

Visiting areas devastated by heavy rains in Takeo City,

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In August 2021, heavy rainfall caused disasters mainly in northern Kyushu, including Saga and Fukuoka prefectures. The affected areas included Takeo City and Omachi Town in Saga Prefecture, which were also flooded by a torrential rain disaster in August 2019. Two years after the last flood, we experienced another disaster. In the case of Takeo City, 1,756 houses were flooded this time (1,184 above floor level and 572 below floor level) compared to 1,536 houses flooded in the previous earthquake. The total rainfall was 1,256 mm, greater than the 482 mm that fell in the previous event. The disaster that occurred mainly in Kumamoto in 2020 was a river flood caused by a river bursting its banks due to heavy rainfall from a linear rainband. In the case of Takeo City, the inland flooding was caused by a pump that stopped pumping rainwater flowing into the city's tributaries to the main stream, the Rokkaku River.

The team visited Takeo City from October 18 to 20, 2021. Most of the damaged houses this time were judged to be “medium-scale half-collapsed,” a term added to the Law for Assistance in Reconstructing the Livelihoods of Victims, which was partially revised on November 30, 2020. As a result of this, financial aid for “half-destruction,” which was not previously provided, will now be provided in the amount of 1 million yen for the construction or purchase of a dwelling and an additional 500,000 yen for repairs, depending on the determination of “medium-scale half-destruction.” If used in conjunction with the emergency repair system (see previous issue for details), a total of about 1 million yen will be provided, including the funds for repairs. However, when volunteers talked about the system to elderly victims at a tea party organized by a volunteer group, they were surprised to find that many of them did not know about the system. An elderly disaster victim blurted out, “Thank God,” when a volunteer informed him that apart from emergency repairs, he would be provided with a livelihood reconstruction assistance grant for disaster victims. The government has set up a Reconstruction Assistance Office, which provides consultation services and publicity, but there are various support measures, and it is difficult for disaster victims to understand at a

glance which support measures apply to their houses, which application documents require a contract, which require an estimate, and so on. Although the fact that support is now available for medium-scale partial destruction is a step forward, disaster victims are still at the mercy of an increasingly complex system.

Moreover, as in previous disasters, a disparity has emerged between those victims who can afford to build or purchase the equipment and those who cannot afford the repair costs. Many of the younger households are thinking of leaving the area because they still have loans from the disaster two years ago and are now even more affected by the disaster. However, elderly households do not want to leave the land where they have lived for many years. There are no



▲Affected house with closet opening leading to exterior wall.

tatami mats, however, and the residents continue to live on wooden flooring. In mid-October, the weather changed from summer-like to a sudden chill in the air. In this situation, there are people who live in places where outside air blows directly into the house if they do not take measures against the cold, such as opening closet doors that lead to the exterior walls. Even if they try to use the emergency repair system, it takes time and costs a lot of money due to the shortage of craftsmen and the increase in labor costs caused by the soaring cost of lumber, and the situation cannot be immediately sorted out. To solve these problems, even temporarily, volunteer groups are going around to households in need and putting up tarps to protect them from the open air. All the tables and furniture had to be discarded due to the flooding, and everything had to be put together again from scratch. Some of the victims were still without tables and were eating their meals alone, using small cabinets instead.

It makes me wonder if the “right to exist (the right to a minimum standard of living that is healthy and culturally acceptable)” was not one of the three major rights of the Japanese people. Or will the response continue to be based on the fact that floods are natural disasters and therefore no one is at fault, and therefore the affected people are the only ones responsible? It is expected that weather disasters caused by global warming will increase not only in Japan but also globally. Visiting the disaster-stricken area in Takeo, I was reminded of the need to consider how we, as people living in such an era, can live in peace and security on the same land (or on new land) after a disaster, based on the basic principle of “human recovery.”

The flood damage response in Takeo City will also be reported at the Forum on Disaster revitalization and mitigation's exchange meetings and roundtables in the affected areas and at the symposium.

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