

The Second Expert Group Meeting on the Great East Japan Earthquake - Learning from the Mega-Tsunami Disaster -

Summary

The Second Expert Group Meeting on the Great East Japan Earthquake was held in Tokyo on 16th and 17th December, 2011 followed by a field trip to disaster affected cities of Miyako and Kamaishi in Iwate on 18th. The meeting was attended by 112 participants, representing 26 countries, mostly from the Asia Pacific region, 19 international organizations and 14 Japanese government and aid agencies, NGOs and research institutions.

The meeting commenced by the keynote address of the Prof. KAWATA Yoshiaki on the recent report compiled by the Technical Committee of the Central Disaster Management Council, presenting the new directions for the earthquake and tsunami measures in Japan. Mr. NODA Takenori, the mayor of Kamaishi City, one of the severely affected cities in Iwate Prefecture, explained the losses and impacts the city suffered and the city's efforts towards recovery and reconstruction since the disaster. He also mentioned that there was no casualty among school students by tsunamis in the city thanks to pre-disaster education and exercises. Furthermore, the experience of disaster management and the lessons learnt from the Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, and the efforts on tropical cyclone early warning system were shared by the representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar and World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) respectively.

The thematic sessions following the plenary focused their discussions on the lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake from three perspectives; 1) early warning system and public awareness and education, 2) resilience of critical infrastructures and society and 3) organizing response and recovery. In the thematic session one, it was agreed that public awareness and education activities need to complement the structural measures to further reduce disaster risks and good examples need to be replicated in other countries without or with little structural measures in place. In the thematic session two, the importance of international collaboration to make use of experiences and lessons of mega-disasters in other parts of the world was stressed. Experiences demonstrated the importance of multi-functionality and redundancy of infrastructure including ICT, quick recovery enabled by pre-disaster investment and further mainstreaming of disaster risk management into development planning. Finally in the thematic session three, the issue of bridging the gaps in response and recovery by utilizing tools/mechanisms and emerging principles and practices were stressed. These include promoting partnerships, engaging community in the planning processes exercising government leadership, and preparing recovery plans proactively.

The discussions of the plenary session following the presentation of the outcome of thematic sessions included the following:

- An effective warning system needs to be suited to the local conditions and characteristics such as geographical settings, distance to the tsunami source, etc.
- Legal system and their effectiveness for ensuring evacuation of people were discussed, including the question of legal enforcement of evacuation orders. Comparing legislative framework of various countries with regard to evacuation could be useful information for countries in this respect.
- Enhancement of needs assessment and further collaboration is important for bridging the gap in response and recovery.

The Asia-Pacific region is facing an increasing threat to disasters through climate change, population growth and rapid urbanization. The disaster affected not only the disaster-hit communities in the Tohoku Region but also social and economic activities in other regions in Japan or even in other countries by the disruption of supply chains, which has been one of main features of recent disaster events. The experiences in the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent policy developments should be continuously learned and replicated to enhance disaster management capacities of disaster prone countries and communities and discussion on this matter should be continued among relevant organizations and countries.

Japan is going to host a high-level international conference on large-scale natural disasters in the summer of 2012 and has offered to host the third World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015. The findings and insights from this expert group, as well as from other opportunities to learn from the Great East Japan Earthquake, shall form an important basis for the global dialogue on future disaster risk management frameworks.