters in recent Japanese history.

The numbers are daunting. This table highlights the fact that these two earthquakes occurred in very different circumstances of time and place. The epicenter of the 1995 earthquake was in the city of Kobe. According to statistics, 90% of those who perished in the 1995 earthquake, which occurred early morning when most people were preparing for work or school, was crushed to death in their homes or beneath heavy structures that crumbled. On the other hand, the epicenter of the 2011 earthquake was off the Pacific Coast of Miyagi Prefecture causing the seabed to shift and triggering the tsunami which drowned 92.5% of the people who died in this disaster.

Two days after the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, backup police units were dispatched to Tohoku but the number was still not enough to respond to the needs of the victims. Leaders of communities were heavily challenged. Where needed help was nowhere to be found, leaders had to quickly determine the issues of the highest priority and also had to courageously move forward and make decisions for their communities.

---

Table 1. Tale of Two Great Earthquakes in Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Great East Japan Earthquake</th>
<th>Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Tohoku region in Northeastern Japan (mainly Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima Prefectures)</td>
<td>Hanshin region in Western Japan (mainly Kobe &amp; Awaji in Hyogo Prefecture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date/Time</strong></td>
<td>11 March 2011, 2:46 p.m.</td>
<td>17 Jan 1995, 5:46 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magnitude (Richter scale)</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of quake-affected area</strong></td>
<td>36,000 sq. km</td>
<td>8,400 sq. km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estimated size of police forces dispatched</strong></td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death toll (No. of people missing)</strong></td>
<td>15,854 (3,276)⁴</td>
<td>5,502 (2)⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estimated damages</strong></td>
<td>16 to 25 trillion yen (US$185 to US$308 billion)</td>
<td>10 trillion yen (US$122 billion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Relief Funds Donations</strong></td>
<td>310.05 billion yen (US$3.79 billion)</td>
<td>100.67 billion yen (US$1.2 billion)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
- Japan Red Cross website. *Higashinihon daishinsai gienkin no uketsuke oyobi Sōkin jōkyō no go hōkoku* (Status report of Great East Japan Earthquake Donations and Remittances).

The table above shows there were relatively more law enforcers dispatched during the Great Awaji Hanshin Earthquake mainly because the devastation was concentrated in a densely populated metropolitan area. At that time, the person who was commended for his emergency relief activities at the grassroots was Taro Goto, the deputy mayor of Ashiya. Goto built his career not by staying in his office all day but by being in the field meeting and talking with people all the time. This is exactly the reason why he was able to grasp the crisis situation and apply his past experiences in the field in deciding the plan of action needed by various communities under his jurisdiction. Through this example, we can see the importance of a rich stock of experiences that make effective leaders understand and empathize with the plight of others.

Many people, who saw what happened in Tohoku on television or on the Internet, took the initiative to organize activities and send the needed help and resources to Tohoku. There were notably a good number of grassroots initiatives created in the aftermath of these two earthquake disasters. However, in 1995, information technology was not as developed as it is now in Japan. The utilization of the Internet and information technology tools is a distinguishing feature of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake. Several fund-raising activities in Japan and all over the world were done through *crowdfunding* on the Internet. Various websites were posted online for specific purposes. Websites like *Google crisis response* were set up immediately after the earthquake struck and collected information and donations for immediate earthquake relief activities. People anywhere in the world with internet access can go online to make a donation using a credit card from a minimum amount of US$100 and all proceeds are turned over to the Japan Red Cross donation account. The Crisis response team maintained the website until December 2011. Other organizations like the Nippon Foundation are

---

⁴ National Police Agency of Japan, as of March 2, 2012.
⁵ Ibid, as of April 24, 1995.
⁶ Japan Red Cross, as of March 1, 2012.
⁷ Ibid., as of January 31, 1996.
also seeking donations for its Northeastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund which aims to “provide both immediate and middle to long-term support to ensure a full recovery of the disaster-struck areas, in an accountable and timely manner.”  The Japan Times reported that by April 28, 2011, the Japanese Red Cross had received more than 166 billion yen in donations—surpassing the total amount of charity proceeds after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake. As of early March 2012, the Japanese Red Cross announced on its homepage that the donations from all over Japan have totaled over 310 billion yen. This does not include the funds totaling over 17.5 billion yen from individuals and organizations in 93 countries who sent donations through the various international chapters of the Red Cross. The Japan Red Cross has extended the donation period for the benefit of the Tohoku earthquake victims until end of September 2012.

During the 1995 earthquake, the Internet was still in its infancy and information sources were limited to conventional mass media like the radio, television and newspapers. However the spontaneous response for support for the 2011 earthquake victims displayed a growing number of individuals who were capable of using social media as a tool for disaster response. Some groups posted online bulletin boards to inform others of their status and whereabouts right after the earthquake last March. Other websites like Google’s Person Finder and Picasa allowed people to volunteer by posting pictures of handwritten lists of people in evacuation centers so that other volunteers can transcribe and digitizing these lists to posting them on the Web. Similarly “Anpi Report” of Yusuke Wada, a web developer and with the help of volunteers rounded up through Twitter and Facebook organized information of missing individuals on the Web. Indeed, several nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups and social enterprises led by a new breed of young, tech savvy leaders of social innovation are gathering information, organizing activities and mobilizing resources not only for disaster relief but also to revive industries and communities heavily damaged by the earthquake and tsunami. This ongoing study will proceed to examine in more detail how information communication technology can further be utilized as a tool supporting the disaster recovery activities in the Tohoku region of socially innovative leaders in the medium and long-term. The second phase of this study will explore the availability of information and tools on the World Wide Web are giving people who want to make a difference a significant motivational push to embark on grassroots disaster recovery activities.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In crises, a good leader has to sift through and absorb information from various sources. And when information is lacking, actual experiences in the past play an important role to help leaders grasp the situation more accurately and make appropriate decisions for his community.

After the disaster last March, several people sympathized with the victims and some of them went to the northeast region as volunteers. Other people who could not go to Tohoku sacrificed their time and shared resources voluntarily to help the people affected by the disasters. Many people started to save electricity to divert energy resources to areas where it is needed most. Several nonprofit organizations are crowdsourcing on the Internet to organize volunteer activities, collect funds and information particularly to resuscitate industries and communities heavily damaged by the earthquake and tsunami. A second phase of this study will explore how the availability of information and tools on the World Wide Web are giving people who want to make a difference a significant motivational push to embark on micro-level disaster relief and recovery activities. With a growing collective consciousness to work together and aided by modern-day tools of information technology, a growing breed of socially conscious individuals and groups are leading various

8 The Nippon Foundation Website for the ROAD project Northeastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund.
10 The Sankei Shimbun and Sankei Digital. “Gienkin 3485 oku-en kaigai kara wa 175 oku-en chō” (348.5 billion yen total donations and 17.5 billion yen from overseas), February 24, 2012.
grassroots initiatives for revitalization of regions devastated by the earthquake and tsunami. We believe that there are more selfless people nowadays who are more aware of the current issues faced by society and take the initiative to promote the common good in Japan. We expect to see a healthy growth of future leaders who want to contribute to the collective reconstruction efforts after the Great East Japan earthquake.

5 REFERENCES


The Nippon Foundation Website for the ROAD project Northeastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund. Available at WWW: <http://road.nippon-foundation.or.jp/>. [Accessed 2012-03-08].