

JANIC's Position Statement on the Issues of Nuclear Power Plants and Sustainable Societies

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The Great East Japan Earthquake/Tsunami occurred on 3.11 and the following crisis at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant marked a watershed for Japanese society. In today's world, threats of such large-scale problems as Fukushima are instantly shared across borders and make significant impacts all around the globe.

JANIC, as a network organization of Japanese NGOs for international cooperation, has been addressing the cross-border issues to support the socially vulnerables. Based on the experiences, we present our position statement on the disaster of Fukushima nuclear power plant as follows.

The Issues of Nuclear Power Plant from a Global Perspective

The crisis at Fukushima exposed the lack of capacity of Japanese society to handle the huge risks of nuclear electricity generation. It shows that the accident at a nuclear power plant gives negative impacts on the earth, causing irreversible environmental devastation. Moreover, its human and material damages are so serious that they cannot be compared with any other disasters. Considering these facts, there is no room left to accept nuclear power generation in Japanese society.

The accident at Fukushima shed light upon the overlooked issues that are structurally embedded in Japanese society; The public administration system often controls the disclosure of information arbitrarily, and the social structure imposes burdens on some members of the society. That is, the workers at Fukushima Daiichi power plant have been facing the danger of heavy exposure to radiation under the harsh working conditions, and the residents in the vicinity of the plant are forced to live without enough information to make their independent decisions. Moreover, they are often suffering from discrimination and harmful rumors based on inaccurate information. These are exactly the issues of human rights and crisis of life. In other words, what people in Fukushima have been facing have many in common with the ones that the socially-vulnerables in developing countries have been confronted with.

Having rich experiences of working on the transborder issues such as poverty, environment, human rights, and peace, JANIC has been acutely aware that the process and outcomes of national development are often temporary and unsustainable and that the vulnerable groups are hardest hit by these developments. The accident in Fukushima has made apparent that the issues of human-rights abuse that we often see in developing countries exist in Japanese society as well. In order to overcome the issue, JANIC considers that the following measures need to be taken: to expand citizen participation in the governmental decision making process; to empower the affected people and guarantee their human rights; to make a fundamental change in the national energy policy.

Rebuilding Japanese Society: Forming a Society based on the Disclosure of Information and Shifting the Energy Policy

Even after the earthquake, Japanese society maintains its stability and order. Rather, it has enhanced

practice of mutual support based upon associations among individuals and communities. It has been widely perceived that citizens in Japanese society heavily depend on the government, and it has been rarely considered that citizens make judgments and actions autonomously. Therefore, public information disclosure has been a mere formality and the governmental decision making process regarding the nuclear accident has lacked transparency. The earthquake disaster, however, has revealed that citizens make own individual decision and take actions by sorting out the information. It is necessary for the government to promote information disclosure in order to build a foundation for a constructive relationship with citizens.

JANIC also calls for fundamental reforms of the Japanese energy policy toward creating a sustainable society. Now that the risk of nuclear power generation becomes apparent, there is an urgent need for shifting energy supply to renewable energy resources with fewer risks. This shift has to be made in a way that the supply does not depend on a single large-scale power generation but utilize multiple recourses such as water, wind, geothermal heat and solar light in order to achieve suitable ways of supplying energy on the basis of local characteristics. Moreover, the shift of energy supplying methods is inextricably linked with reviewing our lifestyle based on large-scale production-and consumption. Therefore, achieving a sustainable society will remain unrealistic without integrating energy supply and consumption under the concept of sustainability.

Creating Sustainable Societies through International Cooperation

JANIC has been promoting international cooperation under pillars of “creation of a sustainable society”, “conservation of global environment”, and “guaranteeing the rights of vulnerable groups”. However, these perspectives have not necessarily been mainstreamed in the international cooperation led by governments and private companies in general. It is necessary to place more emphasis on these perspectives in order to improve development effectiveness

Promoting Japanese international cooperation, access to appropriate information on Japanese assistance is a necessary condition for citizens in developing countries. In particular, introducing nuclear power generation is a significant issue on the process of formulating future energy policy in developing countries. The Japanese government and its citizens, learning from the lessons of Fukushima, should actively provide information to the governments and citizens of developing countries so that they can fully understand the risks of nuclear power generation and make independent choices on their policy. JANIC itself makes further commitments to promote provision of information to the international society, based on the lessons from our activities in Fukushima.

Japan has to provide maximum support in order to form a sustainable society in developing countries. As the very first step, the government has to review its ODA related to nuclear power generation. Furthermore, the government should set a clear national policy not to export nuclear power stations and promote the utilization of renewable energy in developing countries, as written in the ODA medium-term target. By making the most out of its prominent Japanese technology in the renewable energy sector, Japan should be able to make contributions to the environmental protection and the building of a sustainable society at the global level.