
Video Conference 10:00 - 12:00 (Brussels), 17:00 - 19:00 (Kobe)
“Volunteer activities for the GEJET”

Programme

Opening

Prof Hiromasa Kubo, Graduate School of Economics, Kobe University

Presentation:

Ms Ai Yonemitsu, Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University

Ms Mari Kinkawa, Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe University

Ms Yuko Sato, Faculty of Maritime Sciences, Kobe University

Mr Jinya Suzuki, Faculty of Economics, Kobe University

Mr Kai Nishii, Faculty of Human Development, Kobe University

Discussion:

Participants: Students of Kobe University, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Closing:

Prof Yasuo Tanaka, Research Center for Urban Safety and Security, Kobe University

Having two facilitators from Brussels and Kobe, the workshop started with presentations from Kobe students who actually participated in the volunteer activities in Tohoku areas. The first presentation made by Ms Yonemitsu in Kobe was about her volunteer activities in the affected areas. She joined a volunteer group that helped rake out mud from affected houses, took care of the Children’s Day event and so on. Through this volunteer activity, she pointed out the difference between the Great Hanshin Earthquake and GEJET. While the damage in the former was caused by collapsed buildings, tsunami washed away buildings and people in the latter. She also learnt that people in the affected areas needed someone to talk to about their experience in order to sort out their

feelings; and in this respect, volunteers like her were able to help. They had to however steady their own feelings so that they may listen carefully and understand their requests.

Ms Kinkawa participated in two volunteer events from Kobe University. Her presentation was mainly about her involvement in the footbath activities. She found through her experience of giving footbaths to the affected people that it provided thermal effect; relaxation of both body and mind; and a chance for the volunteer to assess the needs of the affected person through communication.

Ms Sato’s activities included providing meals, helping preparation of bath, cleaning up muddy houses and dealing with reliefs such as clothes. Through those activities, she





found there was some mismatch of aid and needs, and thought that we need to think what are needed by people in the affected areas. Moreover, she wishes to point out two things: there should be good cooperation between local government, private sectors and volunteers; and volunteers are responsible to carry on their activities to the next level after completing their activities at the affected areas. They should not forget the disaster once they leave, for this could fill the gap between aid and needs.

Mr. Suzuki helped in the removal of dangerous items, home electrical appliance and so on from destroyed buildings and houses. Mr. Nishi visited the disaster stricken areas twice and compared the two experiences. He noticed a difference in the scenery. For example, in the earlier time, there was a lot of debris, but not so much in the latter. Another aspect was in the places the evacuees stay. In the earlier time, they lived in very small cubicles in schools or other shelters, but by the second time, the evacuees lived in temporary houses built especially for them. He also noticed that people expressed hope for the future in the latter.

In the Q & A session, a student in Brussels asked if there was any difficulty when communicating with people in the affected areas. A Kobe student found no difficulty in speaking to elderly or local people, but the problem was communication with the local government. Another student in Kobe pointed out that dialect was sometimes difficult for communication as well as local customs which were different. There were some other questions such as the essence of the footbath, the timing and period volunteers visited the affected areas and following-up activities after their return to Kobe. Question on the activities of listening to affected people was raised because those activities overwhelmed volunteers and it might

have caused psychological stress. In answering to this question, Kobe students explained that they had some preparations beforehand by way of lectures and explanations. However, even doing so, they were shocked by what they saw in the affected areas and heard from the experiences of people who survived. Although they were not experts, they believed they can be of some help to the people affected by speaking to them. Another Kobe University student mentioned the important roles played by volunteers, individual people, whose view and suggestions would be of help to the government in making a better society.

