

## A Mindset of “Combining Real Experience and Research”



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My name is Yoko Saito, and I have been serving as a senior researcher and an associate professor at the Institute of Disaster Area Revitalization, Regrowth and Governance since April, 2020. Since 2018, I have had the privilege of conducting research on overseas disaster victim support systems as a designated researcher. When a disaster strikes in Japan, the sequence of events is that many victims are forced into communal living, sleeping together in a huddle at evacuation shelters. Those who can tolerate it do so as best as they can, and then they are moved to temporary housing, with those who are able to gradually rebuild their homes moving into permanent residences. However, looking at the post-disaster response in OECD member nations, some countries give various forms of financial support right from the emergency period, and I discovered that “enduring” and “payment in kind” are not always the global standard in the emergency period. I then learnt that there are options other than what we consider to be a matter of course in Japan regarding temporary and permanent housing. For example, as I wrote in a previous newsletter report, in Italy, there are various types of temporary housing, and the national government rebuilds permanent housing; thus, victims at least have no need to worry about their housing. That said, from the perspective of this institute’s ideology of “human revitalization,” it was also revealed that housing alone by no means accomplishes “human revitalization.” It goes without saying that housing and work opportunities that individuals require are essential, but at the same time we must also think

about what kind of area and society we would like to live in. Will we return to the same kind of society as before, seeking economic growth, or will we use the disaster as an opportunity to rethink the state of society until now and move forward with a revitalization premised on a sustainable society? Local revitalization advances through the participation of many “individuals” in the planning process of these discussions, and I think that ultimately, individual “human revitalization” is achieved. I think it would be great if the “revitalization wisdom” accumulated in such disaster areas or disaster-prepared areas could be shared and learned together by victims, workers, and researchers both in Japan and overseas. This would lead to the inheritance of knowledge gained in disaster areas and carefully maintained by the institute, enable the extraction of questions, and help researchers and front-line supporters put their minds together to create a “combination of real experience and research.” It all begins with walking the sites and lending an ear to the opinions of those at these sites. We would then together think about ways for the institute to be of help, a process that will lead to studies examining revitalization. I want to work with everyone to create that kind of virtuous cycle.

I cannot say that I have no anxieties when thinking about the paths trodden by the institute’s first senior researcher Professor Shigeki Yamanaka and my predecessor Professor Masayuki Noro. I imagine that I will often ask everyone to lend their support going forward. I hope that you will give me your unreserved guidance and advice on the institute’s future research and activities.

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