

Enhancing Capacity of Managing Disaster in Local Government Leaders

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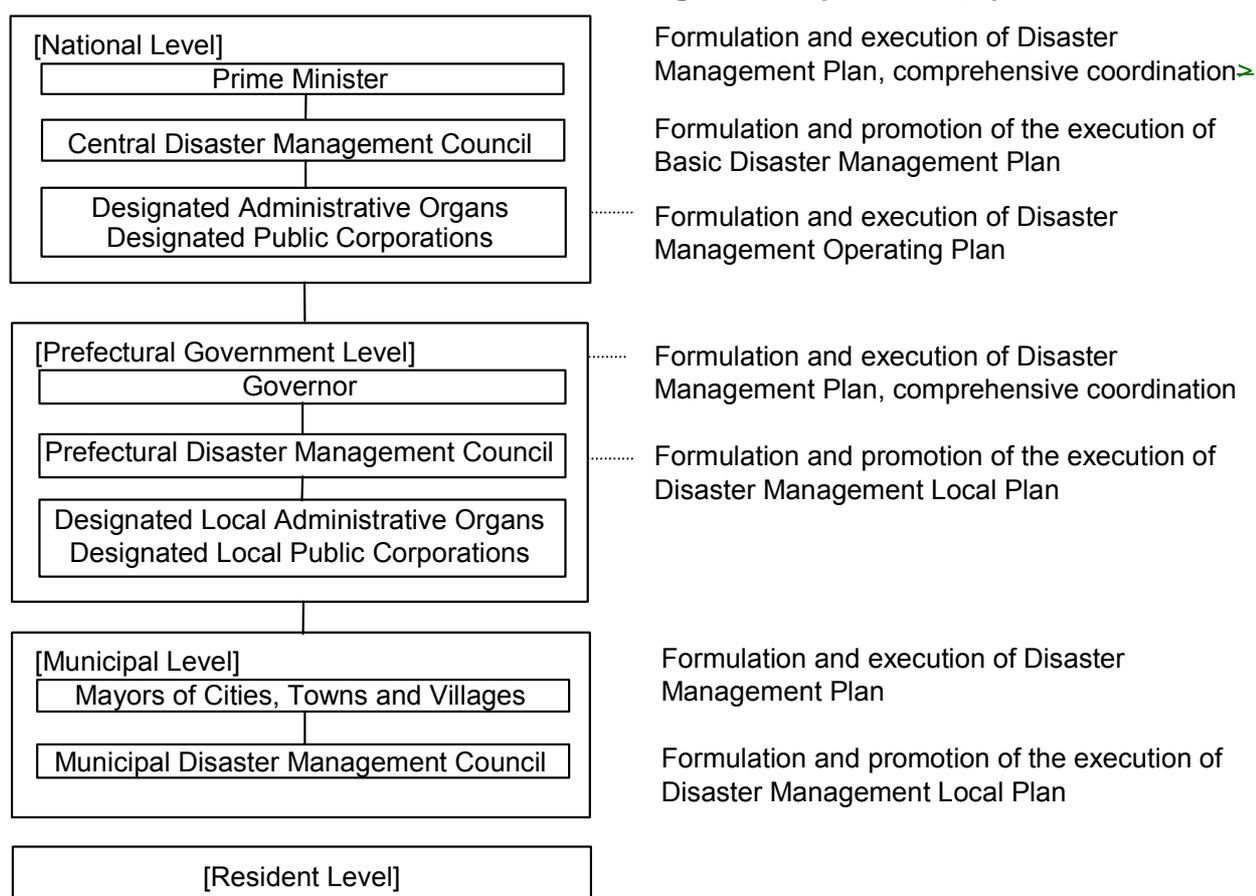
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In Japan, the primary responsibility for disaster countermeasures rests with the local municipalities (cities, towns and villages), and the national and prefectural governments only become involved depending on the extent of the damage.

In the event of a disaster, the local municipalities and prefectural governments enact countermeasures, with assistance from the national government in the wake of a wide-area, large-scale disaster, according to the particular circumstances.

Therefore, local governments bear an extremely heavy and critical responsibility, as their disaster management abilities affect the course of the initial response to a disaster.

Chart: The Disaster Management System in Japan



Circumstances faced by disaster-stricken local governments in the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake

In the 1995 Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, then–Governor of Hyogo Prefecture Kaihara faced a serious situation:

- The massive damage far beyond the coping capacity of the governments of Hyogo Prefecture and the stricken cities and towns, coupled with paralysis of information and communications systems, meant the prefectural government lost its main means of information gathering and was unable to quickly grasp the extent of the damage.
- None of the staff had any actual experience in large–scale earthquake disaster countermeasures, since the most recent earthquake to cause heavy damage to the prefecture was the Showa Nankai Earthquake of 1946.
- Since the facilities, information and telecommunications equipment of the prefectural government as well as its staff were struck by the quake, the government was unable to fully exercise its capabilities.

