Social Innovation and Crisis Management

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On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan earthquake occurred registering a magnitude of 9 on the Richter scale. With a death toll of 20,000 people and an estimated economic loss ranging from 16 to 25 trillion yen, this unprecedented natural catastrophe has caused Japan widespread destruction.

There are certain limitations related to the application of standardized rules and systems for handling various problems or issues exposed in the process of reconstruction. It is inevitable that we should be flexible in applying programs, and establishing new rules and mechanisms efficiently for the reconstruction process. Basically, we should use existing systems to flexibly implement restoration and reconstruction measures. However, in considering the scale of damage that transcends beyond our imagination, the diversity within heavily damaged areas, and the variation of restoration methods and reconstruction speed, there is definitely a need to eliminate standardized regulations applicable during ordinary times, and establish flexible regulations, which are suitable for actual situations in each area or region.

Furthermore, it is also inevitable that we should establish radical rules that surpass existing systems to accelerate the reconstruction of regions. This regional reconstruction is presently ongoing under the deadlocked condition of the Japanese economy. By establishing new economic systems that reduce established rights or constraints, or rather, by setting a breakthrough of the stagnant situation, we can discover a vision for regenerating the economy in stricken areas.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that dealing with crisis effectively and flexibly is the essence of social innovation.

The world is filled with danger and crises. It is, of course, important not only to prepare well and flexibly for a foreseen crisis and prevent it from reoccurring, but we can also minimize damage and avoid it from spreading after “the event” has occurred. It is essential for us to reestablish social systems for “disaster reduction,” and to implement programs appropriately.

In the second issue of the Japan Social Innovation Journal, the articles included in this issue describe how people have responded to the “crisis” experienced in various parts of the world, and the perspective of recovery in view of the current situation in Japan which is now facing the challenges of recovery from the severe damage caused by the Great East Japan earthquake, the devastating tsunami, and the nuclear power plant disaster.