The governor, who served as head of the disaster countermeasures headquarters, and the other senior officials found themselves in a situation of extreme chaos, totally unlike the environment in which they normally exercised their duties. Decision–making in the government immediately following the disaster was seriously constrained by the notable lack of practical experience and know–how necessary to answer such questions as: “What options are available as countermeasures?” “What should be given priority in the enormous amount of work to be done?” “Where should limited resources be directed?” and “What will happen next and how should we cope with it?”

The importance of upgrading the capabilities of local government staff

Very few disaster management staff of local governments in Japan are trained specialists. They generally take charge of such duties temporarily on rotation. Therefore, in the event of a large–scale disaster, there is great concern as to

whether local governments are capable of taking appropriate action immediately following an impact.

As stated earlier, the local governments play a central part in disaster management in any event. Therefore, their personnel have a very important role, and upgrading their skills and knowledge is a top priority in the efforts to mitigate the effects of a disaster.

A recent report from the Central Disaster Management Council highlights the importance of developing human resources “capable of acting effectively” through training and periodic drills for disaster management personnel.

DRI programs for fostering human resources in local governments

In light of the above, the DRI plans to implement three types of human resources development programs targeted primarily at local government officials.

First, we plan to provide a brief, intensive *Top Management Course* for the head managers of local governments, whose knowledge of disaster countermeasures and crisis management is considered key for exercising appropriate leadership in the event of a disaster.

Secondly, we plan to implement two courses targeted at personnel responsible for disaster management administration in local governments.

| | Management Course (Advanced) | Management Course (Basic) |
|---------------|---|---|
| Target Groups | Potential leaders of emergency management in the event of a disaster, such as administrative staff of national government-affiliated organizations, local governments and public corporations (director generals in prefectural and municipal governments etc.) | Personnel as described under the Advanced Management Course and their equivalents with only brief experience at their posts (directors and chiefs in prefectural and municipal governments, etc.) |

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| Purpose | To improve the ability to grasp and cope with a complex situation. To operate comprehensively and cross-functionally, where various measures are progressing simultaneously in response to a large-scale disaster (capabilities required in a person responsible for disaster management) | To systematically acquire the background knowledge necessary for the Advanced Management Course, such as ideal disaster countermeasures for each sector based on the disaster mechanisms and the experience of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. |
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The curriculum for these training courses is supported by academic experts in various fields in cooperation with practitioners at the United Nations and national, prefectural and municipal governments. The DRI is committed to contributing to the improvement of the disaster management capabilities of local governments through enhancing local officials practical and comprehensive knowledge of disaster management. This is very important in developing a highly effective response to disasters.

DRI assistance to local governments for improving disaster management capability

At the DRI, seven full-time research scientists are being developed into comprehensive and practical disaster management specialists through independent research, field surveys and other activities under the guidance of 10 part-time senior researchers consisting principally of university professors.

During normal times, these DRI research scientists provide guidance and advice to local governments on Disaster Management Local Plans, etc., while in the event of a disaster they immediately rush to the stricken area to provide the disaster management headquarters with appropriate and practical advice based on the mechanism of disaster, examples of crisis management at home and abroad, expertise in the group psychology of disaster victims, etc. Through these activities, the DRI is determined to contribute to improving the disaster management capabilities of local authorities.

Other activities at DRI for reducing damage from disasters

In addition to the above efforts, the dissemination of information and education to the general population is also very important for reducing the damage caused by a disaster.

While the Central Disaster Management Council has been actively discussing the Tokai and Tonankai–Nankai earthquakes that are anticipated in the near future, the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake has already started to fade from public consciousness. Thus, we must continue to call people’s attention to the importance of disaster preparedness.

DRI is equipped with an exhibit that passes on the experiences and lessons from the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake to the world as well as to future generations. DRI bears a grave responsibility to communicate the horrors of a huge disaster by showing the results of an earthquake that actually caused considerable damage, and to broadcast messages about the importance of being prepared for future large–scale disasters.

Furthermore, the DRI is entrusted with international disaster management training for the JICA, putting the lessons learned from the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake to good use to assist disaster management personnel from the central and local governments of other countries.

For this fiscal year, there are plans to provide one–month training programs to disaster management officials from Turkey, Central America and Columbia.

Conclusion

Working in cooperation with the many related organizations described above, the DRI carries out a wide range of human resource development activities based on experiences and lessons learned from the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake.

We firmly believe that through these activities the DRI plays a part in the development of a comprehensive disaster management policy in line with the aims of the TDRM.